



For immediate release  
October 20, 2015

Contact: Rachel Arndt, 727.867.8166  
[rarndt@tampabaywatch.org](mailto:rarndt@tampabaywatch.org)

## **400 Volunteers Needed for Largest Restoration Project in Tampa Bay**

*Ruskin, FL* - Tampa Bay Watch is recruiting 400 volunteers for their largest salt marsh planting to-date to help restore the Rock Ponds on Saturday, November 14, 9am - 12pm. This project is in partnership with the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) program of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) and Hillsborough County.

Volunteers are needed to plant *Spartina alterniflora*, or native salt marsh grass along the shorelines of the Rock Ponds. Volunteers should come prepared to get dirty by wearing clothing and closed toe shoes that they don't mind getting mucky. The project site is just south of the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve near Ruskin off of US 41. Interested volunteers should register at [tampabaywatch.org](http://tampabaywatch.org) or by contacting Rachel Arndt, Tampa Bay Watch Communications Coordinator at [rarndt@tampabaywatch.org](mailto:rarndt@tampabaywatch.org) or (727) 867-8166 x233.

Commemorative t-shirts and lunch will be provided by CITGO Petroleum Corporation as part of their Caring for our Coast Program, which commemorates the recovery of coastal communities nearly 10 years after Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

The Rock Ponds project is the largest coastal ecosystem restoration project in Tampa Bay. The site was historically agriculture fields, shell mining pits, and surrounded by non-native and nuisance plant species. The mining pit has been partially filled and recontoured to provide over two miles of new Tampa Bay shorelines and islands in need of plants. This project aims to create critical coastal wetland habitat that will restore essential fish and wildlife habitats, and aid in the improvement of water quality from pollution due to urban and agricultural runoff.

The planting of salt marsh protects and stabilizes low lying coastal lands and provides protection and food sources for estuarine and coastal fishery food chains of many species of fish and marine mammals. Salt marsh and other coastal habitats have declined over the past 100 years -- due to human activities. This loss has damaged a crucial link in the bay's food chain for fish and wildlife resources, significantly impacting the bay's fisheries.

*Tampa Bay Watch is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) stewardship program dedicated exclusively to the charitable and scientific purpose of protecting and restoring the marine and wetland environments of the Tampa Bay estuary encompassing over 400 square miles of open water and 2,300 square miles of highly- developed watershed. Tampa Bay Watch involves more than 10,000 youth and adult volunteers each year in hands on habitat restoration projects. For more information, visit [www.tampabaywatch.org](http://www.tampabaywatch.org), or call 727-867-8166.*

###