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## Habitat restoration off to a great start in 2024

With an additional \$2.7 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law over the next couple years, SBEP is ramping up its restoration projects, many of which are well underway.



*EPA, City and County Commissioners, FISH, SBEP, Earth Balance & partners at the ribbon cutting ceremony for FISH Preserve on Nov. 3, 2023*

## **FISH Preserve - restoration complete, public access improvements planned**

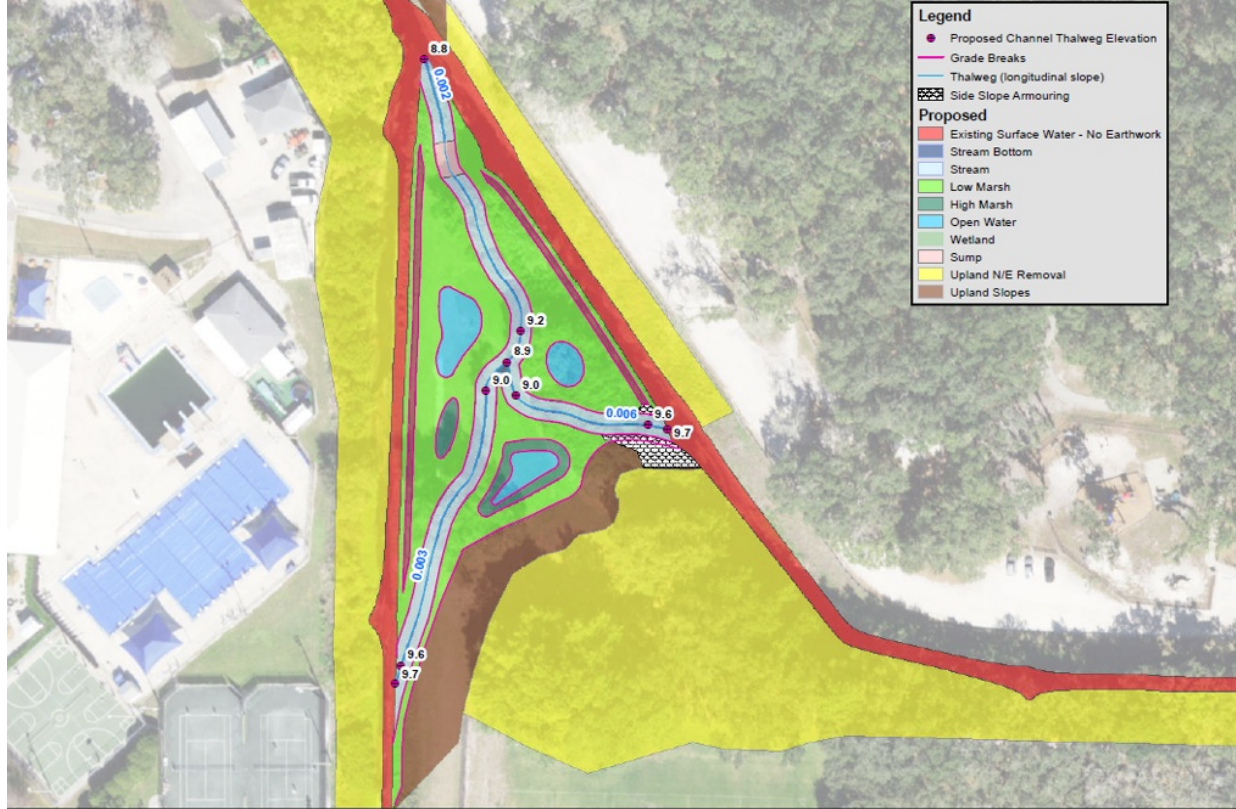
This past November, SBEP, the Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH), EPA, Earth Balance, ESA, and partners celebrated the ribbon cutting and completion of the habitat restoration of FISH Preserve, a roughly 100-acre coastal wetland located in Cortez. The preserve, which is just east of the historic fishing village, provides an important nursery habitat for many key fish species and helps filter stormwater before it reaches Sarasota Bay.

Thanks to a recently awarded \$165,000 grant from the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, funds are now available to construct a welcome kiosk, educational signage, nature trails, and a pedestrian bridge over the tidal creek. SBEP will continue to work with FISH to implement this last phase of construction as we put the final touches on this unique preserve that will benefit both local wildlife and human visitors. [Read more about FISH Preserve.](#)

**Celebrate at the Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival Feb 17 & 18!**

## **GT Bray Park - under construction**

This stormwater treatment project is located in the City of Bradenton and consists of improving stormwater conveyance at the conjunction of two main channels at the park (photo directly below) and restoring a former storage pond (photos on bottom) that was used to hold reclaimed water from the Manatee County Southwest Water Reclamation Facility. In order to rehabilitate the storage pond to function as a stormwater pond, the first step of removing invasive plants was completed. Quarterly maintenance of invasives will take place throughout the project. Construction for the stormwater conveyance portion of the project is expected to start in April of this year.



G.T. Bray Conceptual Design Draft

Delta Source  
- ESA  
Environmental Resource

*Plans for improving stormwater conveyance*



*Pond before invasive species were removed*



*Pond after invasive species were removed*

**Longboat Key Bayfront Park Living Seawall - request for proposals**

Bayfront Park, on Longboat Key, sits directly on the western side of Sarasota Bay. As the town updates its shoreline, they are interested in aspects that might add water quality benefits to the bay. This project consists of two pieces. The first would add elements to a fiberglass seawall to enhance oyster growth (i.e. mangrove panels like the photo below). A local survey showed that seawalls made of plastic (i.e. vinyl or fiberglass) don't support as much oyster growth as materials like concrete. Adding panels onto a seawall can help bring back some of the water filtering capacity oysters provide in our bays and canals. The second part of the project consists

of creating a living shoreline along fifty feet of aging seawall on the north end of the park. Living shorelines help filter water and provide habitat for birds, butterflies, and other species. SBEP will be putting out a call for proposals for the project this month.



*Example of mangrove panels on a seawall*

## **Artificial Reefs - awaiting permits for deployment**

Twenty-four reef modules, called deep cover modules, are completed and awaiting deployment to six existing reefs in Sarasota Bay - three in Manatee County and three in Sarasota County. These new reef modules will enhance the existing artificial reefs, which are used by important recreational fish species like gag grouper, gray snapper, and sheepshead.

[Read more about artificial reefs in Sarasota Bay](#)



## Quick Point Preserve - site refresh in progress

Quick Point is a 34-acre coastal restoration site on Longboat Key bordered by the New Pass

inlet to the south and Sarasota Bay to the east. Quick Point was among the first coastal restoration projects implemented in Sarasota County. Time, and Florida's climate, have taken a toll on the preserve over the past 28 years. SBEP funds, along with recently awarded funding from the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, will contribute to a much-needed refresh. These efforts will improve the educational, experiential, and ecological value of the site. The welcome sign kiosk at the trail entrance will be rebuilt and seven new environmentally focused educational signs will be added along the trail to enhance the learning experience for visitors. Boardwalks will be repaired and replaced where needed to allow walkers of all abilities to safely experience the preserve. Lastly, a round of professional invasive plant removal will be conducted to improve the environmental quality of the habitat.



## **Bay Walk on City Island - site refresh in progress**

Located just behind Mote Marine Laboratory and across the street from New Pass Grill, Bay Walk on City Island is another one of SBEP's earliest restoration projects. It consists of a boardwalk trail through mangroves with a lookout point on Sarasota Bay. Like our other older sites, City Walk was due for a refresh. Currently, new educational signs on mangroves and seagrasses have been installed along the boardwalk. A new wayfinding sign was placed at the entrance to the parking area, and the kiosk at the trailhead was updated to welcome visitors to the site. SBEP will continue to pursue additional improvements to the area as well.



## Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park - design & public input

Over the past several months SBEP and community partners have been gathering input on initial designs for the restoration of the shoreline at Dr. MLK Jr. Park located in downtown Sarasota. This project aims to increase education and recreational opportunities by adding features like a kayak launch, a fishing pier, a sitting area, public art, and educational signage. It will also help treat and filter water through the addition of native plantings along the shore. This month, SBEP plans to begin the invasive plant removal along the shoreline to prep the site for construction, which is expected for this fall/winter. As part of the park restoration, the program is also working

with the City of Sarasota, several Newtown community leaders, and local teachers on a mural for the park bathroom and kitchen building.



**Want a great excuse to visit Dr. MLK Jr. Park?**

Join SBEP on Feb 24th for a day of good food, music, and activities all in support of the [Newtown Farmers Market](#), which sells fresh produce and healthy eats every week.



SATURDAY 11AM - 3PM

Feb. 24, 2024



Newtown Nation presents


# Newtown Farmers Market CommUNITY Fundraising Event


- Expansion of the Newtown  
Farmers Market

Art Auction  
Live Music  
Meditation  
Kids Activities  
Nature Education  
Healthy Meals

DONATE:

[NewtownNation.com](https://NewtownNation.com)

 2523 Cocoanut Ave  
Sarasota, FL 34234

 (941) 536-3221

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Bay Partners Grants Due March 1, 2024



The deadline to apply for a Bay Partners Grant is fast approaching! Grant funding of up to \$10,000 per applicant is available to non-profit, for-profit, schools, and government organizations located within the Sarasota Bay watershed for projects that enhance wildlife habitats, water quality, environmental education, or community engagement in and around Sarasota Bay. A total of \$100,000 is available for 2024 awards. Match is not required but encouraged. Awards are reimbursement grants. Projects may occur between June 2024 and September 2025.

[Learn more & apply for a Bay Partners Grant](#)

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## Join the Bay Guardians for Myakka Headwaters Preserve Planting

February 17, 2024 from 10 AM - 12 PM



# VOLUNTEER EVENT

## FEBRUARY 17 2024

10 AM TO NOON | MYAKKA HEADWATERS PRESERVE  
(9600 WAUCHULA ROAD, MYAKKA CITY, FL 34251)

COOKOUT TO FOLLOW | REGISTER ONLINE



Join the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, and the Coastal and Heartland National Estuary Partnership at Myakka Headwaters Preserve in planting several hundred native wetland trees along the Myakka River.

[Register for Myakka Headwaters Preserve Planting](#)

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**2024 Educator Workshops**  
Stipends and CE credits available



Calling all teachers and educators! Spots are available for the 2024 Educator Workshops. SBEP sponsors professional development workshops for K-12 teachers in Manatee and Sarasota Counties. The full-day workshops are offered three times a year by Sandra L. Gilchrist, Ph.D., Professor of Biology at New College of Florida. The focus of the workshops is to improve teaching skills and the understanding of science while empowering teachers to use modern techniques and pedagogy. Recent workshops have covered data visualization, quantitative literacy, and digital tools. Workshops run a full day on Saturdays. Educators may earn a stipend and continuing education credits for attendance. To learn more or register for a workshop, please **contact Dr. Gilchrist at [gilchrist@ncf.edu](mailto:gilchrist@ncf.edu)**

**Workshop I: Improving Coastal Resiliency - Feb. 17th from 8 AM - 4 PM** at the Heiser Natural Sciences Building on the New College Campus (contact Dr. Gilchrist by FEB 15th to attend)

- Microbes: creating and observing a Winogradsky column; using [Phytopia](#) in class to discuss estuary health
- Field microscopes and hand lens use
- Water quality—introduction to aquarium science
- Using puzzles to reinforce learning
- Bay walk to discuss shoreline features and pollution/beach clean up
- Plants and sea level rise experiments with saline soils
- Storm water control and LID; marshes and other wetlands (simulations and observations)
- Grants and resources-networking

**Workshop II: Human Impacts on Coastlines - date TBD**

**Workshop III: Beaches, Waves, and Currents - date TBD**

**Learn more about 2024 Educator  
Workshops**

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**Oyster Boys Conservation Helps SBEP Expand Vertical  
Oyster Garden Program**



This year, SBEP is teaming up with Oyster Boys Conservation to expand the reach of the vertical oyster garden (VOG) program and deploy 200 VOGs to the waters around Sarasota Bay. Vertical oyster gardens are strings of recycled oyster shells that hang underneath dock structures. They provide a habitat for live oysters, crabs, worms, and other filter feeders and critters to use. The initiative will also have a significant educational component, as the vertical oyster gardens will be built by students learning about water quality and the role filter feeders play in estuary ecosystems.

**Interested in getting involved with Vertical Oyster Gardens?**

- [FREE VOG pick up at Robinson Preserve for Sarasota and Manatee residents](#)
- [Participate in VOG Citizen Science with the Gulf Shellfish Institute](#)

[Learn more about Vertical Oyster Gardens](#)

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**SBEP Celebrates Marine-Themed Art at Emma E. Booker**

# Elementary School



Earlier this month, SBEP had an opportunity to sponsor and attend the *Emma E. Under the Sea* student art exhibition that featured glow in the dark art of marine life and habitats. The family event brought over 200 students for an evening of eye-catching pieces and displays. The SBEP table featured our new virtual reality headset for students to experience underwater scenes like swimming with a manatee or snorkeling through seagrass beds. These experiences are not only fun for kids (and adults) but also help create stronger connections with environments and species that many people may not have the chance to see in person.

## Join SBEP's Citizens Advisory Committee

Community input is integral to our mission. The SBEP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) is a group of local individuals who gather six times per year to provide SBEP with input and to help us share information with the public. Our CAC members have a wide array of professional and personal attributes, but they are all tied by their dedication to the health of Sarasota Bay. Interested in joining? Click the button below to learn more or email [megan@sarasotabay.org](mailto:megan@sarasotabay.org) for a prospective member application.



[Learn more about the Citizens Advisory Committee](#)

# Lights, Camera, Action!

## SBEP in the News

Communication is vital to the protection and restoration of the bay. Check out the latest clips and articles featuring SBEP efforts.



### [Sarasota Bay's water quality improving but climate issues and manmade threats persist](#)

"Sarasota Bay's water quality has begun improving, though threats remain from warming sea temperatures, stormwater runoff, and the potential wide-ranging environmental impact of more than 200 million gallons of polluted waste released from the Piney Point phosphate plant in 2021, experts say."



### [Climate Adaptation Center Announces 2024 Climate Champion Nominees](#)

"Sarasota's Climate Adaptation Center (CAC) will present its second annual Climate Champions Awards. The awards will honor environmental stewards in our community who are leading the way in adapting to and mitigating the major risks from warming temperatures, stronger storms, rising sea levels, storm surge, inland flooding and extreme biodiversity losses."

[Read More SBEP in the News](#)

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## Jobs & Funding Opportunities

- [Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium: multiple positions - Sarasota](#)
- [University of Tampa: Assistant Professor, Biophysical Oceanography - Tampa](#)
- [Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council: Planner/Senior Planner - Tampa](#)
- [Florida Aquarium: multiple positions - Tampa](#)

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## Sarasota & Manatee Resident Input Needed

Exciting developments are underway in the Sarasota-Manatee region to take bold steps to create a regional plan aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Resident input is crucial for the success of this plan. Help shape the future of our community by taking a few minutes to complete the survey.

[Read More & Take the Survey](#)

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# Bite Sized Bay News



## A New Program Aims to Protect Vulnerable Local Mangroves

"Suncoast Waterkeeper's mangrove ranger monitoring program allows volunteers to evaluate the health of mangrove forests and report potential mangrove trimming violations." [Read more](#)



## Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival to celebrate 42 years

"An average of 15,000 people are expected to come to the fishing village this year the weekend of Feb. 17-18 to enjoy live music, food, arts and crafts vendors and a celebration of commercial fishing." [Read more](#)



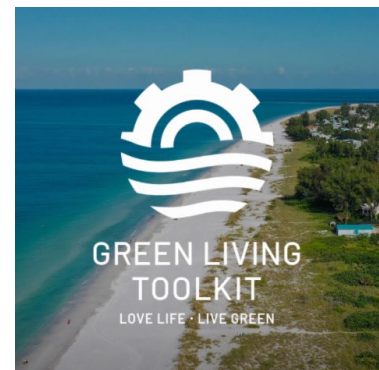
## The City of Sarasota reopens Bobby Jones Golf Club and new nature trails

"The City of Sarasota held a grand re-opening ceremony Friday, Dec. 15, 2023 for the restored 18-hole Donald Ross-designed course and new nature park." [Read more](#)

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## Community & Partner Events

Check out upcoming green events from over 100 local organizations on the [Green Living Toolkit Community Events Calendar!](#)



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### Follow us



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