

BAY REFLECTIONS

SBEP Newsletter - September 2015

News Summary In this Edition



The state of seagrass in Sarasota Bay; Elizabeth Silleck joins SBEP, PIER engages thousands of local students, SBEP and Scheda Ecological Associates updating five-year habitat restoration plan, Bay Guardians to visit Grassy Point Preserve October 10, National Estuaries Week set for September 19, and North Water Tower Park Project update. Thank you for supporting the SBEP mission and its various restoration and public education programs.

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The State of Seagrass in Sarasota Bay; SBEP Report about Latest Survey Results Coming mid September

Southwest Florida Water Management District will release the findings of its most recent aerial surveys of Sarasota Bay seagrass in mid September. The surveys are part of the District's Surface Water Improvement and Management **(SWIM) Program**, which focuses on water quality improvement and habitat restoration in priority waterbodies including Sarasota Bay.



Photo by Jimmy White

SBEP will send an update about the survey results when the information is officially released. Visit **Sarasota Bay Today** to read an interview with Senior Environmental Scientist Kris Kaufman focused on the SWIM Program.

SBEP and its partners continue to devote resources to enhance seagrass monitoring, most

recently through its support of Dr. Mary Christman with MCC Statistical Consulting and Dr. Kellie Dixon with Mote Marine Laboratory. **Read more**.

Elizabeth Silleck Joins SBEP as Public Outreach Manager; Formerly with The Pew Charitable Trusts



SBEP welcomes Elizabeth Silleck as its new Public Outreach Manager. Elizabeth has managed outreach and communications programs for seven years, including as a Regional Coordinator for the **New York State Energy Research and Development Authority** and a Senior Outreach Associate for **The Pew Charitable Trusts** in the U.S. Oceans Division.

Elizabeth graduated from Pace University School of Law with her Juris Doctor and an Environmental Law Certificate, and pursues her passion for the marine environment through snorkeling, SCUBA and kayaking.

PIER Program Enhances Local Environmental Education; 38,000 Area Students Since 2003

Since 2003, SBEP in partnership with **Around the Bend Nature Tours**, has engaged 38,000 students to learn about local habitat, aquatic life, birds, and local ecology through the **PIER Program**.

During the 2014-15 school year alone, Around the Bend Nature Tours educated over 1,500 students and 200 adults through PIER, volunteer outings with the **Bay Guardians**, and other programs supported by SBEP.

PIER is an acronym for Protection, Involvement, Education and Restoration. The program engages students with hands-on activities in the field including water sampling, water quality testing, conservation games, and plant and animal identification. The field trips support classroom lesson plans and activities. **Read more**.



Sisters from North Port's Cranberry Elementary

SBEP and Scheda Ecological Associates Updating Five-Year Habitat Restoration Plan through 2020

The SBEP Wetlands Coordinator **Scheda Ecological Associates** is updating the Program's five-year habitat restoration plan. The plan organizes details on more than 20 projects including the completion of coastal habitat at North and South Lido Beach and FISH Preserve; several estuarine island projects including Bayshore Island, Braden River Islands, and Cortez bird rookery; freshwater projects; and intertidal projects supporting oysters and reefs.



Restoration at FISH Preserve

The criteria for setting priorities includes: restoration cost per acre, proximity to natural habitat, potential fisheries habitat, potential for stormwater quality improvement, construction feasibility, public interest, and funding potential. The new plan will be posted on the SBEP website as soon as its approved by the **SBEP Policy Board**.

SBEP Bay Guardians to Visit Grassy Point Preserve October 10 and then Celery Fields November 7

The award-winning **Bay Guardian** volunteers will plant native Florida plants at Grassy Point Preserve in Holmes Beach Saturday, October 10. The project partners include SBEP, Around the Bend Nature Tours, Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources Department, and the City of Holmes Beach.

A second project is planned for November 7 at **Celery Fields** to enhance a bioswale with native plants. Partners include Sarasota Audubon and Sweetbay Nursery. Coming in the winter will be an oyster bagging project at **Robinson Preserve** and three Air Potato Roundup events at **Red Bug Slough**, **North Water Tower Park**, and **Phillippi Estate Park**.



Bay Guardians in Manatee County

National Estuaries Week is September 19; Please Support Local International Coastal Cleanup Day



The ongoing restoration of Sarasota Bay enhances the enjoyment of its many amenities

This year, in celebration of National Estuaries Week and International Coastal Cleanup Day, SBEP staff will join Sarasota County and community partners in cleaning up Phillippi Creek, the main tributary to Sarasota Bay.

Keep Sarasota County Beautiful will also celebrate International Coastal Cleanup Day September 19. Volunteers will collect litter at 30 locations from Sarasota to North Port from 8am until noon. **Please register**.

The first National Estuaries Day in 1988 was a milestone in public awareness about the importance of estuaries. Estuaries are a natural buffer against storms and floods, absorb and store carbon, and provide habitat for commercial and recreational fisheries. Visit the **Restore America's Estuaries** website for more information about National Estuaries Week and local events throughout Florida.

SBEP Partners Kick Off North Water Tower Project

The SBEP science and outreach staff participated in the recent kick-off meeting for the stormwater improvement design of North Water Tower Park, an urban Sarasota park known for its professional caliber disc golf course and characterized by beautiful old-growth live oaks.



Project partners at Water Tower Park

Sarasota County, in collaboration with the Southwest Florida Water Management District and the engineering firm Brown & Caldwell, have begun the project to design stormwater improvement and low-impact development (LID) features which will ameliorate runoff into Whitaker Bayou, a nitrogen-impaired waterbody bordering the 20-acre park. The project is expected to reduce total nitrogen draining into the Bayou by at least 209 pounds per year through retention and natural filtration, positively impacting 98 acres of watershed.

The SBEP manages a complementary project, funded by the EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program, to support stormwater management and LID design, exotic species removal and public involvement and education about the watershed associated with North Water Tower Park. **Read more**.

Hold the Fertilizer through September



SBEP and its partners remind residents in Sarasota and Manatee County to hold the fertilizer with nitrogen and phosphorus through September 30. The goal is to reduce the amount of chemicals running into Sarasota Bay following heavy rainfalls.

Summer rains don't water fertilizer in; they flush the chemicals into local ponds, tributaries and Sarasota Bay. The overuse of nitrogen and phosphorus undermines water quality and it can also harm aquatic life. **Learn more**.

SBEP News Briefs

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CAC Page Update
The bios of the 25 Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) members were recently updated. The CAC provide citizen input to SBEP and support SBEP programs, projects and priorities. **Visit the page**.

Tidal Creek Study Presentation
Jay Leverone, PhD, the SBEP Staff Scientist, will make a presentation about the Tidal Creek Study at the **Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation** meeting in Portland November 8-12. The study engages SBEP, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, and six Florida counties.

SBEP Public Meetings
The next TAC meeting is Friday, September 4 at Dan McClure Auditorium next to the SRQ Airport. The next CAC meeting is 4:30pm on Tuesday, September 15 at the same venue. The next SBEP Policy

Board meeting is 1pm on Friday, September 25 at the Town of Longboat Key.

Final Reflection with Marina Scarr



The Black-Necked Stilt can be found throughout Florida mostly from April through September. Stilts are a shorebird that eats aquatic insects and other invertebrates. Marina is a professional photographer and lifelong nature lover. See more of her photos on the **Creative Expressions Gallery** posted on the SBEP website or visit **Marina's 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."