

FY26
(October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026)
WORKPLAN and BUDGET



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Executive Summary

Through a cooperative agreement with EPA, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) is anticipating funding of \$850,000 for carrying out tasks described in this FY26 Workplan, as allocated by the US Congress. EPA's funds will be supplemented by funding from Manatee County, Sarasota County, the City of Bradenton, the City of Sarasota, the Town of Longboat Key, and the Southwest Florida Water Management District to provide the full funding outlined here.

This FY26 Workplan will also include recent increases in funding from our local stakeholders. In response to a request made at the February 2024 Policy Board meeting, several stakeholders agreed to increase their cash contributions to the SBEP, to account for accumulated inflation over the past twenty years (when the contribution amounts were first established). This will continue to allow SBEP to increase the amount of work that will be accomplished over the next fiscal year.

This FY26 Workplan agreement summarizes the funding requirements and projects required to support the implementation of SBEP's recently updated (in 2022) Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). These activities will also assist in EPA's ongoing efforts to ensure clean and safe water for residents of coastal communities, and to protect and restore waterbodies and watersheds, to protect important coastal habitats, consistent with the US Congress' legislative intent, when Congress created the National Estuary Program, as outlined in Section 320 of the 1987 Federal Clean Water Act. These CCMP and Congressional goals focus on the restoration and maintenance of the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the estuary and support sustainable human uses of the bay and its abundant natural resources.

Over the past few years, there has been an accumulation of information that suggests that Sarasota Bay is in the middle of a substantial improvement in its ecological health. In 2023, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) determined that the open waters of Sarasota Bay are no longer out of compliance with their previously developed water quality standards for nutrients. In the fall of 2023, FDEP informed SBEP staff that the following portions of Sarasota Bay are on FDEP's official "draft de-list list" for water quality impairments: 1) that portion of Sarasota Bay between Ringling Causeway and Siesta Drive, 2) Roberts Bay, 3) Little Sarasota Bay, 4) Blackburn Bay, and 5) Bowlees Creek. As a result, there is no longer a need for a Reasonable Assurance Plan (RAP) for nutrient impairments, as there are not any nutrient impairments identified in the open waters of Sarasota Bay. However, SBEP's Policy Board recommended moving forward with a Water Quality Protection Plan (WQPP) for the bay. The WQPP, anticipated to be completed in Spring 2025, includes the same elements as a RAP but it has no regulatory implications, although local governments will continue to have to abide by any regulatory guidance contained within their Watershed Management Plans and/or their National Pollution Discharge Elimination (NPDES) permit obligations. The SBEP envisions that the WQPP would be a public-facing document on our website, similar to the SBEP's

Ecosystem Health Report Card, that would track whether our local government partners were keeping up with the projects and programs that will be necessary to “hold the line” on pollutant load increases over the next thirty years.

In addition, the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) recently released their 2024 seagrass maps for Sarasota Bay. Between 2018 and 2020, Sarasota Bay saw an 18% decline in seagrass coverage with losses in four of the five bay segments. Between 2020 and 2022, the rate of decline was less, an overall 5% loss, but seagrass declines were recorded in each of the five bay segments. However, the District recorded 19% more seagrass in 2024 than what was mapped in 2022, and gains were seen in all bay segments. The overall increase, 1,912 acres, represents the second biggest increase in the past 30 years.

To build on these recent improvements in the bay’s water quality and natural resources, SBEP’s FY26 Workplan agreement includes the following tasks and outputs:

- Continue ongoing efforts to assess the status and trends in water quality and ecosystem health, and update our Ecosystem Health Report Card
- Finalize ongoing efforts to develop, with local stakeholders, a WQPP for Sarasota Bay, and to assign load reduction goals to the appropriate stakeholders and permit holders to allow them to “hold the line” on pollutant loads over the next thirty years
- Continue ongoing efforts to include citizen scientists in data collection efforts, particularly through the Eyes on Seagrass monitoring program
- Continue ongoing efforts to document the status and health of Sarasota Bay’s fish populations, via our partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Finalize the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funded habitat restoration efforts at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, the Town of Longboat Key’s Bayfront Park, and the City of Sarasota’s City Island restoration project site
- Develop concept plans and obtain permits for various other habitat restoration projects for future years
- Continue ongoing public outreach efforts through hands-on learning experiences for residents, with a focus on expanding educational opportunities
- Continue ongoing community outreach and education through various Bay Guardians programs.
- Continue ongoing outreach and habitat restoration efforts through the Bay Partners program

A summary of Workplan outputs and outcomes includes the following:

- Outputs- continued program administration which will result in continuing to implement the 2022 CCMP update through: increased partnership building, urban stormwater retrofit projects, improved wastewater treatment and disposal, continued efforts to restore oyster reefs, ongoing efforts to design, permitting and construction of artificial reefs, exotic species removal, increased translation of SBEP products into Spanish, new programs/workshops,

quarterly newsletters ([Newsletter Archive | Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#)), publications and promotional materials for use at fairs and volunteer events, small local grants promoting best management practices, conference support and participation, continued expansion of program capacity and fiscal responsibility (with independent external oversight), and required reports.

- Outcomes- improved water quality, enhanced habitat for juvenile fisheries, more native plant coverage, improved treatment and reduced abundance of untreated urban stormwater runoff, increased acreage of protected and/or restored intertidal wetlands, increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, ongoing and improved coordination with local governments related to bay-specific policy and decision making, better coordination pollution-reduction strategies, increased capacity for seagrass recovery, increased program visibility, and increased leveraging of EPA funds with local contributions and commitments.

To track our progress in implementing both SBEP's goals, as set out in the 2022 CCMP update, the SBEP will continue to report on our progress through a variety of deliverables, including Director's Notes ([Sarasota Bay Health Updates | Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#)), semi-annual and annual reports, as well as using social media to increase awareness of findings of various technical reports, and summaries of public education and outreach activities - [News – Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#).

Part I: Goals and Accomplishments

Introduction

The SBEP's Management Conference was convened in June 1989. The Program's mission is to implement the SBEP's CCMP to restore and protect Sarasota Bay. In 2021, the Policy Committee made "biased towards action" a guiding principle of the SBEP and supported a variety of implementation activities early in the process. The SBEP Management Conference comprises relevant federal, state, and local agencies, community members, and technical advisors. SBEP staff promotes and oversees CCMP implementation, coordinates efforts among the various organizations responsible for bay decision-making, seeks external funding, and promotes public involvement in carrying out SBEP's mission.

On July 23, 2004, the SBEP finalized an Interlocal Agreement with its partners that established a state agency (a special independent district) to oversee the implementation of the CCMP. Effective as of October 1, 2004, the Interlocal Agreement required the CCMP to be updated in 2009 and every five (5) years thereafter. In accordance with this mandate, the first two CCMP updates were completed in 2009 and 2014. On March 1, 2022, the US EPA informed the SBEP that the latest CCMP update was "...recognized as final by EPA." In response to this determination, the CCMP was finalized, and an ArcGIS Storymap of the CCMP has been viewed by more than 1,500 people - [A Thriving Estuary \(arcgis.com\)](#).

The overarching theme of the 2022 CCMP update was that Sarasota Bay needed immediate attention to restore its water quality to protect those ecosystem features that are dependent on good water quality. As documented by the SBEP, much of the bay, especially portions south of Siesta Key Drive, had experienced years of elevated nitrogen concentrations, higher levels of phytoplankton and drift macroalgae, and the loss of most of the seagrass gains that occurred in the first 20 years of the SBEP – [State of the Bay | Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#).

To explore this topic in greater detail, SBEP hosted an all-day Water Quality Restoration Workshop on October 5, 2021, and outlined the logic behind a proposed 20 percent reduction in the loads of dissolved inorganic nitrogen, which was SBEP's proposed load reduction target. This load reduction target was reviewed by the SBEP's Technical and Citizens Advisory Committees and was presented to the October 2021 Water Quality Restoration Workshop. After conferring with the Management and Policy Boards, SBEP took the lead to develop an FDEP-approved RAP for the bay. RAP is a locally led, science-based version of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). While TMDLs are often developed by modelers working for FDEP or the US EPA, a RAP is developed by local experts, people who know the watershed in greater detail than agency staff who might not have direct experience with the peculiarities of a watershed's geology, development patterns and/or the susceptibility of local waters to delivered nutrient loads. SBEP initiated the RAP process in FY23, and a consultant was brought on board to assist the SBEP and its stakeholders in refining scientifically sound pollutant load reduction targets. SBEP informed the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of our progress developing the RAP and discussed the proposed reference period approach that was to be used for developing nutrient

load reduction targets.

However, recent actions by local stakeholders to respond to the bay's water quality problems have already been initiated, and it appears that the over \$300 million in ongoing and/or recently completed stormwater retrofit and wastewater upgrade projects might have already achieved the proposed 20% reduction goal for dissolved inorganic nitrogen - [Director's Note: FDEP determinations of water quality trends \(sarasotabay.org\)](#). In response to the recent improvements in water quality, FDEP informed the SBEP in October 2023 that the open waters of Sarasota Bay were no longer out of compliance with their established water quality standards - [Director's Note: Good news from FDEP - with a caveat... \(sarasotabay.org\)](#). With no violations of water quality standards – for nutrients – there would be no TMDL required, and thus no need for a RAP to be developed. Instead, SBEP's Policy Board recommended continuing the RAP efforts, but with the end goal of producing a non-regulatory Water Quality Protection Plan (WQPP). The WQPP is structured similarly to a RAP, in terms of identifying the projects and partners required to keep these recent water quality improvements from being lost due to future population growth.

The bay's former decline in water quality is now well-documented, and the reasons for this are also documented. One of the reasons for recent problems in the bay is wastewater overflows – especially in the southern portion of the bay's watershed. These overflows were comprised of treated, but high-nitrogen-content effluent, exceeding 1 billion gallons over the period of 2013 to 2019 – [Director's Note: Honing in on the basis for recent trends... \(sarasotabay.org\)](#).

In addition, the Town of Longboat Key's wastewater pipeline to the mainland suffered a multi-day leak in the summer of 2019, which resulted in an excess of 10 million gallons of raw wastewater being discharged into a mangrove fringe bordering the bay. If that pipeline leak had occurred under the bay itself, the ability to detect and fix the leak would have been much more difficult than it already was. In the spring of 2021, releases from the Piney Point facility introduced over 200 tons of nitrogen (mostly in the form of ammonium) into Lower Tampa Bay, with impacts documented in Anna Maria Sound, Palma Sola Bay, and Upper Sarasota Bay, as outlined in these two papers published in peer-reviewed scientific journals: 1) [The response of Tampa Bay to a legacy mining nutrient release in the year following the event \(nxedge.io\)](#) and 2) [Ecological impacts to Sarasota Bay from Piney Point](#).

Between 2018 and 2020, approximately 2,000 acres of seagrass were lost in Sarasota Bay, mostly in those areas where the 2018 red tide was at its worst. Between 2020 and 2022, an additional 500 acres of seagrass were lost, with 80% of that loss occurring in the same portion of Sarasota Bay where the plume of high nutrient discharges from Piney Point were transported. As a result, the macroalgal blooms that characterized much of the lower bay during the period of wastewater overflows were manifesting themselves in the upper bay. While these algal blooms were documented, their long-term impacts are not yet known. Although the macroalgal blooms have declined substantially from what was documented in May and June of 2021, macroalgae might now be a better indicator of nutrient enrichment than phytoplankton abundance.

Over the past few years, the large releases of treated but high-nutrient effluent from Sarasota County's Bee Ridge Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) have been reduced dramatically, and in the

early spring of 2022, Sarasota County and the US EPA celebrated the groundbreaking of the process of upgrading the WWTP to Advanced Wastewater Treatment (AWT) standards, an effort expected to cost more than \$250 million. Additionally, the City of Sarasota's WWTP surface water discharge volumes have been reduced over time, although they are at low enough levels that they could be discharged 100% of the time, according to the State of Florida's Grizzle-Figg Act. In addition, Manatee County has recently (as of 2017) upgraded its WWTP processes, which reduced their nitrogen content by as much as 40 percent, prior to application via reclaimed water ([Investments in wastewater treatment help protect water quality in Manatee County \(sarasotabay.org\)](#)).

Over the past four years, the bay's water quality has improved, even after impacts from 2021's Piney Point disaster and 2022's Hurricane Ian. In June 2024, Sarasota Bay was impacted by record-setting hourly rainfall from Invest 90L, followed by record setting daily rainfall associated with impacts from what was then Tropical Storm Debby. These two events were then followed by a record-setting storm surge from Hurricane Helene in September 2024, and then the impacts of the direct landfall (on Siesta and Casey Keys) of Hurricane Milton in October 2024. After Hurricane Helene's storm surge, there was a short-lived reestablishment of the lost historical tidal exchange between Little Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. However, that tidal connection was lost within a week or so. Then, in October 2024, the combination of a similar storm surge, but larger wind-driven waves on top of the storm surge created a new tidal connection that has persisted until at least April 2025, five months later.

The multiple storm events of 2024 adversely impacted the bay's water quality, especially the high rainfall amounts from June's Invest 90L and August's Tropical Storm Debby. Despite these impacts, Sarasota Bay's Ecosystem Health Report Card for 2024 showed most of the bay to have "good" to "excellent" scores, although the scores in the lower bay segments of Roberts, Little Sarasota and Blackburn Bays declined from higher values recorded in 2023 - [Report Card | Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#). Even after those impacts, most of the bay had similar water quality and/or seagrass coverage as to what was recorded during the SBEP's proposed reference period of 2006 to 2012.

During the years of 2013 to 2019, the success story of Sarasota Bay, in terms of both water quality and natural resources, had slipped, and the bay's health stood at a crossroad. However, management actions initiated and/or completed over the past few years appear to have brought about SBEP's proposed goal for a 20% reduction in loads of inorganic nitrogen. Based on results from the past few years, there is accumulating evidence that the bay's health is now solidly on the path of recovery. However, this recent good news could slip away from us again, management actions are not sufficient to offset the impacts of both future population growth and impacts from warmer and higher (from sea level rise) bay waters. This is the challenge facing the SBEP and its partners, a challenge that must be successfully addressed if SBEP is to successfully carry out its responsibility to guide the re-recovery of the bay and its abundant natural resources.

Current and Recent Challenges

Unpermitted overflows of secondary-treated wastewater in excess of one billion gallons occurred in the lower bay between 2013 and 2019. During those years, annual Total Nitrogen (TN) concentrations in Roberts Bay were consistently higher (four out of five years) than the highest annual average values

during the prior fifteen years. During those same years, macroalgae became more common than seagrass, based on transect data collected by Sarasota County. Elevated TN concentrations and widespread increases in macroalgae also occurred during those same years in both Little Sarasota and Blackburn Bays. In those two systems, seagrass coverage declined by about 30 percent between 2014 and 2018. The reasons for impacts in Little Sarasota Bay and Blackburn Bay are not entirely clear, but they could be a function of over-application of nutrient-rich wastewater from WWTPs other than Bee Ridge, or perhaps the southward flow of discharges from Philippi Creek into Little Sarasota Bay during incoming tides. Regardless of the cause of these prior losses, gains in these same areas suggest that the major stresses have been reduced to the point that recovery is ongoing.

The problems in the lower bay were then followed by impacts to the upper bay during the 2018 red tide event, which is likely one of the main reasons for the 18% decline in seagrass coverage between 2018 and 2020, with almost all that loss occurring in the Manatee County portion of the upper bay. This was then followed by impacts to the upper bay from the Piney Point releases, which occurred in the spring of 2021. Finally, the bay, especially the lower bay, was then impacted by large amounts of rainfall and stormwater runoff associated with Hurricane Ian, in the fall of 2022, and then the multiple storms of 2024.

The problems outlined above have been discussed by SBEP staff at Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Management and Policy Board meetings and have been relayed to the Policy Board in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. At the SBEP’s Water Quality Restoration Workshop, held in fall of 2021, our local stakeholders outlined over \$900 million in projects to address pollution sources to the bay, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 - Summary of past and future project costs for various stormwater and wastewater efforts in the SBEP watershed. Past project cost estimates were restricted to the past 20 years, and do not include costs to upgrade WWTPs by Cities of Bradenton and Sarasota (which occurred > 20 years ago). Future project costs were staff estimates of stormwater and wastewater projects that would likely occur over the next 5 to 10 years. Results compiled from SBEP’s Water Quality Restoration Workshop (October 5, 2021).

Cost in Millions		
Entity	Past projects	Future projects
Manatee County	\$39.3	\$0.0
Sarasota County	\$161.7	\$534.5
City of Bradenton	\$31.0	\$24.0
City of Sarasota	\$9.0	\$35.5
Town of Longboat Key	\$0.8	\$21.7
Total	\$241.8	\$615.7

The \$615 million in future projects listed above does not include approximately \$300 million for ongoing maintenance and repair of existing stormwater and wastewater infrastructure. In total, local governments are anticipating spending over \$900 million on maintenance and repair of existing infrastructure, as well as initiating new projects designed to bring about additional benefits to the bay. It needs to be stressed that without the significant sums spent on operation and maintenance,

future pollutant loads could increase, such as that which happened in the spring of 2020 with the aging pipeline carrying untreated wastewater from Longboat Key to the Manatee County mainland.

Building on our ongoing efforts, this Workplan continues efforts to finalize a public-facing WQPP for Sarasota Bay. This WQPP is intended to be a scientifically sound and locally driven guidance document that develops estimates of nutrient load reductions with future population growth that would need to be offset to ensure that the recent improvements in ecosystem health do not slip away again, should population growth add to the loads of stormwater and wastewater entering Sarasota Bay.

SBEP's proposed projects in this FY26 Workplan aim to assist the Sarasota-Manatee community in continuing to respond to recent challenges in a timely and cost-effective manner. Our stakeholders have been kept aware of the extent of the problems we face and the cost estimates – preliminary as they are – related to implementing the potential load reduction targets. Local, regional, state, and federal agency staff have been involved with reviewing the approach for developing the WQPP during numerous meetings of the TAC, the Water Quality Consortium, and via presentations to our Management and Policy Boards.

While COVID-19 continued to impact the SBEP during the early part of 2023 – with many of our staff testing positive for the virus - SBEP and its partners are now back in the mode of in-person meetings. Public outreach and education projects including the Sarasota Bay Guardians volunteer events, field trips for K-12 schools, and Bay Partners Grants, have returned to pre-Covid levels of activity, and CAC meetings have been held in person since spring of 2021.

This FY26 Workplan includes the costs of continuing our ongoing and/or recently completed large-scale habitat restoration efforts at Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH) Preserve, GT Bray, and other locations.

CCMP Implementation Update: FY24/FY25

During FY24 and FY25, SBEP continued ongoing efforts to implement Action Plan elements from the 2022 CCMP, which is summarized in an on-line ArcGIS Storymap version the CCMP - [A Thriving Estuary \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).

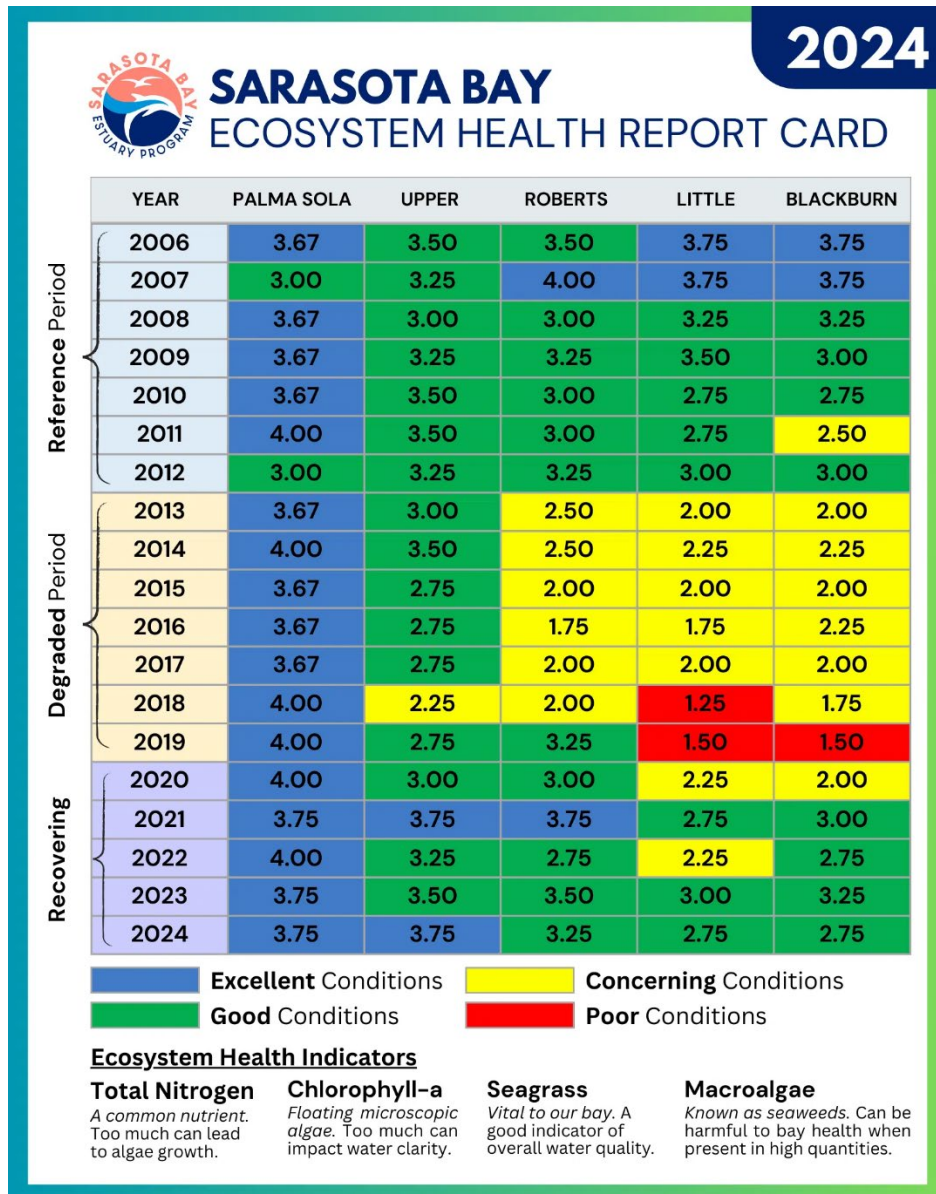
CCMP addenda, including the Finance Plan, Monitoring Plan, Habitat Restoration Plan, and Communications Plan will all be submitted to EPA in the Spring of 2025, less than three years following the 2022 CCMP's acceptance by EPA. When the WQPP is completed (expected in summer 2025, the implementation status of projects will be tracked both in the CCMP and in a public facing website.

Water Quality and Quantity Action Plan

Support comprehensive and coordinated surface water and groundwater quality monitoring, assessment, and reporting: Sarasota and Manatee Counties continue to conduct water quality and biological resource monitoring as described in the 2022 CCMP. Following recommendations from the 2021 Florida Macroalgae Workshops, SBEP implemented an additional community monitoring program to survey macroalgae coverage and nutrient content each spring and summer. SBEP has

updated the Sarasota Bay Ecosystem Health Report Card [Report Card | Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#) for 2024 based on the most current available monitoring data (Table 2).

Table 2 – Ecosystem Health Report Card for the years 2006 to 2024. The report card is based on four measurements of ecosystem health: 1) the annual average concentration of TN, 2) the annual average concentration of Chlorophyll-a (a measure of phytoplankton biomass), 3) the average percent coverage of macroalgae in each bay segment, and 4) the amount of seagrass coverage (measured every two years).



The results shown in Table 2 show that the health of the bay falls into three general periods. The period of 2006 to 2012 is termed the Reference Period, as there were lower levels of TN and Chlorophyll-a in the water, less macroalgae (where data was collected) and there was a bay-wide seagrass increase of 28%. The next seven years are referred to as the Degraded Period, as TN and Chlorophyll-a concentrations rose to higher levels than in the Reference Period, and macroalgae

became more abundant. Most of the seagrass gains seen from 2006 to 2012 were lost during the subsequent Degraded Period. The years 2020 up to 2024 show evidence of a bay-wide recovery, as concentrations of both TN and Chlorophyll-a had decreased sufficiently that the lower bay segments of Roberts, Little Sarasota, and Blackburn Bays are no longer considered impaired for nutrients by FDEP. In addition, the 2024 seagrass maps show increases in coverage in all five bay segments, with a bay-wide increase of 1,914 acres, a 19% increase since 2022.

- ***Develop improvement plans to maintain, attain, or surpass state water quality standards:*** In the fall of 2021, SBEP’s consultants completed the watershed-level pollutant loading model for Sarasota Bay. This model has been updated to include the years 2020, 2021, and 2022, and is being used as the basis for estimating future pollutant loads that form the basis for the load reduction strategies of the WQPP.
- ***Improve and manage hydrology for a more natural pattern of timing, quantity, and distribution of surface water flows:*** Sarasota County’s Sarasota Bay Watershed Management plan, developed with input from the SBEP, contains more than ten priority stormwater treatment projects, and the SBEP’s IJA Workplan includes funds to design, permit and potentially construct one of the County’s priority projects for Matheny Creek. Projects within Sarasota County’s Watershed Management Plans could potentially be eligible for funding through either state or federal sources, depending on whether they are part of an approved Section 319 program or contained within their Capital Improvement Projects schedule.
- ***Reduce pollutant loading from priority sources, including stormwater, septic and other onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems, centralized wastewater collection, treatment and disposal systems, including reuse, and atmospheric nitrogen deposition:*** Sarasota County broke ground on the construction of AWT upgrades to the Bee Ridge WWTP in March 2022, and large-scale releases of treated but non-AWT effluent do not appear to be occurring over the past few years. These upgrades appear to have allowed the bay to have already met the proposed 20% reduction goal for dissolved inorganic nitrogen – [Director's Note: Honing in on the basis for recent trends... \(sarasotabay.org\)](#). After the upgrades are completed at Bee Ridge (expected to be completed in 2025) Sarasota County plans to construct AWT upgrades to two other local treatment plants, Venice Gardens and Central County, as well.
- ***Support measures to better understand, monitor, report, respond to, recover from, and reduce harmful algal blooms (HABs):*** SBEP staff participate in several HAB-related working groups, including the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB) Communications Workgroup and a regional response workgroup.

Watershed Habitats Action Plan

- ***Update and implement the SBEP Five-Year Habitat Restoration Plan and protect, enhance, and restore priority watershed habitats, including uplands and freshwater wetlands, tributaries, coastal wetlands, hard bottom, seagrass meadows, and beaches and dunes:***

SBEP is currently implementing three priority projects that were identified in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA): Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park shoreline restoration, City Island Boardwalk restoration project, and Longboat Key seawall enhancement project. SBEP and its consultants have worked to secure permits for all three projects over the past two years. SBEP's FY21 and FY22 Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) Workplan was accepted by EPA, and those funds are being used to construct these and other recently completed restoration projects.

- ***Improve shoreline resiliency and habitat value through living shorelines and other modifications to hardened shorelines:*** In FY22, SBEP, in partnership with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources, launched a new program to distribute vertical oyster gardens (VOGs) to property owners with docks throughout the Sarasota and Tampa Bay watersheds. The VOG distribution effort has increased substantially during 2022, with hundreds of VOGs being distributed to local stakeholders for community-based installation events. VOGs are intended to introduce structure to manmade environments with little habitat for oysters and other sessile filter feeders. And currently, SBEP are working with consultants and contractors to complete the Longboat Key Park seawall enhancement project, which would add concrete panels to the fiberglass seawall at this site.

Fish and Wildlife Action Plan

- ***Update and implement the SBEP Five-Year Habitat Restoration Plan and protect, enhance, and restore priority watershed habitats, including uplands and freshwater wetlands, tributaries, coastal wetlands, hard bottom, seagrass meadows, and beaches and dunes:*** Habitat projects identified in the 2015-2020 Habitat Restoration Plan that were not completed during that cycle were considered for IIJA funding for the fiscal years 2020-2026. SBEP recently completed three priority projects - FISH Preserve Phase IV, GT Bray Park, and Sarasota Bay artificial reefs, and SBEP is currently constructing the Town of Longboat Key Living Seawall and MLK Park Shoreline projects. Habitat restoration projects slated for FY25 under the IIJA funding Work Plan are the Matheny Creek Stormwater Project, Flamingo Cay Habitat Restoration Project, and Rose Park Shoreline Phase 1.
- ***Improve shoreline resiliency and habitat value through living shorelines and other modifications to hardened shorelines:*** In FY25, SBEP, in partnership with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources, will continue to distribute VOGs to property owners with docks throughout the Sarasota and Tampa Bay watersheds. The VOG distribution effort has increased substantially since 2022, with hundreds of VOGs being distributed to local stakeholders for community-based installation events. VOGs are intended to introduce structure to manmade environments with little habitat for oysters and other sessile filter feeders. The seawall enhancement project at Longboat Key's Bayfront Park will be a high-visibility location through which the SBEP and its partners can highlight the need to take a proactive approach to the recent phenomena of homeowners replacing aging concrete seawalls, which are often covered with oysters, with newer PVC and/or fiberglass

seawalls, which do not seem to support as many oysters as older concrete seawalls.

Protect, restore, and enhance the diversity and abundance of native fish and shellfish: The State of Florida's Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) program indicates that Sarasota Bay supports abundant and diverse fish communities. However, in FY19, during FIM's 10th year of sampling Sarasota Bay, the bay was devastated by intense red tide. Monitoring data indicated impacts to commercially and recreationally important species, including red drum, spotted sea trout, and pink shrimp. However, in an updated report on the impacts of the most recent red tide on recreationally important finfish (common snook, red drum (redfish) and spotted seatrout), the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) reported the following encouraging findings:

- **Monitor and protect threatened, endangered, and vulnerable wildlife:** SBEP continues to fund the FWC Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) program in Sarasota Bay. These data provide bi-monthly fish community and habitat metrics that are communicated as indicators of bay health, as part of the overall monitoring of the bay's health. This monitoring program is headed by FFWCC staff, who use similar techniques and reporting for Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and Charlotte Harbor. Thus, the three NEPs on Florida's Gulf Coast all have fisheries abundance monitored in a consistent manner, with consistent techniques by professional fisheries biologists.

Community Action Plan

- **Reduce recreational use impacts on Sarasota Bay, improve public understanding and action on bay-related issues, and expand reach to all audiences:** Since FY21, SBEP has partnered with Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium to engage youth in bay user groups. The program funds guided kayak paddle trips, bay science lessons, and aquarium visits for youth groups from schools and organizations such as the Sarasota Housing Authority and the Boys and Girls Clubs. Approximately 500 students per year are reached through the program.
- **SBEP continues to distribute seagrass awareness maps to local boat ramps and rental locations.** Staff at several marinas note that the maps are frequently used by patrons.
- **Coordinate and support community initiatives that advance CCMP implementation:** In FY23, SBEP partnered with Sarasota County to host the first annual "Bay Fest." Over 1,000 members of the public attended the event to participate in bay-related recreation and education. This event was held again in March 2025, at the Bay Park Conservancy, with similarly impressive attendance.
- **Ensure coordination of interlocal partners for CCMP implementation:** SBEP communicates consistently via meetings, emails, and other methods with members of the SBEP Policy Board, Management Board, TAC, and CAC.

SBEP Highlights - FY24/FY25

In a new addition, a public facing Annual Report is now available online - [2024-SBEP-Annual-Report.pdf](#)

1. February 2024 – SBEP presentation to University of Florida’s Environmental Law Panel.
2. February 15, 2024 – SBEP received an award at Climate Adaptation Center’s Annual Luncheon for efforts to highlight impacts of climate change on the bay’s water quality and ecosystem health.
3. February 21, 2024 – SBEP presentation to University of Florida’s Water Institute.
4. March 8, 2024 – SBEP presentation to University of South Florida’s Environmental and Water Resources Engineering Graduate Student Seminar.
5. March 2024 – SBEP invited to join Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council’s newly renamed “Agency on Bay and Coastal Management.”
6. March 15, 2024 – SBEP presentation to Florida Chapter of American Water Resources Association meeting in Sarasota.
7. March 2024 – SBEP presentations to City of Sarasota City Commission, and Town of Longboat Key Commission meetings.
8. April 2024 – SBEP presentation to Manatee County Commission meeting.
9. April 23, 2024 – SBEP and numerous media outlets covered the deployment of several of the 24 artificial reef modules placed in the bay, using funds from the IJJA.
10. April 2024 – Developed draft FY25 Workplan.
11. May 2024 – SBEP staff participate in EPA-ANEP meeting in Washington, D.C.
12. June 2024 – SBEP Director participated in ex-officio review of New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program, at request of EPA HQ staff.
13. August 2024 – review of candidates, selection, and onboarding of SBEP’s new scientist – Ryan Gandy, Ph.D.
14. August 2024 – SBEP staff worked with staff from SWFWMD to sample water quality in Roberts, Little Sarasota and Blackburn Bays, to quantify the impacts of Tropical Storm Debby - [Director's Note: Bacteria levels - 4 weeks after Debby](#)
15. August 27, 2024 – SBEP participation in Florida Water Quality Summit, hosted by US Congressman Byron Donalds in Ft. Myers.
16. September 24, 2024 – SBEP presentation to Bradenton City Council.
17. September 2025 – Finalized EPA Annual Report.

16. September 19, 2024 – SBEP hosted EPA staff at ribbon-cutting ceremony for GT Bray Park restoration projects.
17. September and October 2024 – SBEP staff assisted in collection of data to develop initial estimate of water exchange via the newly established tidal connection between Little Sarasota Bay and the Gulf after the storm surge from Hurricane Helene
18. October 1, 2024 – SBEP interviewed on WSLR’s “Our Changing Environment.”
19. October and November 2024 – SBEP staff worked with SWFWMD and other agencies to collect, analyze and interpret water quality data after the impacts of Hurricane Milton.
20. October and November 2024 – SBEP staff worked with local NGOs to coordinate cleanup efforts at Cortez Village and other locations impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton -[Director's Note: Post-storm activities](#)
21. November 2024 – SBEP participation and presentation at ANEP Tech Transfer Conference, Stony Brook, NY.
22. December 10, 2024 - SBEP presentation on Red Tide studies at Roskamp Institute, Sarasota, FL.

An update (as of 4/18/2024) on the progress of IJJA-funded projects contained within SBEP’s IJJA Work Plans for FY22 through FY26 is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Update (as of 4/8/2025) on status of IJJA-funded projects for Sarasota Bay.



SBEP RESTORATION PROJECTS

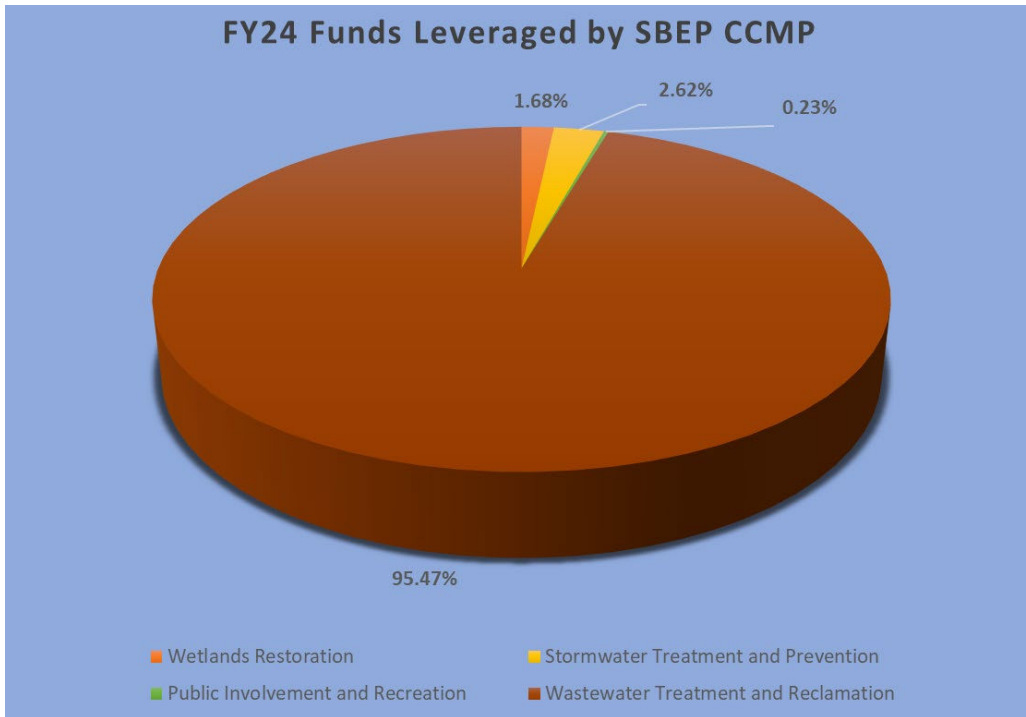
Funded through the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IJJA), formerly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)

Project	Description & Partner(s)	Year	Cost (IJJA)
FISH Preserve	Constructed tidal creek habitats, invasive plant removal, enhanced public access. Partner: Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage.	'22	\$700,000
GT Bray Park	Stream restoration and stormwater pond retrofit. Partners: City of Bradenton, Manatee County	'23	\$900,000
Artificial Reefs	Habitat for commercial fish species, enhanced bay recreation. Partner: Manatee County, Sarasota County	'23	\$220,000
Dr. MLK Park	Shoreline restoration, kayak launch, fishing pier, stormwater treatment, native plants, educational exhibits. Partner: City of Sarasota	'24	\$200,000
Longboat Key Bayfront Park Shoreline	Modify the fiberglass seawall with the attachment of concrete panels that support growth of oyster communities. Partner: The Town of Longboat Key	'24	\$500,000
Sarasota Baywalk at City Island	New boardwalk, debris removal, additional signage. Partner: City of Sarasota	'24	\$200,000
Matheny Creek	Stormwater treatment (ponds and swales), facilitated cistern use for adjacent community. Partner: Sarasota County	'25	\$600,000
Flamingo Cay	Restoration of upland spoil area via contouring and planting, mangrove migration corridor, primitive paddle-up campsites. Partner: Manatee County	'25	\$160,000
Rose Park Phase I	Living shoreline design and permitting. Partner: Manatee County	'25	\$150,000
Rose Park Phase II	Construction of living shoreline. Partner: Manatee County	'26	\$500,000
City of Sarasota Bayfront Park South Shoreline	Shoreline restoration and beach stabilization, kayak launch, native plantings, small watercraft mooring. Partner: City of Sarasota	'26	\$400,000
Total			\$4,530,000

Complete
In Progress
Pending

NEPORT Tracking

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program accomplishments for FY24 were recorded in SBEP’s submission to EPA’s NEPORT Performance Tracking System in September 2024. In this submission, SBEP reported eight habitat projects that created or restored 85.1 acres. In addition, SBEP identified over \$74.3 million in associated leveraged funds, a ratio of 87:1. A breakdown of leveraged funds by CCMP objective and then by individual projects are included below:



FY24 SBEP Leveraged Funds by Project



Part II: Projects

Introduction

For FY26, eight projects and/or project-type categories are recommended to further implement the CCMP. These projects are consistent with the goals, objectives, and recommendations outlined in the CCMP that was approved by the Governor of the State of Florida and the US EPA Administrator on November 3, 1995, and as revised by the Policy Board in both 2014 and 2022.

Following is a list of projects planned for FY26, which will allow SBEP to assist local stakeholders in implementing various elements of the CCMP. Starting in FY23, SBEP sought to consolidate projects into more management and appropriate categories. Thus, rather than have separate categories for “oyster restoration” and “artificial reef” restoration, or to have separate categories for the design and permitting of restoration projects – compared to their construction, the SBEP’s budget categories for FY26 allow for staff to be more responsive to opportunities, rather than having to potentially modify the Workplan, should an unexpected yet worthwhile opportunity arises. If previously initiated projects now fit into the SBEP’s broader yet still appropriate categories, the modified newer project titles are discussed below. As such, the projects discussed below are a combination of ongoing projects within broad categories and/or projects that SBEP staff subsequently combined from two (or more) earlier tasks into a single broader and more appropriate project category.

ONGOING AND/OR NEW PROJECTS:

Water Quality Protection Plan / Water Quality Improvement

Description: SBEP will finalize efforts to develop a locally led, scientifically sound water quality and ecosystem restoration program for the bay. Previously, SBEP’s CAC, TAC, Management and Policy Boards, and the SBEP’s Water Quality Consortium members worked with our consultants (in coordination with FDEP) to develop basin-specific and agreed-upon pollutant load reduction targets to restore and protect the ecological health of Sarasota Bay, as part of ongoing efforts to develop a RAP for the bay. However, FDEP has recently determined that none of the open waters of Sarasota Bay exceed their established water quality standards. As such, since there is no impairment, no TMDL is needed. And without a TMDL being needed, neither is a RAP needed. In response to these developments, SBEP’s Policy Board decided to move forward with a Water Quality Protection Plan (WQPP) which is a non-regulatory guidance document that will keep all the technical features of a RAP. While the WQPP is not legally binding document, the load reduction strategies agreed to by local stakeholders will likely reference their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits, and activities that have recently been completed, or are ongoing, so there is not a penalty for acting early to implement load reduction strategies.

FY26 Budget: \$0 is requested for FY26, with no rollover expected from FY25

Funding Partners: Federal and local.

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: Staff will continue to oversee WQPP progress.

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Regular reporting on participation with WQPP goals, via a public-facing portal on SBEP's website.- [Our Plans | Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#)

Results/Outcomes: Refinement of preliminary load reduction target, and allocation of load reductions among SBEP partners

CCMP Action Plan: Water Quality and Quantity

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: All core programs

Project inception: FY21

Project completion: Public-facing document (on SBEP website) expected by December 2025.

Outputs- urban stormwater retrofit projects, improved wastewater treatment and disposal.

Outcomes- improved water quality, enhanced juvenile fisheries, improved treatment and reduced abundance of untreated urban stormwater runoff, increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, ongoing and improved coordination with local governments related to bay-specific policy and decision making, better coordination pollution reduction strategies, increased capacity for seagrass recovery.

Macroalgae

Description: SBEP will continue efforts initiated in FY21 to quantify the abundance of macroalgae, as part of the SBEP's Report Card for ecosystem health. The amount of macroalgae in the bay is quantified using techniques developed by UF-IFAS "Eyes on Seagrass" program in Charlotte Harbor. This project includes the coordination of volunteer efforts to conduct seagrass and macroalgae transect assessments. If deemed necessary, rollover funds could be used to fund Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium to quantify the nutrient content of quantified macroalgae in different bay segments.

FY 26 Budget: \$200 is requested for FY26, with no rollover expected from FY25.

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: Staff will continue to oversee data collection, compilation, and analysis.

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Annual report on participation in Workplan

Results/Outcomes: Quantification of macroalgae abundance, one of the four components of the Ecosystem Health Report Card.

CCMP Action Plan: Water Quality and Quantity

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: All core programs

Project inception: FY21

Project completion: ongoing into future years, as part of SBEP's ongoing ecosystem health report card.

Outputs- increased partnership building, conference support and participation, and continued expansion of program capacity

Outcomes- increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, ongoing and improved coordination with local governments related to bay-specific policy and decision-making, and increased program visibility.

Biological Monitoring

Description: The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FFWCC) Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) Program is a long-term program designed to monitor the relative abundance of fishery resources in Florida's major estuarine, coastal, and reef systems. The FIM Program's primary goals include: 1) to address the critical need for effective assessment techniques for an array of species and sizes of fishes and invertebrates, 2) to provide timely information for use in management plans, and 3) to monitor trends in the relative abundance of fish and selected invertebrates in a variety of estuarine and marine systems throughout Florida. Although FWRI agreed to take over funding the FIM Program in Sarasota Bay starting in FY21, budget issues prevented this from occurring. Regardless, recent large-scale losses of seagrass habitat in the Upper Sarasota Bay, and continued losses in the Lower Bay, have created the potential for a substantial impact to fisheries and fish populations throughout Sarasota Bay. The requested funds are to continue to monitor fish populations in Sarasota Bay with techniques and approaches like those used in the adjacent NEPs (National Estuary Program) of Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor so that long-term trends in abundance can be properly interpreted. For FY25, additional resources are requested for monitoring the recovery of seagrass in Upper Sarasota Bay, including the potential for monitoring the success of experimental seagrass transplants, through a collaborative effort with FFWCC staff. With the data collected by FIM, seagrass acreage maps created by SWFWMD and in combination with results from scientific literature, the SBEP hopes to be able to estimate the increased abundance of fish, for example, that might be expected based on the anticipated increase in seagrass acreage when the 2024 maps are completed.

FY 26 Budget: \$80,000 is requested for FY26, in addition to the \$25,000 rollover expected from FY25.

Total Project Cost: \$105,000

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP, FFWCC

Status: Staff will continue to oversee data collection, compilation, and analysis.

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Annual report on participation in Workplan

Results/Outcomes: Quantification of fish populations in Sarasota Bay, with comparison to Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor

CCMP Action Plan: Fish and Wildlife Action Plan

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: All core programs

Project inception: FY09

Project completion: ongoing into future years, as part of SBEP's ongoing ecosystem health report card.

Outputs- increased partnership building, publications, and promotional materials for use at fairs and volunteer events, conference support and participation, and required reports.

Outcomes- enhanced juvenile fisheries, increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, ongoing and improved coordination with local governments related to bay-specific policy and decision-making, and increased program visibility.

Science and Research

Description: Over the past few years, SBEP's TAC has functioned differently than was the case for most of SBEP's 30+ year existence. Some of this change was related to the Covid pandemic, as TAC members did not have in-person meetings for most of 2020 and the earliest part of 2021. But the other reason for the change in the focus of the TAC to be less deliberative than they were accustomed to in the past was the SBEP's dedication to a "biased towards action" approach to bay management. During 2021, SBEP determined that there was a need to pivot from "study" to "action," due in part to the poor water quality of 2018 and 2019, along with the seagrass losses documented in the lower bay – starting in 2014 – and the massive seagrass loss in the upper bay between 2018 and 2020. As such, the TAC functioned more as a peer review entity than a deliberative body. During 2021, for example, the TAC was asked to review, for technical shortcomings, the SBEP's proposed methodology for developing an Ecosystem Health Report Card. The TAC also reviewed the proposed pollutant load reduction goal for the bay – a 20% reduction in loads of Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen. While these TAC meetings were needed to help shift SBEP from proposing studies to proposing restoration priorities, there are unresolved issues related to the bay's health that need to be addressed. This new budget category will allow SBEP to "reset" its relationship with the TAC, thus allowing SBEP to better understand the still unresolved issues that need to be addressed, for SBEP to guide stakeholders during the next few years to decades.

FY26 Budget: \$25,000 is requested for FY26, in addition to the \$0 rollover expected from FY25 (new project category).

Total Project Cost: \$25,000

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: Staff will continue to oversee the TAC meetings and priorities

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Annual report on participation in Workplan

Results/Outcomes: Identification of priority technical concerns, such as the role of macroalgae as a nutrient sink, impacts to water quality and wildlife of the reestablished Midnight Pass, and possible efforts to better understand other issues that the TAC believes need to be addressed

CCMP Action Plan: Water Quality Action Plan and Fish and Wildlife Action Plan

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: All core programs

Project inception: FY26

Project completion: ongoing into future years, as part of SBEP's ongoing ecosystem health report card.

Outputs- increased partnership with TAC members and member organizations.

Outcomes- increased understanding of issues that affect the water quality and natural systems of Sarasota Bay.

Wetlands Coordination

Description: This project category has assisted SBEP in further identifying areas for habitat restoration and/or protection, coordinating design and permitting activities and construction management. The selected consultant continues to work closely with FDEP and other agencies to ensure maximum use of resources via the adopted Five-Year Restoration Plan. This will also provide technical support to the ongoing habitat restoration initiatives. With the levels of funding anticipated for FY24 to FY26 IJA Workplans, funding for this effort has shifted from Section 320 funds to IJA funds. After FY26, when IJA funds are not anticipated to be available, the cost for Wetland Coordination will shift back to be funded through Section 320. The SBEP will roll these activities into the broader category of “Habitat Restoration and Maintenance.”

FY 26 Budget: \$0 is requested for FY26, plus \$0 rollover from FY25 (inactive category)

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: Staff will continue to oversee consultant efforts for design and permitting.

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Updates on progress in Semi-annual and Annual Reports and progress updates in future Work Plans

Results/Outcomes: Design and permitting stages completed allow for more “shovel-ready” projects to be completed when and if additional funds become available. Based on this approach, two such projects are now in the implementation phase.

CCMP Action Plan: Watershed Habitats Action Plan

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: all core programs

Project inception: FY96

Project completion: ongoing into future years

Outputs- increased partnership building, urban stormwater retrofit projects, continued efforts to restore oyster reefs, ongoing efforts to design, permitting and construction of artificial reefs, and exotic species removal.

Outcomes- improved water quality, enhanced juvenile fisheries, more native plant coverage, improved treatment and reduced abundance of untreated urban stormwater runoff, increased acreage of protected and/or restored intertidal wetlands, increased protection and conservation of the bay, increased capacity for seagrass recovery, increased program visibility, and increased leveraging of EPA funds with local contributions and commitments. **The FISH Preserve Phase IV project, completed in November 2023, restored 15 acres of intertidal wetlands, and treats stormwater runoff generated from an adjacent 20-acre mobile home park. The GT Bray Park project, completed in 2024, created 0.6 acres of floodplain swamp and 0.24 acres of blackwater stream, while enhancing 5.4 acres of adjacent uplands.**

Habitat Restoration and Maintenance

This project category encompasses past project categories for wetlands coordination, oysters, wetlands, and artificial reefs into a single project category, allowing funds to be used for whatever project(s) need funding. These funds are to be used not only for habitat restoration but for the maintenance of prior habitat restoration projects, some of which are more than 20 years old. As is the case for funding for Wetland Coordination, financial support for these efforts will shift from Section 320 to IJA funds, as long as IJA funds remain available for SBEP to use for these efforts.

FY 26 Budget: \$90,000 is requested for FY26, in addition to \$100,000 rollover expected from FY25-

Total Project Cost: \$190,000

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: Staff will continue to oversee contractor efforts.

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Annual report on participation in Workplan

Results/Outcomes: Maintenance of previously completed habitat restoration projects, as well as completion of restoration projects completed at the direction of SBEP staff.

CCMP Action Plan: Watershed Habitats Action Plan

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: All core programs

Project inception: FY93 (for earlier categories of habitat restoration)

Project completion: ongoing into future years

Outputs- increased partnership building, urban stormwater retrofit projects, continued efforts to restore oyster reefs, ongoing efforts to design, permitting and construction of artificial reefs, and exotic species removal.

Outcomes- improved water quality, enhanced juvenile fisheries, more native plant coverage, improved treatment and reduced abundance of untreated urban stormwater runoff, increased acreage of protected and/or restored intertidal wetlands, increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, increased capacity for seagrass recovery, increased program visibility, and increased leveraging of EPA funds with local contributions and commitments. **FY26 funds will be used to continue efforts to maintain prior restoration projects throughout our watershed, and to use SBEP consultants to develop conceptual plans and/or final designs and permits for priority restoration projects. Currently, identified projects include the replacement of a boardwalk and additional educational signage at the City Island restoration site, and continuing habitat and educational upgrades at the Leffis Key restoration site. This category will also be used to complete additional living shoreline habitat improvements at MLK Park.**

Community Action Plan

Description: The SBEP CAC develops an annual Community Action Plan (CAP) with activities that support outreach, education, and community involvement in bay-related activities and special projects to advance CCMP implementation. The goal of the CAP is to foster public awareness of issues

impacting Sarasota Bay and to increase environmental stewardship. SBEP carries out this plan with its partners through engaging volunteers and citizen scientists, funding professional development workshops for local K-12 teachers and providing opportunities for community members to participate in outdoor service-learning activities.

Priority Initiatives: Develop and support urban nature programs to reach communities within inland portions of the Sarasota Bay watershed, engage neighborhood-based groups in VOG building workshops, and continue to build relationships with diverse audiences by hosting unique bay-related recreational and social events.

FY26 Budget: \$20,000 is requested for FY26, in addition to \$15,000 in rollover expected from FY25.

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: The CAP funding category implements projects identified by the CAC.

Milestones, Outputs, and Deliverables: Outreach projects will begin or continue in October 2025. SBEP staff will regularly update SBEP boards and committees on implementation and will produce an annual report in September 2026.

Results/Outcomes: Each year, programs funded by the CAP engage thousands of people in bay-related programs that aim to improve the stewardship of Sarasota Bay.

CCMP Action Plans: multiple, consistent with the Community Engagement Action Plan

CWA Support: all core programs.

Project inception: FY00

Project completion: ongoing into future years

Outputs- increased partnership building, new programs/workshops targeting urban and inland communities, coordination with local VOG organizations, free bay-related recreational programs for the public, quarterly newsletters, publications, and promotional materials for use at fairs and volunteer events, conference support and participation, and continued expansion of program capacity.

Outcomes- increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, ongoing and improved coordination with local governments related to bay-specific policy and decision making, better coordination pollution reduction strategies, increased capacity for seagrass recovery, increased program visibility, and increased leveraging of EPA funds with local contributions and commitments.

Community Grants & Sponsorships

Description: Community Grants & Sponsorships enable SBEP to support the efforts of community and scientific partners through competitive grant programs and mission-aligned sponsorship opportunities. In FY26, SBEP will continue to offer its annual Bay Partners Grant Program (BPG) through this fund. The BPG promotes community involvement in bay restoration and education with small grant incentives offered to community organizations for wetland and habitat restoration,

bay-friendly landscaping, and bay-related education projects. Projects are selected by a subcommittee of the CAC and approved through the Management Conference. The CAC selects a priority issue for the grant awards each year. In addition, SBEP will, for the first time, offer a funding opportunity for applied science research grants focused on priority topics for the region. The Technical Advisory Committee will be involved in the review and selection of proposals.

FY26 Budget: \$125,000 is requested for FY26, in addition to \$15,000 in rollover expected from FY25. NOTE: SBEP's Community Grants and Sponsorships are now 100% funded by local contributions. No 320 funds are utilized for this program.

Funding Partners: Local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: The Bay Partners Grant program supports community partner efforts to conduct ongoing and new education, outreach, and restoration projects throughout the watershed.

Milestones, Outputs, and Deliverables: The Sarasota Bay Partners Grants program opens for applications in January every year. Applications are due on the first business day of March. Committee and board review of projects takes place between March and May and applicants are notified of their award status by the end of May, at which time they may begin projects. Projects must be completed with final reports and invoices submitted to SBEP by the end of the following fiscal year. For this grant cycle, applications were received in March 2025, applicants will be notified of awards by May 2025, and projects must be completed by August 2025. SBEP reports on project outcomes to SBEP committees and boards as well as in the annual Workplan.

Results/Outcomes: Bay Partners Grants involve not only outreach and education, but they also include projects that improve the performance of stormwater treatment systems, remove exotic invasive species, and remove debris from intertidal and submerged resources.

CCMP Action Plans: multiple, consistent with the Community Engagement Action Plan

CWA Support: all core programs.

Project inception: FY00

Project completion: ongoing into future years

Outputs- increased partnership building, urban stormwater retrofit projects, continued efforts to restore oyster reefs, exotic species removal, increased translation of SBEP products into Spanish, new programs/workshops targeting Hispanic communities, ongoing public outreach with a focus on underserved communities, quarterly newsletters, publications and promotional materials for use at fairs and volunteer events, small local grants promoting best management practices, continued expansion of program capacity and required reports

Outcomes- enhanced juvenile fisheries, more native plant coverage, improved treatment and reduced abundance of untreated urban stormwater runoff, increased acreage of protected and/or restored intertidal wetlands, increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, increased program visibility, and increased leveraging of EPA funds with local contributions and commitments.

Program Development

Description: This project provides support for developing alternative funding sources for CCMP implementation and continued support for technical skill development for SBEP staff.

FY 26 Budget: \$0 additional dollars are requested, based on expected rollover of \$3,026 from FY25

Funding Partners: Federal and local

Responsible Partners: SBEP

Status: Staff will continue to develop both technical skills and seek opportunities to find additional opportunities to fund CCMP implementation.

Milestones, Outputs & Deliverables: Annual report on participation in Workplan

Results/Outcomes: Financial stability for the SBEP, and outside funding (e.g., EPA's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WiFIA) program) for CCMP implementation

CCMP Action Plan: Program Governance

CWA (Clean Water Act) Support: all core programs

Project inception: FY16

Project completion: ongoing into future years

Outputs- continued program administration which will result in continuing implementing the 2022 CCMP update, increased partnership building, quarterly newsletters, publications, and promotional materials for use at fairs and volunteer events, small local grants promoting best management practices, conference support and participation, continued expansion of program capacity and fiscal responsibility (with independent external oversight) and required reports.

Outcomes- increased public awareness of water quality issues and means of improvement, increased protection and conservation of the bay, ongoing and improved coordination with local governments related to bay-specific policy and decision-making, better coordination on pollution reduction strategies, increased program visibility, and increased leveraging of EPA funds with local contributions and commitments.

Non-320 Funded Projects

SBEP has two projects that are not exclusively funded with Section 320 fund or IJIA funds — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park in the City of Sarasota, and the Artificial Reefs project. For the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park project, the project design and permitting phases, and the preliminary shoreline invasive vegetation removal efforts are being funded by stipulated fees that are held in an account with the Sarasota Bay Environmental Fund. For the Artificial Reef project, donations from the Sarasota Sportsmen's Association were used to supplement funding from IJIA for FY23.

320 Funding of Ongoing Projects by Fiscal Year

Table 4 summarizes projects proposed for funding with Section 320 for FY25, with information on the project funding levels from FY22 to FY26.

Table 4 – Summary of Section 320 funding levels for previously funded projects (FY22 to FY25) along with proposed FY26 levels.

PROJECT	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26
Water Quality Protection Plan*	58,500	50,000	140,000	30,000	0
Macroalgae	5,000	4,500	0	500	200
Biological Monitoring	90,000	20,000	50,000	60,000	80,000
Science and Research**	0	0	0	0	25,000
Wetlands Coordination	35,000	70,000	0	0	0
Habitat Restoration and Maintenance	7,810	25,000	0	160,000	90,000
Public Outreach	5,000	0	0	0	0
Community Action Plan	97,000	77,000	92,000	35,000	20,000
Project Support Contract Staffing ***	0	0	0	65,000	0
In-kind Match	404,000	454,000	554,000	557,000	582,000
CCMP Update	10,000	0	0	0	0
Program Development	2,500	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	714,810	800,500	936,000	907,500	797,200

Completed Projects and Activities Reports FY23-FY25

As noted above, SBEP actively manages projects that are funded from Section 320 of the Federal Clean Water Act, the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (IIJA). In addition, SBEP staff use funds from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, which are a combination of donations from individuals and groups, as well as stipulated fees from consent decrees based on legal proceedings from third parties. As seen above, SBEP has allocated Section 320 funds into broader categories, such as Biological Monitoring and Habitat Restoration and Maintenance. Within these two categories, there are a few

projects that have been completed – such as the design and permitting for GT Bray Park, and the design efforts for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park, as shown in Table 3.

The biggest stand-alone project that has been completed recently (in addition to those shown in Table 3) is the recently completed update to the SBEP's CCMP, described below.

Project/Activity: Sarasota Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Revision

Project/Activity Objective: Convene stakeholders to revise the 2014 Sarasota Bay CCMP and obtain approval from the SBEP Policy Board and EPA.

Lead Implementer, Partners, and Their Roles: SBEP was the lead implementer. SBEP's interlocal and community partners participated in stakeholder discussions. Shafer Consulting, LLC drafted the CCMP text. EPA (Region IV and HQ) provided comments.

Accomplishments and Deliverables: The revised 2022 Sarasota Bay CCMP was approved by the SBEP Policy Board in September 2021 and accepted as final by EPA in March 2022. Graphic design and final production were completed in 2022, along with a web-enabled ArcGIS Storymap of the CCMP - [A Thriving Estuary \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com)

Amount of 320 grant/cooperative agreement: \$10,000

Expected long-term outcomes: increased stakeholder participation in bay restoration.

CWA Core Program Project: all core programs

In addition to the larger projects listed in Table 4, SBEP funds smaller efforts within the category of Bay Partners Grants. Table 5 summarizes the projects funded through the Bay Partners Grants program that are currently being implemented

Table 5 – Summary of the status of Bay Partners Grants financed with local funds from FY25. All listed projects are currently underway.

Entity	Project Description	Award Total
Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast	Bay Explorers Summer Experience: Provide underserved youth with a fully funded week-long, Monday – Friday educational experience, allowing them to explore new places in the Sarasota Bay watershed while learning about bay ecology, health, threats, and career opportunities in environmental fields.	\$ 9,940.00
Cortez Village Historical Society	"It Takes a Village" Healthy Estuary Education and Call-to-Action Project in Cortez: Comprehensive community education project designed to inform both residents and visitors. Information (signs, cards, tri-fold map) will be provided for English and Spanish speakers. Rain garden planting and community events will be included as part of the initiative.	\$ 10,000.00
Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium	Talks from the Baywalk: A Virtual Estuary Exploration: Utilizing videoconferencing technology, Mote will arrange for certified naturalists and trained volunteers to lead participants through a virtual, real-time exploration of the estuary.	\$ 7,861.04
New College of Florida	Youth Bay Stewards: Educational program for students centered around sea level change and climate issues.	\$ 4,382.00
Newtown Nation, Inc.	Newtown Environmental Programs: Host programs that promote the environmental and community value of local greenspaces around Whitaker Bayou.	\$ 10,000.00
Pelican Cove Condo Association	Pelican Cove Vertical Oyster Gardens: Installation and monitoring of a 600 vertical oyster gardens in the Pelican Cove Harbor	\$ 6,600.00
Prodigal Daughters Journey Home	Prodigal Daughters Raised Bed Garden Project: Capture and filter rainwater runoff through rain barrels and resident-led sustainable gardening practices.	\$ 5,345.00
Save Our Seabirds	Drainage System Improvements: Installation of two electric pumps and a holding tank where water from bird enclosures will be treated and neutralized before being released back into Sarasota Bay.	\$ 10,000.00
Suncoast Aqua Ventures	Above and Below Water Cleanups: Bowlees Creek, Perico Bayou/Palma Sola Bay, Coquina North & South Boat Ramps, and Leffis Key area. Scuba and landside volunteers.	\$ 7,003.91
Town of Longboat Key	Jackson Way Access Coastal Hammock Restoration: The Jackson Way Access Coastal Hammock Restoration site consists of a 0.3-acre degraded semi-tropical coastal hammock impacted by incursion of non-native and invasive vegetation. This project will remove native species and replant with natives.	\$ 9,921.75

Part III: FY26 Workplan Budget Summary
(October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026)

	<u>REVENUES</u>
EPA FUNDING:	\$850,000
SWFWMD	133,000
Manatee County	80,000
Sarasota County	80,000
City of Sarasota	50,000
City of Bradenton	25,000
Town of Longboat Key	25,000
In-kind Match	<u>582,000</u>
LOCAL FUNDING:	\$975,000
Non-matching funds retained for community grants	(125,000)
TOTAL:	\$1,700,000
 <u>OPERATING EXPENSES</u>	
Direct Personnel Expenses	490,000
Other Personnel Expenses	220,000
Travel/Conferences	19,275
Contractual	
Legal Services	12,000
Accounting/Auditing	30,550
Payroll Services	3,800
Contract Procurement	2,000
Computer Support	12,500
Digital/Web Support	15,000
Operations	
General Administration – Operations	800
Liability/Workers Compensation	19,000
Postage/Courier	275
Advertising	1,200
Office Supplies	2,000
Subscriptions/Dues	1,200
Building Lease	42,000
Telecommunications	8,500

Office Equipment Repair	300
Copier Machine Lease	2,400
Capital Expenditure	4,000
Contingency	<u>16,000</u>
OPERATING EXPENSES SUBTOTAL:	\$902,800
ONGOING PROJECTS:	
Macroalgae	200
Biological Monitoring	80,000
Science and Research	25,000
Habitat Restoration and Maintenance	90,000
Community Action Plan	20,000
Program Development	0
In-Kind Match*	<u>582,000</u>
PROJECT EXPENSES SUBTOTAL:	\$797,200
TOTAL COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT EXPENSES:	\$1,700,000

Non-Workplan Expenses**

Community Grants and Sponsorships: \$125,000
National Estuary Program Association Dues: \$4,500
Administrative Expenses: \$5,000

** SBEP requests that up to \$675,000 from other local projects may be used as Federal match at the discretion of the program and EPA through the SBEP CCMP Action Plans.*

*** These lines represent additional expenses not incorporated within the EPA Workplan. These expenses are paid directly through local funding and retained earnings from the program and are not EPA reimbursable expenses.*

A: Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Staff Responsibilities

David Tomasko, Ph.D. – Executive Director

- Oversees preparation of Annual Workplan and Budget each year for review by Management and Policy Boards and submittal to EPA
- Manages program staff
- Oversees preparation of annual Cooperative Agreement application package for base program operation each year for submittal to EPA
- Ensures obtaining funding contributions each year from local governments and water management district
- Accomplishes program goals specified in the Annual Workplan each year
- Works to ensure the SBEP meets the general and special conditions specified in the cooperative agreements for base program and other grant awards
- Maintains controllable expenditures within budget and takes appropriate actions when unexpected budget problems develop. Makes necessary amendments as required by EPA regulations
- Ensures that the NEP program responsibilities under the Interlocal Agreement are met
- Monitors progress of work on grant awards both received and made by the Program to ensure timely completion of work
- Ensures compliance with relevant federal and state purchasing and procurement procedures

Heather Moody – Operations Manager

- Acts as the Grants and Contract Coordinator, tracking expenditures and reimbursement
- Coordinates budget portions of Annual Work Plan for submittal to EPA
- Oversees all financial issues regarding accounting, budget control, revenues, payables, and purchase orders
- Acts as human resources coordinator
- Acts as payroll and retirement coordinator
- Processes payments, purchase orders, SBEP accounts payable and receivable
- Maintains controllable expenditures within budget and takes appropriate actions when unexpected budget problems develop. Make necessary amendments as required by EPA regulations
- Responsible for reporting, collecting, and processing all federal reimbursements and local government contributions
- Ensures compliance with relevant federal and state purchasing and procurement procedures
- Provides assistance to Director as needed in managing the program
- Manages annual programmatic audit report
- Ensures compliance with relevant federal and state purchasing and procurement procedures
- Ensure that SBEP meets matching fund requirements for grants it receives, and that in-kind match is sufficiently documented by the requirements of awarding agencies

- Prepares reports, documents, and assists staff with financial tracking
- Assists with Management/Policy Board agenda, meeting notices, agendas and packets
- Maintains general responsibility for office operations

Ryan Gandy, Ph.D. – Senior Staff Scientist

- Manages technical, artificial reef and habitat restoration projects as identified in SBEP Workplan
- Organizes and coordinates meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee and subcommittees as required to meet technical objectives of the program
- Presents results of SBEP's technical work to NEP committees and community groups
- Provides technical support as needed to Director, Public Outreach Coordinator and Finance Director
- Keeps current in investigations and developments in estuarine science and management
- Presents results of SBEP work to appropriate local, state, and national science and resource management meetings, and participate in state-wide/national efforts on atmospheric deposition.
- Actively participates in regional resource management committees directly related to SBEP objectives
- Monitors progress toward SBEP goals through tracking implementation of local government/agencies' Action Plans.
- Reports environmental conditions and trends to TAC and Management Board
- Pursues additional funding sources for implementation of the CCMP
- Works with attorneys and Director to create contracts and intergovernmental agreements and processes them for execution ensuring that all federal and state requirements are being followed.
- Ensures financial integrity of technical contracts and managing contracts

Megan Barry – Public Outreach Manager

- Manages implementation of the Outreach Support Contract
- Manages implementation of the Citizens Advisory Committee. Provides staff support to the CAC while encouraging members to become more actively involved in developing and implementing their own projects.
- Manages implementation of the SBEP Community Action Plan
- Promotes the Program's accomplishments to the media through ongoing and consistent communication of SBEP Program goals, challenges, and achievements
- Investigates, writes, and coordinates production of the SBEP newsletter and oversees all publications
- Gathers and coordinates information for updates of the SBEP website
- Develops public education programs that address SBEP priority goals, and assists government and non-profit partners in creating and promoting educational programs and tools
- Ensures that SBEP maintains a high profile among the environmental community by assisting

local public, private, and non-profit partners with outreach needs and serving on committees and task forces.

- Manages the SBEP's involvement in the EPA Climate-Ready Estuaries Program
- Manages all outreach and communications contracts
- Presents on a variety of Bay-related topics to community groups as requested
- Participates in panel discussions on Bay-related topics
- Manages the process of updating the Sarasota Bay CCMP
- Manages the production of the State of the Bay report

Cheryl Dexter - Executive Assistant

- Support Executive Director (ED):
 - Work independently and under supervision of ED
 - Manage ED's calendar, coordinate meetings, internally and externally
 - Coordinate staff meetings and outings
 - Assist with ED's travel arrangements, prepare itinerary and travel reimbursement
 - Review staff's travel preparation/reimbursements, track all travel for EPA Workplan
 - Assist with preparation of Workplans, Annual Reports, and other reports
- Human Resources:
 - Keeper of Human Resources files
 - Facilitate payroll and payroll reports, monitor and track staff's paid time off and accruals
 - Coordinate with ED, Director of Operations, and Policy Board, if appropriate, on new employees and personnel changes: advertise vacancies, act as candidate liaison, perform background checks, E-Verify checks, coordinate employment forms and insurance/benefits
 - Coordinate annual performance evaluations and update position descriptions
- Board Meeting Planning:
 - Establish non-conflicting meeting dates for the upcoming calendar year
 - Work with ED and staff in agenda development, organize agenda packets, and distribute in a timely manner
 - Coordinate and attend board briefings
 - Confirm quorum at board meetings or secure alternates
 - Secure locations for board meetings; visit sites and assess technology requirements
 - Prepare public notices and advertise in a timely manner
 - Record meetings/take minutes and prepare for distribution and approval
- Office Management:
 - Provide back-up to Operations Manager on Financial Management System
 - Maintain professional office, technology, order supplies as needed
 - Credit card/Costco membership cardholder

Appendix B: Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Board Membership

Policy Board Members:

Ms. Elizabeth Sweigert, acting co-chair, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Ms. Becky Allenbach, co-chair, US EPA, *ex officio*
Ms. Jayne Kocher, City of Bradenton Council
Ms. Carol Ann Felts, Manatee Board of County Commission
Mr. Gary Coffin, Town of Longboat Key
Ms. Jen Ahearn-Koch, City of Sarasota Commission
Mr. Randy Smith, SWFWMD
Mr. Joe Neunder, Sarasota Board of County Commission

Management Board Members:

Mr. David Fiess, chair, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Ms. Felicia Burks, US Environmental Protection Agency
Mr. Paul Semenech, Sarasota County Water Planning and Regulatory
Mr. Charlie Mopps, Town of Longboat Key Public Works
Ms. Vivianna Bendixson, SWFWMD
Ms. Courtney Saari, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
Mr. Charlie Hunsicker, Manatee County Parks and Natural Resources
Mr. Verne Hall, City of Sarasota
Ms. Brian Norman City of Bradenton
Mr. Greg Blanchard, Technical Advisory Committee
Mr. Chris Anastasiou, Technical Advisory Committee
Mr. Michael D'Imperio, SBEP Citizen Advisory Committee

Appendix C: Travel Expenditures Report

TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION 10/01/2023 - 09/30/2025				
DATE	CONF/MTG NAME	LOCATION	EMPLOYEE	EXPENSES
10/21/2023-10/26/2023	RAE Living Shoreline Workshop	Galveston, TX	Heather Moody	1,800
2/08/2024	UF Law Speaker re Ocean Waste	Gainesville, FL	Dave Tomasko	495
2/19/2024-2/21/2024	UF Leadership & Education Foundation	Gainesville, FL	Dave Tomasko	1,136
2/28/2024	Meet with Congressman Steube Chief of Staff	Washington, DC	Dave Tomasko	1,256
03/08/2024	Environmental & Water Resources Engineering Seminar	Tampa, FL	Dave Tomasko	72
10/01/24	Kind Designs and Kearns and Cummins Engineering	Miami, FL	Ryan Gandy	304
11/12/2024-11/15/2024	New York NEP Tech Transfer	Stony Brook, NY	Ryan Gandy	1,539
11/12/2024-11/15/2024	New York NEP Tech Transfer	Stony Brook, NY	Dave Tomasko	1,653
1/08/2025	SW Florida Ramp meeting	N. Tampa, FL	Dave Tomasko	86
1/29/2025	Sarasota Bay Seagrass Final Draft Results	N. Tampa, FL	Dave Tomasko	86
2/19/2025	Tampa Bay Environmental Professionals	Tampa, FL	Dave Tomasko	61
2/26/2025	Release of SWFWMD Seagrass Report	St. Petersburg, FL	Ryan Gandy	59
3/11/2025	H2Ology Video Shoot – Seagrass Mapping	Brooksville, FL	Dave Tomasko	133
3/13/2025	Agency on Bay and Coastal Management	St. Petersburg, FL	Dave Tomasko	61
Total				8,741

Appendix D: Proposed FY26 Travel

Purpose	Location	Dates	# Staff	Registration	Transportation / Hotel / Meals	Total
EPA meeting	TBD	TBD	3	675	4,350	5,025
Estuarine Research Federation	TBD	TBD	2	1,000	2,900	3,900
Other meetings and conferences	TBD	TBD	5	400	4,180	4,580
Miscellaneous travel & mileage	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	5,770
TOTAL				\$1,975	\$14,330	\$19,275