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2024: A Year in Review



Our Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2024 is here! This special edition marks SBEP's 35th anniversary and highlights key programs and accomplishments from October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024. These achievements were made possible by the invaluable support and collaboration of our stakeholders. Explore the report and join us in celebrating a year of remarkable progress and impact!

Read the 2024 Annual Report

Midnight Pass: What Does the Science Say?



This past fall, Hurricanes Helene and Milton opened Midnight Pass, allowing water from the Gulf of Mexico to flow into Little Sarasota Bay. Many scientists anticipate that the reestablished tidal connection may improve water quality and increase seagrass and fisheries habitat. However, it's unclear how established fish communities and human factors, like storm surge levels, might change now that the pass is open. Understanding the benefits and implications of this shifting ecosystem enables us to better manage and protect Sarasota Bay.

What's on the horizon for Midnight Pass? As of December 2024, observations and studies from University of South Florida's geologist **Dr. Ping Wang, who was interviewed on NPR**, suggest that, "The pieces should be all in place for this to stay open...The issue is, we really have to give enough room for the system to adjust." In the article linked below, we explore the expected changes with an open Midnight Pass and what the options are moving forward.

Read more on Midnight Pass

Bay Partners Grant Program is Open



Sarasota Bay Partners Grants are competitive awards for projects in the Sarasota Bay watershed that promote habitat and water quality restoration, environmental education, community involvement, and stewardship to improve the overall quality of Sarasota Bay and its tributaries. The SBEP welcomes applications from non-profits, for-profits, schools, and government organizations located within the Sarasota Bay watershed. Applications for the 2025 grant cycle are **due by March 1**.

Learn more & apply for a grant

Whitaker Bayou ECOmmunity Day Jan. 18th

Join us and partners for a paddle cleanup of Whitaker Bayou (BYO kayak) and a garden workday at Orange Blossom Community Garden, followed by free lunch in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park with the Newtown Farmers Market. Gear will be provided.



Register for Whitaker Bayou cleanup & Orange Blossom Garden workday

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Bay Fest is Back!

Dive into an extraordinary experience at Bay Fest and celebrate the wonders of our underwater worlds! Explore hands-on exhibits and activities and enjoy live music, kayak tours, and food from the Nest Cafe and local food trucks. This FREE event will be filled with discovery and endless fun for the whole family!



RSVP for Bay Fest

Thank You Volunteers!

It's been a busy volunteer season this fall and winter with a mix of exploration, celebration, and recovery. We would especially like to recognize all the groups that helped remove hurricane debris from our waterways these past couple months: Sarasota Bay Watch, Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage, Organized Fishermen of Florida, Cortez Village Historical Society, Florida Maritime Museum, Keep Manatee Beautiful, Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Suncoast Aqua Ventures, Suncoast Waterkeeper, and Tampa Bay Watch. **Since October, over 10,800lbs of trash have been removed**. Below are some snippets from recent events.

- **Cortez Cleanup October 18, 2024** - SBEP got together with our partners in Cortez to help clean up and break down some of the storm damage and debris at the Cortez Village Historical Society and Florida Maritime Museum campus, which boarders the FISH Preserve.
- **Supermoon Moon Paddle November 15, 2024** - This marked the fourth supermoon paddle in partnership with Manatee County, Big Waters Land Trust, and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. Three have been at Robinson Preserve, including this past November's paddle, and one was held at Big Waters Land Trust. During the paddle, participants

explore Sarasota Bay at sunset and learn about watershed health and stewardship.

- **Perico Bayou/Palma Sola Paddle Cleanup November 16, 2024** - SBEP joined many of the cleanup organizations listed above to tackle post-storm debris caught in the mangroves around Palma Sola Bay.
- **Volunteer Appreciation Party December 5, 2024** - Volunteers and staff gathered at Motorworks Brewing to celebrate and acknowledge members of SBEP's Citizens Advisory Committee and volunteers that have gone above and beyond to support the program.
- **Terra Ceia & Manatee River Cleanup – December 14, 2024** - A dual cleanup was held at two locations in Manatee County to continue the effort of removing large debris from the water. Both sites completely filled their dumpsters and put a good dent in what was out there.









2025 Educator Workshops



SBEP sponsors **professional development workshops** for K-12 teachers in Manatee and Sarasota Counties. The full-day workshops are offered three times a year by Sandra L. Gilchrist, Ph.D., Professor of Biology at New College of Florida. The focus of the workshops is to improve teaching skills and the understanding of science while empowering teachers to use modern techniques and pedagogy. Workshops run a full-day on Saturdays. Educators may earn a stipend and continuing education credits for attendance.

January 25, 2025 Workshop - Coastal Resiliency
Heiser Natural Science Building at New College from 8:30AM - 4:30PM
We are using a general theme of Coastal Resiliency to explore the interface between the estuary and shore and uplands areas. We will demonstrate some field projects and classroom experiments that you can use at your schools. A discussion of vegetation along the shore including mangroves and marsh plants will be used to introduce the notion of creating a food forest on your school grounds that can be used for multiple scientific discovery activities. Some new digital tools will be used to plot data and to help you with introducing critical thinking skills to students regardless of grade level. Our last activity will be to discuss networking and grant opportunities to support your classroom activities. Lunch and snacks will be provided. There will be a small stipend for participants along with take-home materials.

Items included:

- Beach dynamics/understanding sand-simulations; pH
- Beach plants, pollination and reproduction: creating habitat for pollinators
- Mapping surface currents-simple ways to look at currents
- Grants and resources-networking

To learn more or register for this workshop, please contact Dr. Gilchrist at gilchrist@ncf.edu by Jan 18th.

Have You Heard About RainCheck?

Sarasota County's new RainCheck Program offers a rebate for installing certain features around your home that help improve water quality and allow rain to soak into your landscape. Examples include:

- Rain gardens and bioswales - up to $500
- Downspout planter boxes - up to $1,000
- Impervious Replacement (i.e. driveways & sidewalks) - $5 per sq ft up to $5,000
- Modified Downspouts - up to $50



Learn more about RainCheck

Participants Needed for Red Tide Study



Roskamp Institute researchers are conducting a study to investigate the potential health effects of exposure to red tide toxins. The study focuses on understanding the links between red tide exposure and possible neurological symptoms in people who interact with coastal environments. This includes:

- Coastal residents, whose daily lives may involve exposure to air or water containing algal toxins.

- Professionals who work in or near the water, such as fishers, boaters, or those involved in water quality management.
- Sports and recreation enthusiasts, including commercial or recreational fishers and boaters who frequently engage in water-based activities.

By examining these groups, researchers aim to shed light on how red tide may impact the health of coastal populations, contributing to the broader understanding of environmental health issues. This study is part of ongoing efforts to address questions about the potential effects of environmental toxins and how they influence community well-being.

For further information or to learn more about this research, contact Dakota Helgager dhelgager@roskampclinic.org or 941-256-8010.

Lights, Camera, Action!

SBEP in the News

Communication is vital to the protection and restoration of the bay. Check out the latest clips and articles featuring SBEP efforts.



Garden Club teaches best practices for post-storm landscape restoration
Your Observer

"On Dec. 19, the Longboat Key Garden Club hosted an in-person seminar for interested residents to learn how to restore plants after major storms. At the “Restoring plants after major storms” seminar, representatives from environmental organizations provided expert opinions about coastal vegetation landscapes and the importance of native plants."



Lake Okeechobee releases can make red tide outbreaks longer in Sarasota, study shows
WUSF

"You may not think Lake Okeechobee would affect water quality in the Tampa Bay region. But when that freshwater is released to prevent flooding, it can make red tide blooms worse off the coast of Sarasota, around 100 miles away. That's according to a peer-reviewed **study** in The Florida Scientist. It looked at the impact of nitrogen-rich water that flows west — from the lake, down the Caloosahatchee River and into Estero Bay and Charlotte Harbor."

Read More SBEP in the News

Jobs & Funding Opportunities

- **Big Waters Land Trust: Database and Donor Stewardship Administrator - Sarasota**
- **Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium: multiple positions - Sarasota**

Bite Sized Bay News



Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program Earns National Designation

"New federal legislation recognizes Pensacola and Perdido Bays as “Estuaries of National Significance.” The measure, passed Monday by the U.S. House of Representatives, will prioritize government funding for projects aimed at keeping the bays healthy." (WUWF)



Expanding habitat protections for Florida manatees by almost a million acres

"In response to a lawsuit settlement with environmental organizations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to expand the critical habitat designation for Florida manatees by over 930,000 acres to a total of 1,904,191 acres." (Environment Florida)



Use caution when navigating local waters to avoid debris, find fish

"Whether it’s floating debris, such as sections of docks, fences or tree limbs, or even channel markers that have been knocked over, you want to proceed with caution as striking a large object in the water could not only severely damage a boat but can cause harm to the driver and put passengers at risk." (Anna Maria Islander)

Community & Partner Events

Check out upcoming green events from over 100 local organizations on the **Green Living Toolkit Community Events Calendar!**



Follow us

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