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22,106 feet of fishing line removed from Tampa Bay & Gulf of Mexico

St. Petersburg, FL – The 23rd Annual Fishing Line Cleanup, organized by Tampa Bay Watch and Audubon Florida and sponsored by Sea World Busch Gardens Conservation Fund and Restore America's Estuaries, was a great success. Fifty-three volunteers cleaned 44 different sites around Tampa Bay and along the Gulf of Mexico shoreline. The volunteers removed an estimated 22,106 feet of fishing line and 225 hooks from bird nesting islands and mangrove shorelines. Unfortunately, 52 birds that had died because they were entangled in line were found during the cleanup. Volunteers were able to rescue two pelicans that were found trapped by fishing line in the mangroves. Tampa Bay Watch and Audubon Florida strive to educate anglers to reduce improper disposal of line and to teach fishermen how to release birds accidentally caught, with a goal to decrease the amount of fishing line and reduce the number of entangled birds each year.

The cleanup took place throughout the week of Saturday, September 24 - Sunday, October 2. Volunteers with boats removed tangled fishing line from mangroves and shorelines of assigned bird nesting islands. Advanced registration on tampabaywatch.org allowed captains and their volunteer crews to remove fishing line from protected bird colonies that otherwise are off-limits to the public. This cleanup, scheduled in the fall when most birds are not nesting, effectively removes fishing line from Tampa Bay and reduces the threat of entanglement for coastal birds and also other marine animals.

Abandoned fishing line is a significant mortality factor in bird colonies. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologists have identified fishing line as the major cause of mortality for adult Brown Pelicans. "Florida's coastal birds face increasing pressures from habitat loss, human disturbance, and predation; removing fishing line is an easy way to increase their chances of survival," said Audubon Florida Sanctuary Manager Mark Rachal. "Pelicans, egrets, herons and other iconic coastal birds need our help. We thank our captains and crews who participated in the 23rd Annual Fishing Line Cleanup and made a difference for Tampa Bay's wildlife."

"It's great to be able to get the community involved in an event to help prevent wildlife entanglements, while also raising awareness about the importance of responsible fishing practices. This event would not be possible without community volunteers generously donating their time and boats, as well as, our partners' collaboration, resources, and funding," said Melinda Spall, Tampa Bay Watch Environmental Specialist.

***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, or call 727-867-8166.*

***Audubon Florida** and the **National Audubon Society** are dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitats that support them. Audubon's national network of community-based nature centers, sanctuaries, and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation. For more information, please visit www.audubon.org or fl.audubon.org, or call 813-623-6826.*

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