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TIDE UPDATES

RED TIDE

Some worry high red tide levels could take toll on seagrass, causing more issues for marine life



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by: [Allyson Henning](#)

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SARASOTA COUNTY (WFLA) – There’s been a [record-breaking number of manatee deaths so far in 2021](#). The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recorded 841 deaths between January 1 and July 2. That number tops the state’s all-time annual record from back in 2013.



Scientists blame poor water quality in the Indian River Lagoon. They say the lack of seagrass ultimately took a toll on the state’s manatee population.

The executive director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program is worried the Tampa Bay area could be facing a similar fate with red tide ravaging the area and severely impacting water quality.

“Until fairly recently, we were doing quite well, but over the last couple of years, we are actually moving in the wrong direction,” said Dr. David Tomasko.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District found Tampa Bay recently lost 13 percent of its seagrass. Sarasota Bay is at a 12-year low. It lost about 18 percent of its seagrass between 2018 and 2020.

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“We can’t really afford to lose a whole lot more and still expect to be able to support the manatee population and green sea turtles and fish population that we are used to seeing. We have always had red tide, we will always have red tide in the future, but what makes red tide worse is what we call human-induced nutrient loads,” said the executive director.

Experts explained to 8 On Your Side, the red tide toxins don’t directly impact seagrass. However, a severe bloom for an extended period of time can take a toll.

“Red tide makes the water very dark and if the water is very dark and it starts to get warm, that is a problem for seagrass meadows,” said Dr. Tomasko.

Other local experts say only time will tell how the seagrass beds will stand up to the high levels of red tide.



“People compare what we are experience right now to 2018, but the 2018 red tide really fired up in the latter part of the summer in the middle of the wet season,” said the executive director. “In June in Tampa Bay, it was beautiful, it looks like the Caribbean, but by the time we got to August and September, it was really awful fish kills. We are already starting off the beginning of this wet season with worse water quality than where we were in 2018 and that doesn’t mean we are going to follow that same trajectory, but we are starting off the wet season in worse condition then we started off the wet season in 2018 and that is concerning,” he continued.

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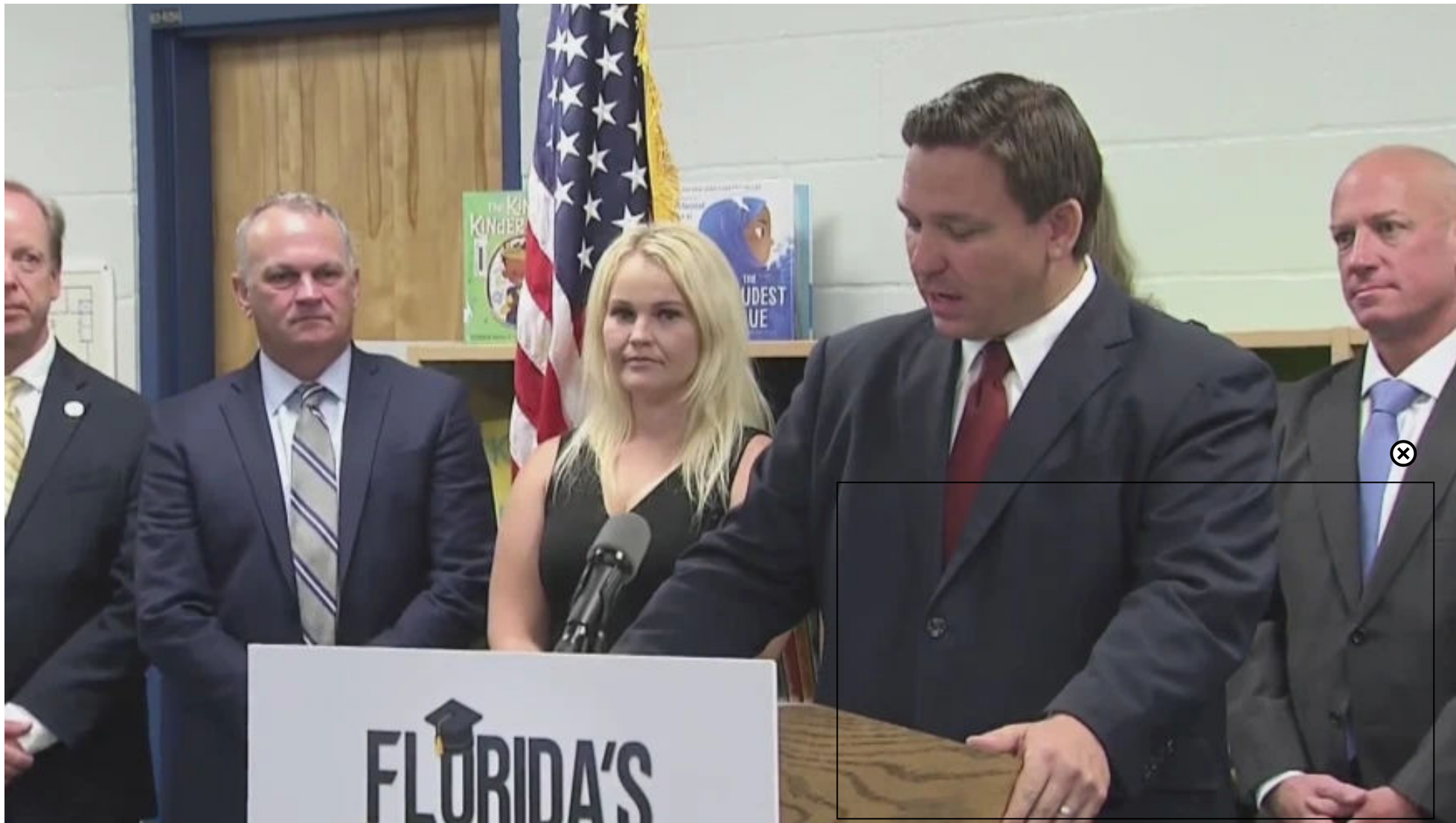
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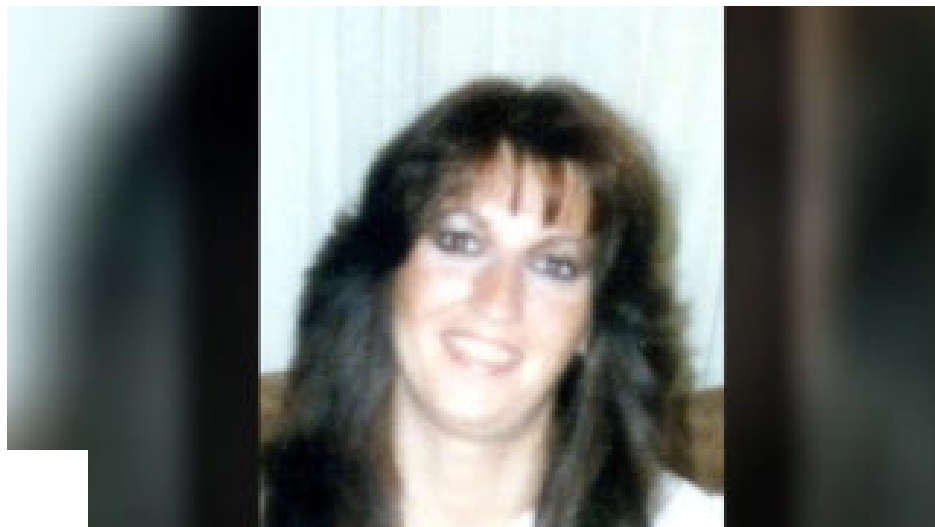
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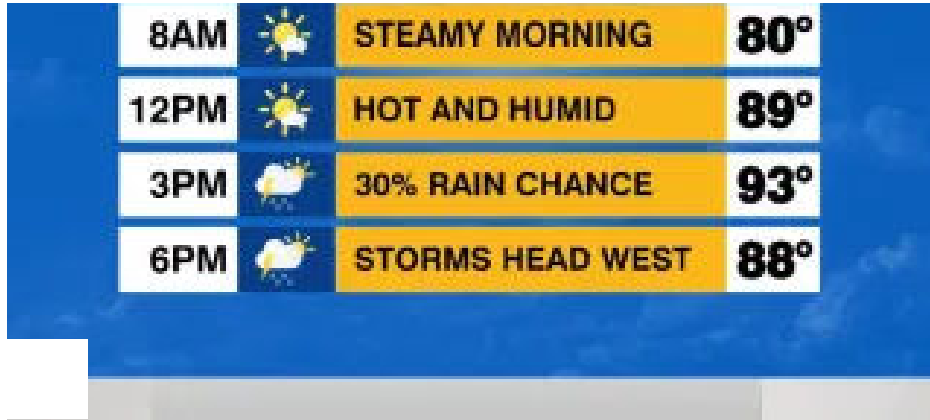


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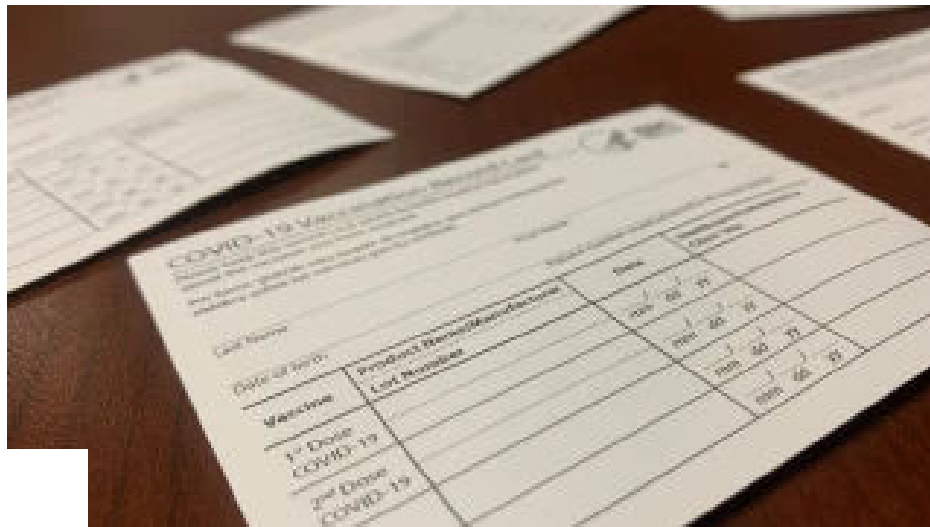
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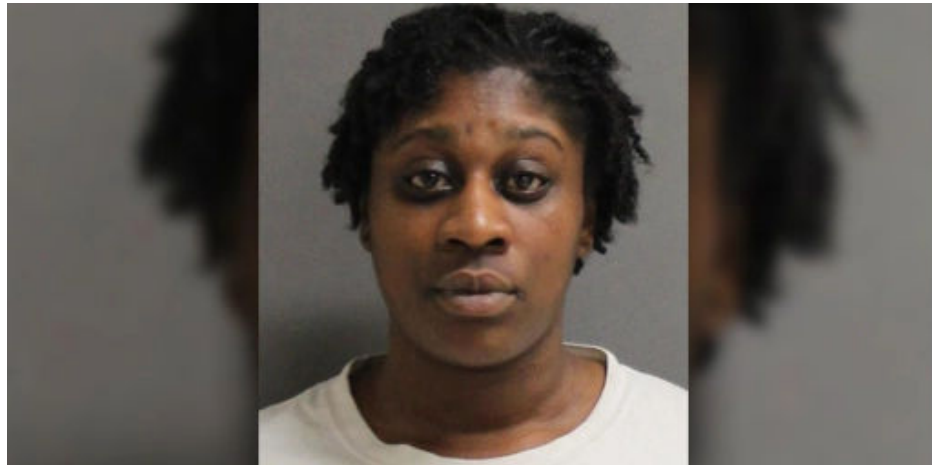
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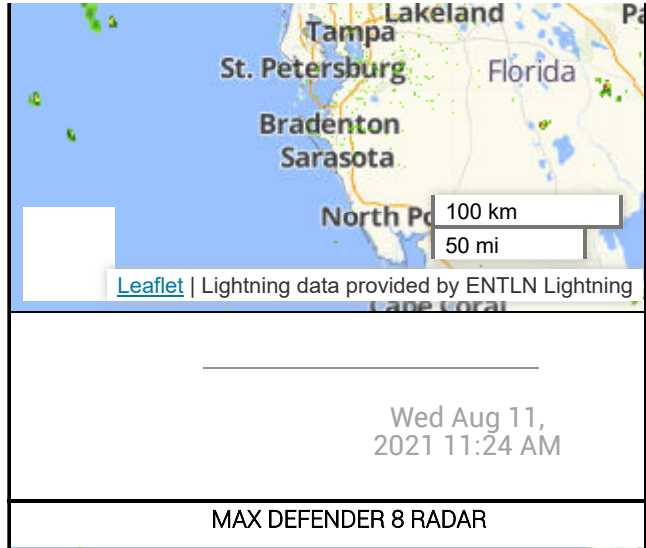
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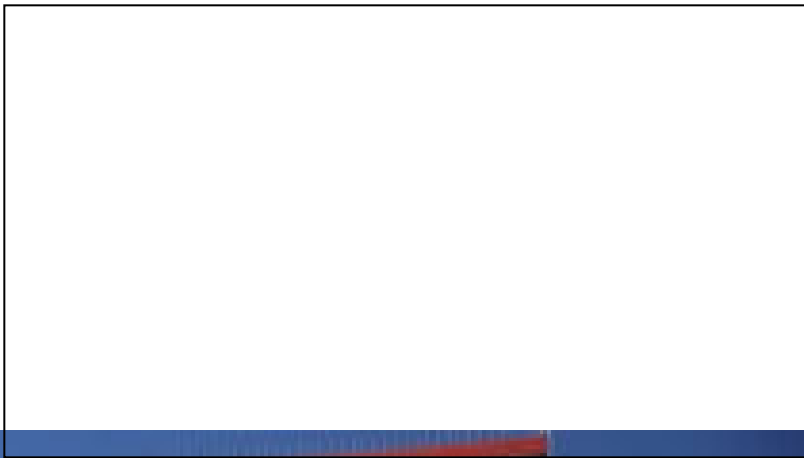
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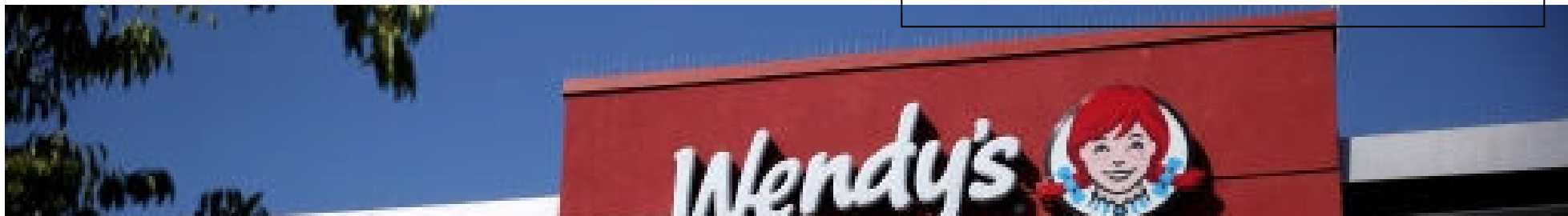
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