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**SARASOTA COUNTY****More vinyl seawalls in Sarasota Bay may have adverse effects on oyster habitats**by: [Allyson Henning](#)

Posted: Jul 19, 2023 / 06:53 PM EDT

Updated: Jul 19, 2023 / 06:54 PM EDT

LONGBOAT KEY, Fla. (WFLA) — For many years, concrete seawalls were the norm, but now more people are turning to vinyl and fiberglass seawalls.

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program started noticing a difference in the oyster habitats on vinyl versus more traditional concrete seawalls and it's something they're now working to raise public awareness about.

"We did a survey and we looked at 32 seawalls. Sixteen of them were concrete and every one of those concrete seawalls had oysters, and sometimes a lot of oysters, but when we looked at the 16 basically plastic seawalls, 10 of them had no oysters whatsoever and six of them had a really sparse amount, you would easily miss it if you weren't looking for it," said Dr. David Tomasko.

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The reason behind the diminished habitats is still unclear, but the estuary program is working to find possible solutions since more people are choosing vinyl over concrete.

"It does seem that this is an important issue. We are losing, it appears, a lot of oyster reef habitat that is growing on concrete seawalls, because they just don't seem to be able to grow that thick on plastic seawalls," said Dr. Tomasko. "Maybe think twice about looking at some alternatives, maybe it costs more for concrete, but at the same time you are helping to create the kind of conditions that give you the good water quality that people who live on the waterfront care about."

The Town of Longboat Key has fiberglass seawall panels at Bayfront Park. The oyster habitat there isn't what it used to be.

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“What we are finding is that we are losing that habitat benefit because the oysters cannot actually attach to those types of seawalls,” said public works director Isaac Brownman.

The town is partnering with Sarasota Bay Estuary Program to add “mangrove panels” to the existing fiberglass seawall. The panels look similar to mangrove roots and will allow for oyster growth.

“The fiberglass seawall maintains the structural integrity of the park, this now will provide the habitat benefit. We are hoping that by doing this as a pilot at one of our public parks, a lot of our private home owners that have seawalls see it and agree that it is a good solution and would like to do it on their own seawalls as well,” said Brownman.

“We want people to be aware of the fact that if you live in a canal front community and you have an over-fertilized lawn and your grass clippings go out into the storm drain and now you’ve got a vinyl seawall, the government is not going be able to fix your water quality problem,” said Dr. Tomasko. “You are gonna have to be part of the solution.”

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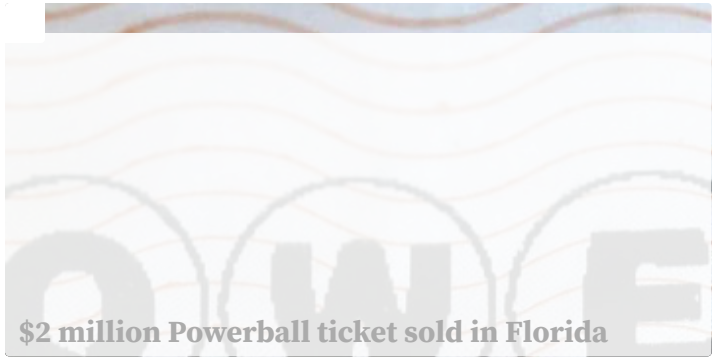
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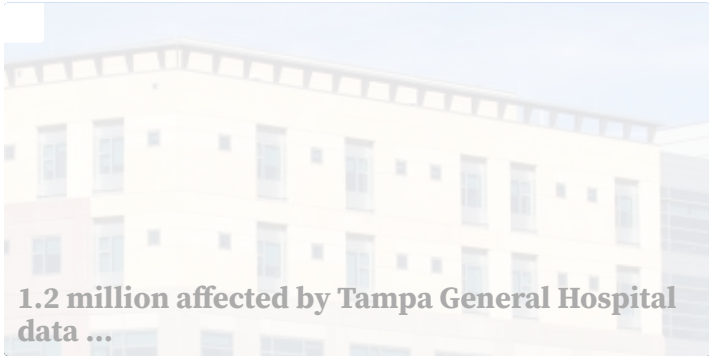
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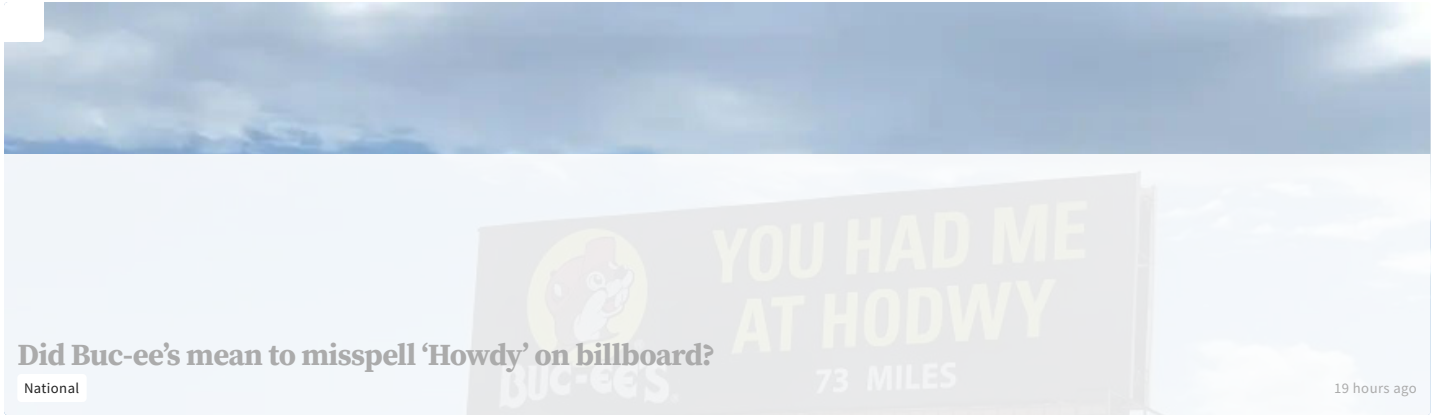
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