Summer 2006 Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

Greetings!

in this issue

- Director's Letter
- Feature Article
- Restoration and Outreach
- Guest Column

Feature Article

For insight into our area's public-use land policies and programs, Bay Reflections interviewed Melissa Cain, Volunteer Education Coordinator for the Conservation Lands Management Department of Manatee County, and Brie W. Ondercin, Public Use Coordinator for Sarasota County Environmental Services - Natural Resources. In their own words, they describe what they do and its impact on our community.

Interview with Melissa Cain

What conservation projects are you working on now?

We are hosting tours at Robinson, Rye and Emerson Point Preserves. At Robinson, tour-goers receive updates on the restoration and transformation of the preserve. These tours give people a rare opportunity—a sneak preview of a preserve while it is being built. At Rye and Emerson Point, new morning tours are scheduled for photography buffs. We are planning new and exciting programs for the 2006-2007 season. Visit our website for details.The Conservation Lands Management Department just published a new version of the Manatee County Paddle Guide. This 47-page, free resource includes maps of the county's blueway trails, GPS coordinates, Manatee County history and much more. The public is welcome to contact me via email or phone for a copy.

Director's Letter

Dear Partners and Citizens:

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) hopes that residents and visitors of Sarasota and Manatee counties will have the opportunity to experience and enjoy the Bay during this hot summer season. Year- round, SBEP stays committed to our mission—to improve water quality, increase habitat and enhance the natural resources of the area for use and enjoyment by YOU!

This edition of Bay Reflections features reporting on Sarasota and Manatee counties' conservation lands— what is being done to protect them and

Any big, future- planned projects coming up?

Yes, we are developing a unique system of intertidal canals within Robinson Preserve that will connect Palma Sola and Tampa Bay. These blueways will allow paddlers to experience the beauty of the entire preserve. A state-of-the-art canoe/kayak launch, trails, boardwalks and observation towers are in the planning stages as well. We expect to open in 2008.

What are the biggest challenges you face in your line of work?

I've found that people have become disconnected with the environment. With all of the technological stimuli in the world today, people are not spending as much time outdoors. Awareness of what's out there is another problem. In Manatee County, for example, we have 12 public conservation lands, but this isn't well known. I've also noticed that many people are misinformed about local flora and fauna and how they link to the ecosystem. As an environmental educator, I am working to overcome these misconceptions and educate the public about our connections to the environment around us.

Contact Information: Melissa Cain, Phone: 941.748.4501 x3654 Email: Melissa.Cain@co.manatee.fl.us[*www.co.manatee.fl.us/conservation.html*](www.co.manatee.fl.us/conservation.html)

Interview with Brie W. Ondercin

What significant projects are you working on now?

A major push is developing the Conceptual Plan for Public Access to Natural Areas. This plan, now in draft form, encompasses all natural lands suitable for public access and use in Sarasota County. The document highlights the forms of recreation suitable for these lands, as well as relevant criteria and timelines for establishing public use within each natural area. The plan will be ready for public review in September and October (look for meeting dates, times and locations

to create recreational opportunities for the public. We have interviewed key counterparts, Brie W. Ondercin, Public Use Coordinator for Sarasota County Environmental Services - Natural Resources, and Melissa Cain, Volunteer/Education Coordinator for the Manatee County Conservation Lands Management Department, to get the inside scoop. Also in this issue, guest columnist, Rick Smith, explains REEF RAKERS—a hands-on program in association with Volunteer Services of Manatee County that helps with underwater clean-up. With the dedication of environmental stewards like Rick, and the many students and volunteers active in his program, we can accomplish

in your local newspaper). Once approved by the Board of County Commissioners, the plan will serve as a model for implementing public access and use of natural lands.

How would you describe public perceptions of natural lands?

Generally, people want more! They want more trails, kayak launches, camping areas, etc.—what we call public use features. We always strive to provide as much access as possible, however, it's a fine balance— providing land for public use while preserving environmentally sensitive lands.

What new sites are opening?

Curry Creek Preserve, which spans 80.63 acres in Venice off Albee Farm Road, will open in the fall with a kayak launch and nature trails. A second site, Pocono Trails in Nokomis, is slated to open in 2007. Additionally, Sarasota County Natural Resources plans to open a 213-acre site on North River Road in Venice for public access in 2007. These sites will provide the public with plenty of trails, waterfront access and opportunities for bird watching.

What do you like best about what you do?

I work with incredibly dedicated staff and interested citizens. I also get to explore the lands and encounter the beauty of native habitat and wildlife.

Contact Information: Brie W. Ondercin, Phone: 941.861.6286 Email: bonderci@scgov.net www.discovernaturalsarasota.org or www.scgov.net

Restoration and Outreach

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program's (SBEP) restoration projects continue to enhance the beauty and productivity of the Sarasota Bay watershed. SBEP, in partnership with Manatee County Conservation Lands

great things! The newsletter also highlights SBEP's ongoing public outreach and restoration efforts.

SBEP staff welcomes 14 new members to our Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC comprises residents of Manatee and Sarasota counties and is responsible for advising the SBEP staff and Policy Board on important community issues. These members are integral to the mission of connecting SBEP programs and resources to the community. New members are as follows: Tommy Vaughan-Birch, Michael Bressan, Melissa Cain, Ken Chapman, Ryan Denton, Cindy Hill Ford, Steve Foster, Nick Gladding, Charles Hegener, Kurt Rowe, Jack Taylor, Christopher Warn,

Management Department, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, has recently kicked off a nine-month project to enhance and restore Robinson Preserve (northwest of Palma Sola Bay). Plans for this restoration have been in the works since the 480-acre parcel was acquired by Manatee County approximately three years ago. The goal is to remove all invasive/exotic species, such as Brazilian pepper and Australian pine. In addition, earthwork will be conducted on 150 acres of the property to re-establish tidal inlets. This environmental "cleansing" will restore the function of rare native coastal habitats like mangrove swamps and salt barrens. Even though Robinson Preserve is currently closed to the public, scheduled tours of the park are available. To learn more about restoration efforts and tours, call Melissa Cain, Volunteer Education Coordinator for the Conservation Lands Management Department of Manatee County, at 941.748.4501 x3654.

Hot weather and heavy rain this summer have not slowed down SBEP's outreach efforts. SBEP recently participated in the Florida Gulf Coast Outdoor Festival at Coquina Beach on June 24. The event showcased organizations from the greater Bradenton area that promote eco- recreation, such as kayaking, wildlife-watching and hiking. Live music, nature games, kayaking clinics and raffles made this festival fun and interactive. SBEP raffled off a complimentary nature tour of Joan M. Durante Park to five lucky winners. Visit www.theoutdoorfestival.com to learn about next year's festivities.

Bay Buddies, in conjunction with ManaTeens, SBEP and Sarasota County Parks & Recreation, recently hosted a two- day event at South Lido Park. The objective was to plant native plants such as sea oxeye daisies, sand cordgrass, beach elder, railroad vine and beach sunflowers in the recently cleared areas of the park. Throughout the two days, hundreds of kids, ages 6 to 18, planted nearly 1,600 natives and removed Australian pine seedlings from the park. For

Kelly Westover and Nancy Wiener. SBEP would like to thank the new members for their participation. If you are interested in becoming a member, contact Julia Burch at julia@sarasotabay.org or 941.955.8085.

On another note, the State of the Bay Report 2006 continues to receive communitywide praise. Positive feedback keeps rolling in, and we believe it is one of the strongest reports in the nation. If you would like to request a copy, please contact Julia Burch at 941.955.8085 or julia@sarasotabay.org. Or you can download an electronic version (pdf) of the report at www.sarasotabay.org. If you haven't had a chance to visit SBEP's new and

more information on upcoming Bay Buddies events visit www.baybuddies.org.

Read on...

Guest Column

Meet the REEF RAKERS
By Rick Smith

Which organization is getting students, parents and teachers involved in building, maintaining, monitoring and cleaning artificial reefs in Manatee and Sarasota counties? If you didn't already know, the answer is the REEF RAKERS.

Started in 2003, this educational and proactive program trains participants at all levels of Professional Association of Dive Instructors (P.A.D.I.) SCUBA diving, from Open Water to Dive Master and all specialties in between. What's really great about REEF RAKERS is that it's one of most innovative environmental enhancement programs in the U.S. What's more, it's open to any student who expresses interest in clean-up dive trips. The program also has won several local, state and national awards for its stand-out efforts.

The idea for starting the program occurred to me after three of my students noticed that the reef ball modules they were building made great fish habitat. The problem was that some modules were filling up with rubbish, leaving no room for the fish. The students convinced me that someone needed to conduct a beach clean- up under the water. In April 2004, the first five SCUBA certified students, along with concerned volunteers, hit the water, and REEF RAKERS was born.

Since its humble beginnings, the program has really taken off. In 2006, Sarasota resident Martin Watson became the P.A.D.I. instructor for the program and has spent countless hours training the next

improved website, what are you waiting for? Explore every aspect of our Program in this new, user-friendly and visually appealing site.

Regards,
Mark Alderson
SBEP Director

Find out more....

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Bay Buddies

Reef Rakers

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Join

generation of young environmentalists. Many corporate and individual sponsors make the future of the REEF RAKERS program viable. The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program was one of the first sponsors, for the construction of reef ball modules. They continue to be an avid supporter and provide technical advice as well as grant opportunities.

We will continue to offer REEF RAKERS training to students of Manatee and Sarasota counties, regardless of their ability to cover the cost of the lessons. Everyone is welcome to get involved, whether they are trained in SCUBA diving or not. The program will achieve continued success thanks to the gracious donations and support of our dedicated volunteers. Visit www.reefrakers.org for more information.

Read on...

email: julia@sarasotabay.org
phone: 941-955-8085
web: http://www.sarasotabay.org