



For immediate release
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Earth Day – Tampa Bay Coca-Cola Employees to Help Restore McKay Bay

Tampa, FL – In celebration of Earth Day, Tampa Bay Watch partnered with Coca-Cola for a community-based oyster creation project to install new oyster shell communities on the northern shoreline of McKay Bay. Tampa Bay Watch's Community Oyster Reef Enhancement project at McKay Bay is supported by a generous grant of \$25,000 from the Coca-Cola Foundation.

"Sustainability and giving back to our community is at the heart of our business and what better day to show it than on Earth Day," said Jeff Ortmeier, General Manager, Coca-Cola Refreshments Central Florida. "Through our partnership with Tampa Bay Watch, our associates worked to restore McKay Bay and help improve water quality through the organization's Community Oyster Reef Enhancement project. This type of project is part of Coca-Cola's 2020 goal to safely return to communities and nature an amount of water equivalent to what we use in our finished beverages and their production."

Approximately thirty volunteers from Coca-Cola Refreshments assisted with the project. Earth Day is a great opportunity to focus on restoring our beautiful environment. The project involved shoveling fossilized shell into mesh bags, and then transporting and installing the shell bags to create a series of oyster reefs. The goal of the project was to help provide hard bottom habitats for fish and wildlife resources, promote water quality improvements in McKay Bay and reestablish oyster communities.

"Tampa Bay Watch has long been impressed with Coca Cola's commitment to giving back to the community," said Peter Clark, President of Tampa Bay Watch. "Earth Day was the perfect occasion for corporate and community members to volunteer at a local level to improve our local environment."

McKay Bay is an ecologically important estuary located in the heart of a heavily industrialized area in the City of Tampa that has suffered from many years of impacts from dredge and fill construction, urban and industrial runoff and dredged material disposal. McKay Bay provides habitat to over 200 bird species and historically supported healthy fisheries. The bay has suffered from many years of developmental impacts, including dredge and fill construction, urbanized and industrial stormwater runoff, industrial contamination and dredged material disposal.

The goal of Tampa Bay Watch's Community Oyster Reef Enhancement (CORE) program is to increase the oyster population in Tampa Bay and at the same time, provide habitats for small organisms, prevent erosion, improve water quality and promote fish and wildlife habitats. In addition, this project benefits the Tampa Bay community by promoting environmental awareness and offering hands-on experience in

habitat restoration. Visit our website at www.tampabaywatch.org for more information about the project.

***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.*

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