

BAY REFLECTIONS

SBEP Newsletter - March 2015 Edition

Spring Forward!

In this editon: Bay Guardians in Sarasota and Manatee County, new interviews on Sarasota Bay Today, remaining Bay Wise Kayak Tours, a BPG project completed by Save Our Seabirds, FISH Preserve restoration project and NWTP stormwater and education project. Thank you for supporting the SBEP mission and its various programs.

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SBEP Bay Guardians Remove 1,100 Pounds of Air Potato Vines at North Water Tower Park in Sarasota



On February 7 SBEP hosted a **Bay Guardian** volunteer event at North Water Tower Park. The event featured 120 volunteers that removed 1,100 pounds of the invasive air potato vine and seeds.



The air potato vine covers and shades beneficial native plants, and grows a large tuber that looks like a hanging potato.



Volunteers split up into teams. The participating groups included New College, Ringling School, King Middle School, Philippi Shores Elementary School, Indian Beach Sapphire Shores, Crossroads Church, Bayou Oaks Neighborhood Association, Sarasota Sky Pilots Disc Golf Club, JDub's Brewery Street Team, and the Florida Native Plant Society.

Prizes were awarded to teams for the weirdest looking air potato (Philippi Shores Elementary School), the most collected at 201 pounds (JDubs Brewery Street Team), the smallest air potato found (New College) and the largest air potato found at 1.5 pounds (King Middle School).

Bay Guardians Create New Habitat for Oysters and Fish at Robinson Preserve in Manatee County



On February 21 the **Bay Guardians** visited Robinson Preserve in Manatee County. The event featured 53 volunteers who filled bags with material to create new habitat for oysters and fish.

Oyster beds represent a unique and valuable component of the Sarasota Bay ecosystem. They provide structural habitat for many species of fish and invertebrates. Oysters are also valued for their ability to improve water quality through prolific filtering capacity.

Project partners included Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources, Around the Bend Nature Tours, Johnson Middle School and the Sarasota Scuba Club. A catered lunch was provided following the volunteer outing. Visit **MyManatee.org** to learn more about Robinson Preserve.





The next Bay Guardian event is **Saturday, March 28 at Bowlees Creek**.

Sarasota Bay Today Blog Website Features Two New Interviews with Christine Johnson and Karen Willey

Sarasota Bay Today, the bay-centric website sponsored by SBEP, features two new interviews with Christine Johnson (left photo) and Karen Willey (right photo). Christine is president of Community Foundation of the Gulf Coast and Karen owns Around the Bend Nature Tours.




Christine joined Community Foundation in 2011 and worked previously at Ringling College of Art and Design as Director of Development. **Read Christine's interview**.

Karen has been working in the field of ecotourism and environmental education for more than 30 years. She provides environmental education services for the SBEP Bay Guardians Program and the PIER Program. **Read Karen's interview**.

Sarasota Bay Today was launched by SBEP's marketing contractor Triple 3 Marketing in 2011 to provide information about the people involved with the ongoing efforts to restore, protect and study Sarasota Bay. Randy Moore is the editor and has completed 22 interviews with area scientists, researchers, resource managers, engineers, educators, photographers, nonprofit leaders, and elected representatives.

Remaining 2015 Bay Wise Kayak Tour Trips

Eleven trips are organized from December through April with two outings per month led by professional guide Brad Tanner. The trips are free but require participants to bring their own kayak and gear. Each trip lasts between two and three hours and space is limited to 15 individuals per outing.

The late Jack Taylor, a respected marine biologist, helped to create the popular **kayak tour program** in 2007 with a SBEP funded Bay Partners Grant.



Remaining Dates:

March 7 and **March 21**
Blind Pass

March 29
Philippi Creek

April 4 and **April 18**
Lyons and Blackburn Bay

For more information or to be placed on a waiting list please contact Camille info@sarasotabay.org

Save Our Seabirds and Community Partners Enhance Crane Habitat with Support from Bay Partners Grant



Save our Seabirds, Florida Native Plant Nursery, Animal Warriors, Sarasota Bay Parrot Head Club and other volunteers transformed the largest habitat on their Birdwalk to be a more appropriate environment for the cranes. Crane friendly dunes were built and native grasses and shrubs planted.

They designed and implemented a Bay education and stewardship program along will educational signage. The signs highlight the importance of native vegetation which protects the environment and attracts native birds.

SOS welcomes approximately 30,000 visitors per year including school children of all ages. Visit **SaveOurSeabirds.org**.

Applications for the 2014-15 Bay Partners Grants must be received by 4pm on March 2. Visit the **Bay Partners Grant page** to learn more and download the application. SBEP has awarded nearly $247,000 in Bay Partners Grants to support 126 organizations since 2003.

Please **contact Sara Kane** if you have any questions about the Bay Partner Grant program.

SBEP Partners with Freshwater Institute of Saltwater Heritage (FISH) to Restore More than 50 Acres



SBEP has partnered with the **Freshwater Institute of Saltwater Heritage** (FISH) to restore nearly half of the 100 acre parcel of conservation land. Restoration activities will increase wetland acreage, improve tidal circulation, and reestablish natural hydro-periods. The removal of exotic plant species and replacement of native plant species will also support the recovery of natural habitats. The project was made possible through a cooperative funding agreement with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and FISH.

Prior to acquisition by FISH the preserve lands were home to illegal dumping, infested with exotic species and the intertidal wetland communities were fragmented. The loss of wetlands, especially low salinity marshes, greatly reduced the available habitat for juvenile fisheries. These areas are in critical need of restoration and management to promote revitalization of Sarasota Bay's ecological health.

The restoration project will improve these environmentally sensitive lands and will further efforts to preserve the Cortez community's heritage as a traditional working waterfront. FISH Preserve is one of the last remaining undeveloped parcels on northern Sarasota Bay.

Three-Year Restoration, Stormwater Improvement and Environmental Education Project in Sarasota



SBEP is one of the managing partners of a three-year restoration, stormwater improvement and environmental education project that will take place at North Water Tower Park in Sarasota. SBEP, Sarasota County, and the City of Sarasota are the managing partners of the 1.3M project.

The planned improvements are part of a proposed North Water Tower Park area Master Plan initiative within the City Commission's adopted Fiscal Year 2014-2016 Strategic Plan. One of the goals is to improve park access for residents in the nearby Bayou Oaks Neighborhood, plus heighten natural surveillance within the park using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles.

Funding was recently awarded to SBEP from the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program for community engagement and education, exotic species removal and beautification elements. Sarasota County was awarded a grant from the Southwest Florida Water Management District for design and construction of the stormwater improvements.

The grant application process has brought together diverse groups that value the park including the Bayou Oaks Neighborhood Association, Indian Beach Sapphire Shores Neighborhood Association, the North Trail Redevelopment Partnership, the Sarasota Sky Pilots Disc Golf Club and the Friends of Disc Golf nonprofit organization.

The project will incorporate Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to reduce stormwater pollution and improve water quality in Whitaker Bayou and Sarasota Bay. Invasive plants will be removed to increase native habitat and improve aesthetics throughout the park. A diverse education, volunteer, and outreach program will improve environmental stewardship in the area while engaging school groups and local citizens.



The park is home to region's oldest disc golf course.

The City's Urban Design Studio recently conducted a comprehensive review of the neighborhoods that surround North Water Tower Park and identified them as a catalyst area which could experience zoning code changes using a new form-based code, prior to implementation in other areas of the City.

Please contact Sara Kane at **Sara@SarasotaBay.org** to learn more about the project.

SBEP News Briefs

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SBEP Public Meetings
The next CAC meeting will be 4:30pm on Monday, April 6 at New College of Florida HCL 8 (Teaching Auditorium) located at 5800 Bay Shore Road in Sarasota.

The next TAC meeting will be 9am on Friday, March 13 at Dan McClure Auditorium.

The next Management Board meeting will take place 9am on Friday, April 24 at the Manatee County Administration Building, 1112 Manatee Ave. W, BCC Conference Room (9th floor). The Policy Board meeting will take place at 1pm on Friday, May 8 at the same location. **SBEP Online Calendar**.

Final Reflection with Maxis Gamez



Maxis Gamez is a self-taught nature photographer residing in Sarasota. You can view more of Maxis' work on the **Creative Expressions Gallery** on the SBEP website.

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) is dedicated to restoring the area's greatest natural asset - Sarasota Bay. Its unique program strives to improve water quality, increase habitat and enhance the natural resources of the area for use and enjoyment by the public. Sarasota Bay is one of 28 estuaries in the U.S. that have been named by the U.S. Congress as an "estuary of national significance."