

# Dead Sportfish Washing Ashore on Tampa Bay

Blair Wickstrom

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*Florida Sportsman staff is disheartened to again see photos of red tide fish kills on Tampa Bay.*



July 7, 2021 on the Gandy Causeway beach was reported to be littered with fish carcasses. Credit: John Schiller

John Schiller, St. Petersburg, sent these pictures today. They were taken July 7, 2021 on the Gandy Causeway beach in St. Petersburg. “There were thousands of dead fish ranging from pinfish to tarpon. It was sad to see so many different species affected by the red

tide,” John said. “There was a large amount of dead over-slot redfish, but there were not many snook.

“I saw one gentleman fishing and happened to ‘get a bite.’ When he reeled it in it was a dead redfish that he foul hooked. Just a sad sight to see in an area that thrives off saltwater related activities,” John lamented.



All varieties of sportfish were effected by the most recent red tide event. Credit: John Schiller

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Red tides are caused by blooms of a tiny algal dinoflagellate, *Karenia brevis*. The organism produces a neurotoxin that can kill fish and other marine life. Recent sampling performed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has confirmed medium to high levels of *K. brevis* red tide in parts of Tampa Bay.



Both inshore and offshore species showed up on the beach. Credit: John Schiller

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Red tides have been documented in the southern Gulf of Mexico as far back as the 1700s and along Florida's Gulf coast in the 1840s. Fish kills near Tampa Bay were even mentioned in the records of Spanish explorers. Strength and duration of the blooms depends on physical and biological conditions that influence its growth and persistence, including sunlight, nutrients and salinity.

The influence of nutrient levels on the current blooms in Tampa Bay will be a major question for researchers and state and local officials in the weeks to come, particularly in light of the discharges from the nearby Piney Point facility during the spring.



John reported "thousands" of fish washed up on shore. Credit: John Schiller

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## **Disaster in the Making?**

**On March 26, 2021** a leak was found at the Piney Point a phosphate mine and fertilizer plant on the banks of lower Tampa Bay. The facility houses stacks of phosphogypsum, a toxic, radioactive byproduct of the fertilizer production process.

**On April 3, 2021** Florida Governor Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency in Manatee and two neighboring counties and more than 300 homes were evacuated. Ultimately, authorities pumped more than 200 million gallons of polluted wastewater into the Tampa Bay to lessen pressure on the containment structure. This helped avoid a human catastrophe, but did it spark an ecological tragedy?



Credit: John Schiller

**On April 17, 2021** The Florida Department of Environmental Protection signals the alarm to varying levels of cyanotoxins that have been identified in Tampa Bay, increasing chances that the discharge at Piney Point will trigger a blue-green algae bloom.

Researchers monitoring water quality near the former Piney Point phosphate plant have identified increased levels of blue-green algae in the area where more than 200 million gallons of polluted water was discharged recently.

<https://wusfnews.wusf.usf.edu/environment/2021-04-17/heightened-blue-green-algae-levels-found-in-waters-near-piney-point>

**On June 10, 2021** ABC News reported, scientists believe the blue-green algae called Lyngbya, is growing at an alarming rate and could be a result of the 215 million gallons of polluted wastewater released from Piney Point in April.

“There’s a lot of circumstantial evidence that suggests that the releases brought a nitrogen

and phosphorus load to our parts of the bay where this is blowing up on us,” said David Tomasko, executive director of Sarasota Bay Estuary Program.



Credit: John Schiller

**On July 4th weekend,** St. Petersburg is experiencing nine straight days of lingering fish kills and red tide. Mary Jo Allen who was quoted locally lives in a condo at Waterside South in Coquina Key where thousands of dead fish have filled a canal after Tropical Storm Elsa passed by Pinellas County on Wednesday. “It’s almost like you can walk across the water on the fish,” she said. “That’s what it feels like and that’s what we saw first thing this morning when we woke up from the storm.”

<https://www.baynews9.com/fl/tampa/news/2021/06/23/still-smell-dead-fish-red-tide-is-lingering-and-moving-north>

Florida Sportsman has investigated “supercharged” red tide events in recent years. Might this be another example?

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