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SARASOTA COUNTY

## Environmental groups fear seagrass mitigation bill will do more harm than good



by: [Allyson Henning](#)

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SARASOTA COUNTY (WFLA) – Florida lawmakers are considering a bill that would make it easier for developers to build over seagrass meadows across the state. [Senate Bill 198](#) would allow developers whose projects would impact seagrass beds

Conservationists say the bill sounds like a good idea on paper, but claim it's not as simple as it seems.

"This bill actually incentivizes the destruction of wild native seagrass under a pretense that planting seagrasses elsewhere will succeed," said J.P. Brooker with Ocean Conservancy. "The trouble of it is, there is tremendous uncertainty whether or not the seagrass will hold. At a time when we have lost 1,100 manatees whose primary food source is seagrass, we can't buy that kind of uncertainty. We need the wild native seagrass in place," he continued.

Brooker argues there isn't enough data showing planted seagrasses will thrive.

"If we had certainty, if we had multi-year studies that showed the efficacy of seagrass planting, you might be in a different situation, but the facts are we are just not there," Brooker said.

2021 was a devastating year for Florida's manatee population. State data shows more than 1,100 manatees died over the course of the year, most starved to death.

"It shocked me that we would be considering anything that would take wild native seagrass at a time where we are losing so many manatees," Brooker said.

Director of Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Dr. David Tomasko points out density as another concern with transplanting seagrass.

"The history of seagrass transplanting is better now in the state of Florida than it has been in many other locations. About 88% of these transplants continue to support seagrass which is good, but the other part of it is those transplanted seagrass meadows are typically about 40% less dense than what they replace," explained Dr. Tomasko. "It's kind of like saying we are going to have 88% as many restaurants, but each one of them is gonna have 40% less food. If you are a manatee, that is not really working out all that well for you," he continued.

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seagrass beds. He also pointed out the mitigation banks would likely result in a net destruction of seagrass beds across the state.

“Manatees are facing an ecological catastrophe and we need to do everything we can to protect them and taking away their food source is not protecting them,” said Brooker. “We are confident at the legislators are going to do the right thing and take away this legislation. We don’t need it. We don’t want it and there is significant distaste for it so now is not the time for it,” he continued

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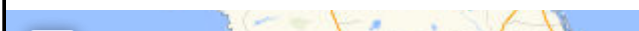
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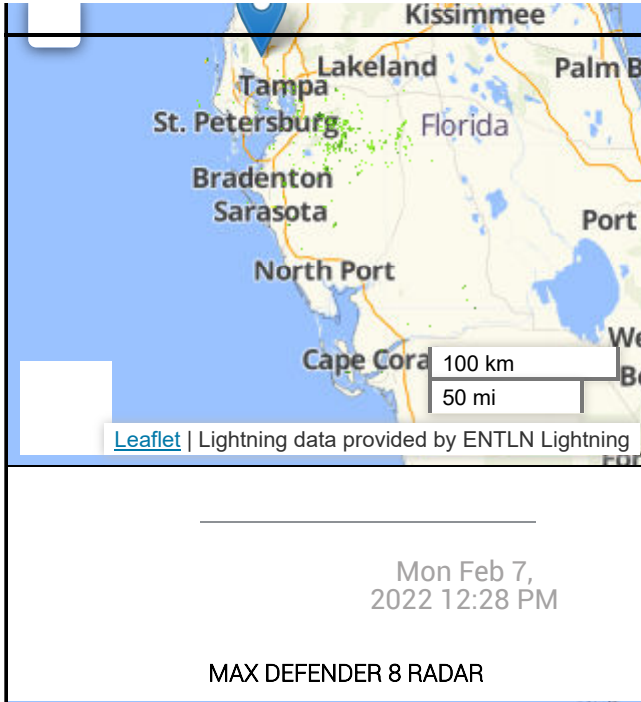
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