



For immediate release
May 12, 2015

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CITGO Sponsors Planting at Largest Wetlands Restoration Site in Tampa Bay

Palmetto, FL - Tampa Bay Watch has recruited 150 volunteers for a salt marsh planting to restore the Rock Ponds on Saturday, May 16, 9am – 12pm in partnership with Southwest Florida Water Management District. The planting project is being sponsored 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.

"Tampa Bay Watch is honored to receive this generous support from CITGO for our community based habitat restoration programs," says Peter Clark, President of Tampa Bay Watch.

Volunteers will plant 10,000 plugs of *Spartina alterniflora*, commonly known as salt marsh along along the shoreline of Piney Point Creek of the Rock Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project. The project site is just south of the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve near Ruskin, which sits just north of the Manatee County line.

"Restoring these natural habitats is an ongoing effort and we are very proud to be a part of it," said Nelson P. Martinez, CITGO President and CEO. "We place great value on our communities and will continue to support initiatives that reflect our commitment to being both a responsible business and a good neighbor."

The Rock Ponds is the largest wetland restoration site in Tampa Bay. The site was historically agriculture fields, shell mining pits, and dominated by non-native and nuisance plant species. The plan is to restore the coastal wetlands by planting salt marsh with the help from schools and community volunteers. 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 habitat populations have declined more than 80% over the past 100 years -- due mostly to the dredging, construction and waste water discharges. 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, or call 727-867-8166.

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