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WEDNESDAY, JUL. 28, 2021 1 week ago

# On Sarasota Bay, seagrass scars from boats cut deep





Sarasota Bay Estuary Program has installed signs around the area to bring awareness to seagrass scarring.

by: **Nat Kaemmerer** | Staff Writer

With new signs around Longboat Key and the Sarasota-Manatee area, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program is trying to give Sarasota Bay seagrasses an easier shot at life.

Three new signs at Longboat Key bay accesses catch the eye with the words “SCARS HURT” marred by a scar through the sign. There are eight other matching signs in SBEP’s area. The signs were designed by Florida Sea Grants and have been up since April as part of a campaign to help stop seagrasses from getting up by passing boats.

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“They (the signs) kind of have this rip through them to kind of demonstrate what that looks like in the seagrass bed,” Director of Planning and Communications Darcy Young said. “If you’re in a kayak just on the bay, you can see these scars. What happens is that rips the seagrasses up basically

### What is seagrass?

Seagrasses are exactly what they sound like: Grassy-looking plants that live

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Seagrasses are an important habitat for young marine animals, and they also help filter the bay water by trapping particles in their leaves, so keeping boats away is a high priority. Seagrass beds can be damaged by prop

such as manatees, turtles and crabs, and they are also carbon sinks, which means they store carbon dioxide and lower the





“We've got over 40,000 registered boats in Sarasota and Manatee counties,” Public Outreach Assistant Christine Quigley said. “That number’s only going to grow, which is great, but we just want to make sure that out-of-town boaters or new boaters are aware that our bay is pretty shallow. It's only about six and a half feet on average ... It's more just making people aware that they're there and that they're really important for our economy and important for our natural organisms.”

Prop scarring has been an issue for many years, and Young said research on scarring started in the late 1980s. New College students did a study on the scars in the early 2000s, and a student picked that up again a couple summers ago to find scar hotspots. Now SBEP is making public outreach part of its efforts with the signs. There's one at the Ken Thompson Parkway boat ramp and another at Cannons Marina.



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climate change,” Christine said. “They can stabilize the sea floor ... with the vertical structure (of their roots). They help reduce erosion during storm events and they help reduce wave energy.”

Of course, they also indicate water quality. If the seagrasses are doing well, the bay probably is, too and vice versa. Since 2018’s red tide, Christine said there has been a die-off of grasses.

“If we have an overload of nutrients, we get a lot of algal blooms, and that makes the water less clear and less light is available for the seagrasses to grow.

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boat rental spots as possible,” Young said. “We're trying to do a broad net, because it's not just the people coming in from out of state who don't know the waters. That is a big part of the education, but it can happen to anybody because seagrass beds are ephemeral. They change from year to year. So even if you're somebody who's been boating on the bay for 30, 40, 50 years, there might be seagrass





Running into seagrass can cause extensive damage to a boat’s motor, too, so avoiding it entirely by staying in marked channels and maintaining a safe speed is the best course of action. But Young said if someone gets stuck in a bed, the first thing to do is offload as much weight off the boat as possible before putting up the motor and pushing the boat to a slightly deeper location.

Other than boat interference, seagrasses face danger mostly from water quality. When there are algal blooms, they block the light and the grasses can’t get the light they need to grow. Aside from red tide, nitrogen in the water can cause those harmful blooms.

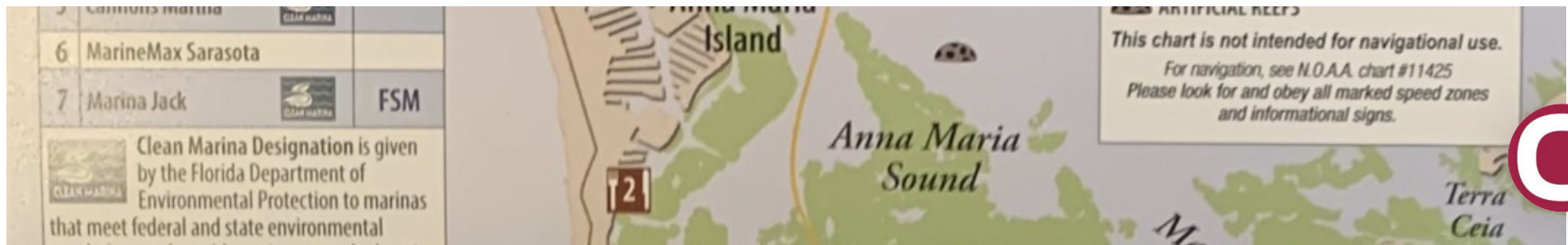
“Grasses have a lot of stressors and water quality is definitely a huge one, but we also don't want people to do that physical damage is also a stressor,” Quigley said. “The less stress we can put on them right now, the better.”

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snacks, restrooms, bait & tackle, available.

Island Preserve  
Neal Preserve  
Palma Sola Bay  
Bradenton  
Manatee Ave. W.  
Cortez  
Cortez Rd.  
Tidy Island  
Sister Keys  
Jewfish Key  
Pine Key  
Longboat Pass  
Leffis Key  
Gulf of Mexico

#	RESTAURANTS WITH DOCKING	Marker No.
1	The Waterfront Restaurant	#64
2	Waterline Marina Resort & Beach Club	#58
3	The Bridge Tender Inn & Dockside Bar	#40A
4	Star Fish Company	
5	Swordfish Grill	
6	Cortez Kitchen	#49
7	Mar Vista Dockside Restaurant	#40
8	Bearded Clam Waterfront Restaurant & Tiki Bar	#16
9	Dry Dock Waterfront Grill	#13
10	New Pass Grill & Bait Shop	#13
11	The Old Salt Bar	#13

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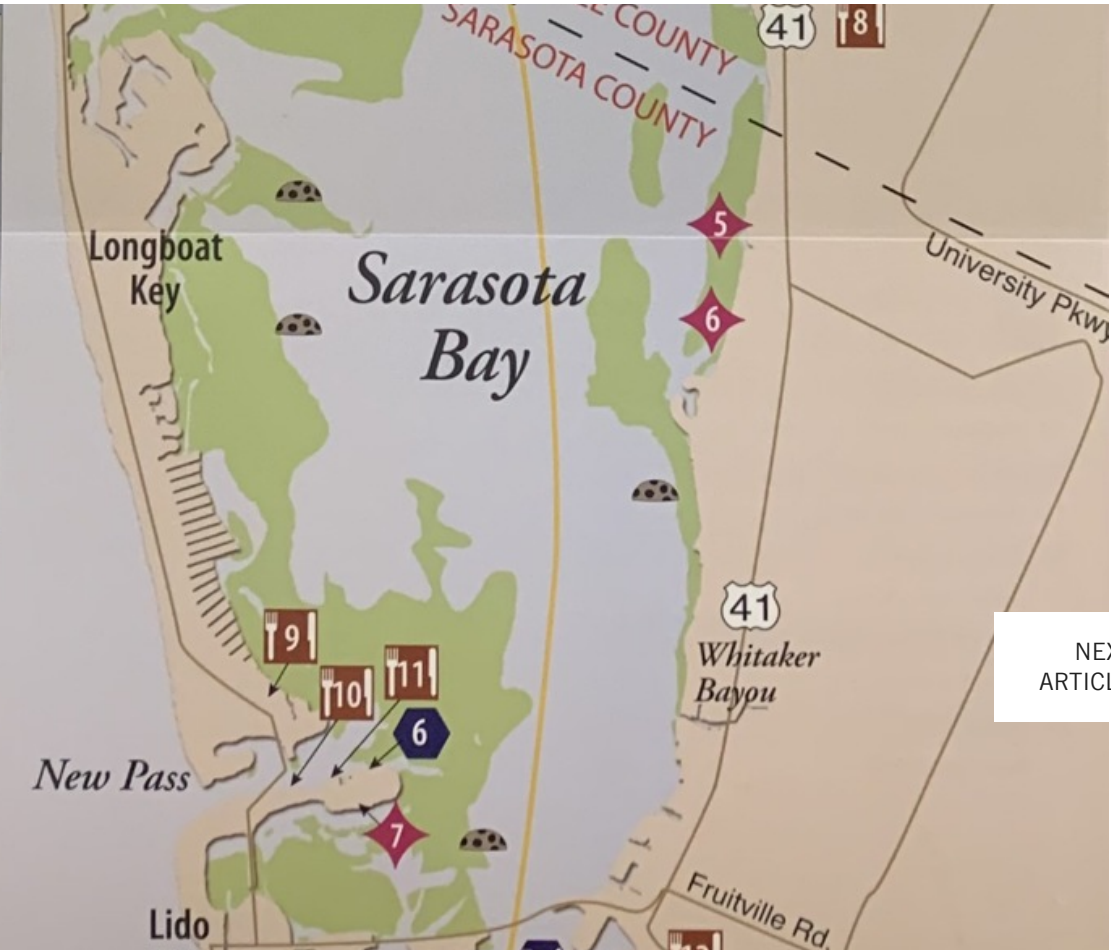
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Boaters can anchor, dock or see by the water	Marker No.
<b>1. EMERSON POINT PRESERVE</b> Coastal preserve with trails, boardwalk, beach, home to SW Florida's largest Native American Temple Mound. Restrooms, picnic areas, fishing, wildlife viewing.	Dock/ Marker #67
<b>2. LEFFIS KEY</b> Restored island preserve with beach, boardwalk &	Anchor/ Marker #67



<b>4. SISTER KEYS</b>	See from water/ Caution: shallow! Marker #34
Four restored islands with tidal lagoon, native plants, fishing, & wildlife viewing.	
<b>5. CHARLES RINGLING MANSION</b>	See from water/ Caution: shallow! Marker #15
1920s winter home of 1 of the 7 Ringling brothers - part of New College of Florida campus	
<b>6. CA' D'ZAN</b>	See from water/ Marker #15
1920s Venetian style winter home of circus family John & Mable Ringling	
<b>7. KEN THOMPSON PARK</b>	Anchor/ Marker #12
Boardwalk trails, restrooms, restaurants, picnic areas, playground, fishing, wildlife viewing & wetland restoration area.	



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The maps provide an overview of where seagrasses are thickest.

Each sign has a holder of Sarasota Bay maps (pictured above) underneath, which Young said a lot of people have taken advantage of. The maps highlight areas where seagrasses are, as well as other points of interest





Young said there's also a survey on the map that they hope people will take so SBEP can see how the program is going. They're hoping for more interaction on the survey, so make sure to scan the QR code on the map holder.

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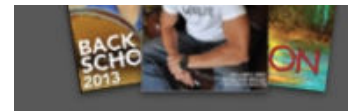
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