

Recreational Use



BACKGROUND



The 1995 CCMP acknowledged the large public investment needed for restoration and the need to provide the public with access to the Bay and its resources.

The primary goal of this Action Plan is to provide increased levels of public access to the Bay and its resources without adverse impact.

Surveys conducted by the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program indicate that one primary use of Sarasota Bay is simply looking at it. The aqua-blue water color is an important aspect of people's attraction to the region. Sarasota Bay is also a popular destination for sport fishing, motor boating, sailing, wildlife observation, birding, kayaking/canoeing, and other eco-tourism opportunities. Maintaining and enhancing these recreational opportunities were envisioned as an important aspect of efforts to restore Sarasota Bay while creating a sense of place and stewardship

among area residents and visitors. The 1995 Conservation and Management Plan acknowledged the large public investment needed for restoration and the need to provide the public with access to the Bay and its resources. The CCMP also acknowledges the need to reduce conflicts among users and to educate the public to become environmental stewards.

Several fundamental objectives were to:

- Improve management of high-use areas, reducing conflicts
- Improve channel marking throughout the Bay
- Improve access
- Increase education among user groups.



Lou Newman

Least terns (above), gulls, and skimmers nest in sandy beach areas between April and August. Watch where you step, keep your distance, and enjoy them from a distance.



Caspersen Beach.

Sarasota County

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PROGRESS REPORT

In response, no-wake zones were established or expanded at all inlets to Sarasota Bay, along with improved marking of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) and access channels throughout the system. This marking also resulted in increased protection of seagrass (from scarring) and protection for manatees. Speed zones were also implemented and enforced within the ICW; and no-wake zones were established outside the ICW in many areas of the Bay.

To increase access, 32 ecological parks were created around the Bay; these parks include educational signage to enhance stewardship and vistas for viewing. The Gulf Coast Heritage Trail was unveiled, linking environmental, educational, cultural, and historical destinations around the Bay. The trail recognizes that many vista points are located within the identified destinations, increasing opportunities for Bay access. Two Scenic Highways have been designated in the region (Palma Sola and Gulf Drive). New ecotourism business opportunities are emerging throughout the region.



Palma Sola Scenic Highway sign unveiling.



The Legacy Trail, more than 10 miles in length. Trailheads offer easy access. Visit www.scgov.net for more information.



Bird Key Park, at the western foot of the Ringling Causeway Bridge, provides a great place to fish or launch a windsurf board, kayak, or canoe.



Island Park/Bayfront Park, on the shore of Sarasota Bay close to downtown Sarasota.

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ACTION PLAN

GOAL:

Provide increased levels of managed access to Sarasota Bay and its resources.

POLICIES:

Enhance recreational opportunities on Sarasota Bay while protecting Bay resources.

Recreational use of Sarasota Bay shall not adversely impact Bay resources.

OBJECTIVE 1.0:

Increase public awareness, foster behavioral change, and promote environmental stewardship.

ACTION 1.2:

Promote enforcement for boat speeds and no-wake zones in Sarasota Bay.

OBJECTIVE 2.0:

Reduce recreational use impacts on natural resource areas within Sarasota Bay.

ACTION 2.1:

Promote channel marking to protect threatened marine areas such as seagrasses.

ACTION 2.2:

Promote posting markers to discourage boats from approaching bird rookeries.

ACTION 2.3:

Discourage deliberate feeding of seabirds and marine mammals through education and signage.

ACTION 2.4:

Support fishing catch-and-release activities.

ACTION 2.5:

Promote disposal of fishing line and other marine debris in appropriate containers.

ACTION 2.6:

Promote enhanced enforcement of all boating, fishing, and other waterborne rules and laws.

ACTION 2.7:

Encourage marinas and other waterfront businesses to follow safe, non-polluting practices.

ACTION 2.8:

Encourage and support coastal cleanup initiatives. (Note: Channel marking mostly complete; bird and wildlife feeding discouraged regionally. Marine Patrol is ticketing as necessary.)

OBJECTIVE 3.0:

Improve recreational access to Sarasota Bay.

ACTION 3.1:

Facilitate neighborhood-initiated improvements for visual access to the Bay through the Florida-Friendly Landscaping Program.

ACTION 3.2:

Enhance recreational use of publicly owned Bayfront land.

ACTION 3.3:

Acquire undeveloped Bay shoreline for public recreation, Bayfront parks, or low-impact preserves.



Monofilament recycling container.

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ACTION PLAN (continued)



Signs like these guide users along the Gulf Coast Heritage Trail.

ACTION 3.4:

Identify Bay vista points in local comprehensive plans and consider them in landscaping, roadbuilding, and other construction.

ACTION 3.5:

Fully implement and expand the Sarasota Bay Heritage Trail and Blueways System. (Note: Heritage Trail and Blueways are system fully implemented with the assistance of the National Park Service.) The maps and guides (Blueways and Heritage Trail) are regularly used and distributed at information centers. The SBEP updated the Heritage Trail guide in FY2008.

OBJECTIVE 4.0:

Improve education of recreational users to protect the resources of Sarasota Bay.

ACTION 4.1:

Work with appropriate organizations to increase enrollment in boater education programs to promote better protection of Bay resources.

ACTION 4.2:

Develop an educational program for target audiences – including youths, tourists, and visitors – to improve awareness and sensitivity about the Bay. (Note: Educational programs are fully implemented through annual Citizen Action Plans: Participation, Involvement, Education, and Restoration; Bay Buddies; and signage.)

OBJECTIVE 5.0:

Promote the Sarasota Bay region as “paradise.”

ACTION 5.1:

Continue to develop and market a system of integrated recreational opportunities. (Note: Heritage Trail and Blueways System are operational. The Manatee/Sarasota area is commonly referred to as “paradise” by the business community, Chambers of Commerce; and media.)

ACTION 5.2:

Promote litter prevention throughout the Sarasota Bay region. (Note: Litter prevention programs are operated by Keep Manatee/Sarasota Beautiful.)



Ringling Causeway, Sarasota.



Kayaking in Manatee County.