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## **Volunteer Boaters Needed for 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Fishing Line Cleanup**

**St. Petersburg, FL** – The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Fishing Line Cleanup, organized by Tampa Bay Watch and Audubon Florida and sponsored by Sea World Busch Gardens Conservation Fund will take place throughout the week of Saturday, September 23 – Sunday, October 15. Volunteers with boats are being recruited to independently remove tangled fishing line from mangroves and shorelines of specific bird habitat site assignment locations. Advanced registration on [tampabaywatch.org](http://tampabaywatch.org) allows 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 reduces the threat of entanglement for marine animals, including birds. Last year's cleanup resulted in an estimated 22,400 feet of fishing line being removed from the environment by 55 volunteers at over 44 different sites.

Abandoned fishing line is a significant mortality factor in bird colonies. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologists have identified fishing line as the number one killer of 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 are asking for captains and crews to enlist in the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Fishing Line Cleanup and make a difference for Tampa Bay's wildlife."

Registered volunteers are emailed a packet with assigned cleanup locations, equipment, and data sheets. Additionally, volunteers are instructed on how to free entangled live birds they may encounter during the cleanup and given information on local rescue groups that can assist. Visit [tampabaywatch.org](http://tampabaywatch.org) or call (727) 867-8166 x233 for more information on the event.

"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 Scientist.

***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.*

***Audubon Florida** and the **National Audubon Society** are dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Audubon's national network of community-based nature centers 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](http://www.audubon.org) or [fl.audubon.org](http://fl.audubon.org), or call 813-623-6826.*

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**-Photo Opportunity-** Media is welcome to join us at this event to get pictures of the Fishing Line Cleanup. Please contact Melinda Spall at 727.867.8166 x243 [mspall@tampabaywatch.org](mailto:mspall@tampabaywatch.org) or Mark Rachal at 813.623.6826 [mrachal@audubon.org](mailto:mrachal@audubon.org) to schedule a time to get on the water with Tampa Bay Watch or Audubon Florida.