



BAY REFLECTIONS

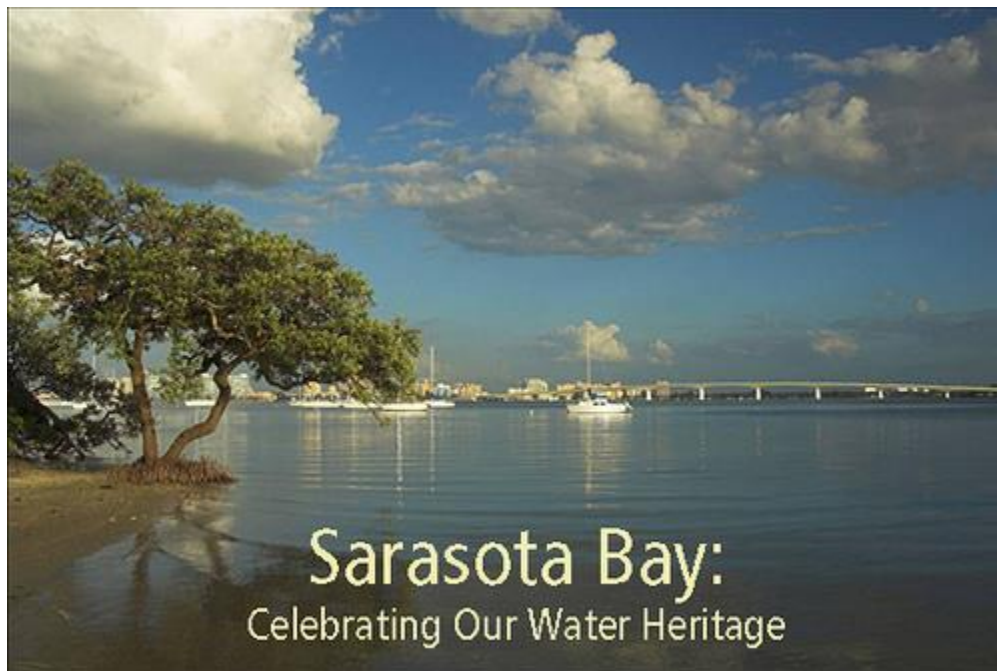
Restoring Our Bays

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Newsletter

Spring 2008

Upcoming Events

VIDEO PREMIERE: On the evening of April 16th the much anticipated premiere screening of the film "**Sarasota Bay: Celebrating Out Water Heritage**" will be presented at Mote Marine Aquarium's Immersion Theatre to an invitation only audience of media, community leaders and government officials. The film is a Florida Journeys production and is directed and written by Caroline McKeon.



We would like to thank the following sponsors for their generous support of this event:

Lagoon Level:



Tributary Level:



Seagrass Level: Tom Dabney



Upcoming Events

FLORIDA SCENIC HIGHWAY CONFERENCE:

May 1 & 2 at Sarasota

Hyatt (http://www.dot.state.fl.us/emo/scenic Hwy/2008_SHW_Conference.htm) SBEP is a gold sponsor for this conference and is involved in both the Palma Sola and Bradenton Beach Scenic Highways with an eye on promoting the beauty as well as the responsible use of Sarasota Bay. SBEP Outreach Coordinator Julia Burch will be giving a presentation about the Gulf Coast Heritage Trail and managed recreational access to Sarasota Bay resources.

NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY CONFERENCE:

May 14-18 at Manatee Convention Center

(http://www.fnps.org/pages/programs/programpg_no_pic.php?keyword=Conference). SBEP is a primary sponsor of this conference and Outreach Coordinator Julia Burch will give a presentation that includes information about the the National Estuary Program, the main sources of pollution in our estuarine systems, local projects to restore Sarasota Bay, how landscaping with native plants helps protect the watershed and what you can do at home to improve Florida's waterways. SBEP will also sponsor a kayak fieldtrip to see the restoration activities at South Lido Park.



Earth Week

City of Sarasota celebrates Earth Week April 19-25

The City of Sarasota will be the host for celebrating sustainability education during Earth Week 2008. From April 19-25, representatives from the City of Sarasota, Sarasota County, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Mote Marine Research Laboratory, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and the University of Florida will present free, public workshops on water conservation, watershed management, social and economic impact of trees, green building and more. The workshops will take place at City of Sarasota Commission Chambers, Bay Haven School of Basics Plus, Selby Public Library and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.

For more information about the events the City of Sarasota will be hosting during Earth Week visit <http://www.yourgreencity.sarasotagov.com>

Other Earth Day celebrations include festivals at Felt's Audubon Preserve in Manatee County <http://www.manateeaudubon.org/earthday.htm> and Oscar Scherer State Park in Sarasota County <http://www.floridastateparks.org/oscarscherer/default.cfm>. Come join SBEP at these events to learn about the Bay, other cool stuff going on in our community and to celebrate Earth Day.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Return of Seagrasses Indicate Sarasota Bay Health is Improving:

Seagrasses are so vital that Governor Charlie Crist proclaimed March "Seagrass Awareness Month." In 2006, seagrass communities in Florida supported an estimated harvest of \$71,400,000 for six seagrass-dependent, commercial fish and shellfish species. The seagrass community of Florida is reported as being "the largest seagrass meadow in the world."

The regeneration of seagrasses in Sarasota Bay indicates that water quality is improving. This positive trend is reported by the SBEP, which regularly monitors seagrass coverage as an indicator of water quality along with other government agencies. Aerial photographs in combination with on-the-ground verification reveal that the Bay now supports 9,855 acres of seagrass beds. This represents a significant gain of 5,587 acres of new or improved seagrass beds since historical lows in 1988 primarily as a result of declines in water clarity and dredge-and-fill operations.

"This could be the tipping point," says SBEP Senior Scientist Gary Raulerson. "The increase in seagrass coverage supports that the Bay is much healthier than it was 20 years ago." Seagrasses are not only a sensitive indicator of water quality but also a critical marine habitat for juvenile fish, affording them protection from predators as well as bountiful feeding opportunities.

The regeneration of seagrasses in Sarasota Bay shows that the estuarine system is responding to the projects outlined in SBEP's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan designed to reduce pollution, nutrient levels and improve habitat.

Bird Colony Islands Shoreline Protection Project



The Bird Colony Islands Shoreline Protection Project, located in North Roberts Bay, Sarasota County, Florida, was designed to protect three small mangrove islands just south of the Siesta Key bridge. The mangrove islands were eroding due to heavy wave action from boats in the intracoastal waterway that runs right past this productive bird rookery. This process was slowly shrinking the tree canopy available for nesting and resting.

The island complex is the most significant coastal bird rookery in the Sarasota Bay system, and provides nesting and resting habitat for as many as 11 different species of birds, including several State- and Federally-listed species.

SBEP and Sarasota County designed and constructed a breakwater round the Bird Colony Islands facing the intracoastal waterway to attenuate the waves. The total project cost was approximately \$1.2M and was completed in February of this year. The project's main feature is a 1246-foot long limestone-boulder breakwater, designed to absorb wave energy before it reaches the island shores. The project also includes three separate areas of compatible sand fill placed in the lee of the breakwater and planted with salt marsh grass and red mangroves. These fill areas will help to jump start recovery of habitat that has been lost to erosion.

Sarasota Bay Buddies Events

Native Coastal Planting at Robinson Preserve

On February 16 the Sarasota Bay Buddies were joined by master gardeners and Manatee County Conservation Lands Management volunteers and planted approximately 2000 native coastal plants at Robinson Preserve. All together there were 151 participants. Robinson Preserve is scheduled to open this summer. Contact Melissa Nell at Melissa.nell@mymanatee.org to find out about sneak previews of Robinson Preserve and how to get involved in future projects.



Invasive Plant Removal at Pinecraft Park

On March 1 the Sarasota Bay Buddies partnered with Sarasota Audubon Society to remove air potato and other invasive plants from Pinecraft Park. A total of 74 participants ranging from toddlers to adults removed 451 pounds of air potato. Air potato is one of the most invasive plant species in Florida. Environmentally themed prizes were awarded to participants for the biggest, smallest, ugliest, etc. air potato.

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Event

On March 3 members of SBEP's Citizens Advisory Committee enjoyed an educational kayak paddle to the habitat restoration site at South Lido Park. The kayak ecotour was lead by CAC member and retired marine biologist Dr. Jack Taylor. Taylor has just completed leading a series of free kayak eco-tours throughout Sarasota Bay. The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program sponsored this "Bay-Wise" series and will offer it again in the Fall. Please contact Julia Burch for more information at Julia@sarasotabay.org.



Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Awards: Funding for Bay-Friendly Projects to Local Organizations

The **Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP)** recently awarded **Funding for Bay-Friendly Projects** grants to several local community organizations. The grants promote Bay Education, Bay Restoration and Bay-Friendly Landscaping and help improve the overall quality of Sarasota Bay and its tributaries.

This year SBEP received grant applications from 10 different organizations in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. This year's grant recipients include:

- **Mote Marine Laboratory** for the funding of its Delivering Sarasota Bay to Sarasota's Youth program in which Mote Marine Laboratory will partner with the YMCA After School Care Program to provide hands-on, discovery-based, marine science activities to second through fourth graders.
- **Village at Beekman Place** for planting native aquatic plants in a neighborhood pond to improve the quality and reduce the quantity of stormwater runoff from the neighborhood.
- **Anna Maria Environmental Education and Enhancement Committee** for educational signage for habitat restoration areas around Anna Maria City Hall. Signage will enable a self-guided experience for the public to the plants, habitats, natural resources and restoration activities of the site.
- **Anna Maria Historical Society** for native plant identification and watershed education signage in the native landscape around the Anna Maria Island Historical Museum to promote the watershed benefits of native plants in the landscape.
- **Bradenton Beach WAVES Committee** for pet waste pollution education and prevention campaign to educate the public about the harmful affects of pet waste on public health and the health of waterways.
- **Riggs Landing Condominium Association** for removing resource intensive St. Augustine grass and replacing it with native and Florida-friendly landscaping to improve the quality and reduce the quantity of the stormwater entering Hudson Bayou.
- **Windward Bay Condominium Association** on Longboat Key for removing resource intensive St. Augustine grass and replacing it with native landscaping to improve the quality and reduce the quantity of the stormwater entering Big Sarasota Bay.
- **Pelican Cove Condominium Association** for installing native wetland and upland plants around two ponds to decrease the amount and improve the quality of the stormwater entering Clower Creek and Little Sarasota Bay.
- **Palma Sola Scenic Highway** for painting a mural depicting the wildlife and habitats of the Sarasota Bay region on existing public restrooms on the Palma Sola Causeway to promote awareness and sense of place.
- **Hudson Bayou Neighborhood Association** for materials and supplies for stormdrain cleaning kits for volunteers to keep stormdrains and therefore stormwater litter free.

Funding for Bay-Friendly Projects applications were reviewed by a panel of Citizens Advisory Committee members. The committee made decisions based on how the proposed projects addressed the issues of stormwater runoff and pollution prevention; wildlife habitat restoration and protection; recreational use and Bay access; and environmental education and awareness.

