



For immediate release
August 19, 2019

Contact: Rachel Arndt, 727.867.8166 x233
rarndt@tampabaywatch.org

Tampa Bay's Treasure Hunt: The 25th Annual Great Bay Scallop Search is Saturday, August 24

Tierra Verde, FL – Tampa Bay Watch has recruited 40 volunteer boats to participate in the Great Bay Scallop Search on Saturday, August 24. The event is a resource monitoring program where community volunteers snorkel to search for scallops in select areas within Boca Ciega and Lower Tampa Bay. The event has been conducted annually since 1993 with the goal to monitor and document the health and status of the local bay scallop population. Forty volunteer boaters, with more than 200 participants, will search selected sites for the elusive bay scallops.

“We can witness the health of the bay by tracking the number of scallops found each year”, says Peter Clark, President of Tampa Bay Watch. “Every year we hope the number of scallops found increases, which means that water quality and habitat are also improving in our estuary.”

For the seventh year in a row, the SeaWorld Busch Gardens Conservation Fund has not only supported the event financially, but also sent 20-25 employees passionate about the cause to help in the hunt. “The SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund is honored to support Tampa Bay Watch and Restore America’s Estuaries through the Great Bay Scallop Search. We love being able to work so closely with a conservation organization that shares our values of educating and engaging the local community through their citizen science programs focused on studying and protecting Tampa Bay”, states Rob Yordi, Executive Director of SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund.

Some years, volunteers find many scallops and other years they don’t. Factors that may affect the scallop population include water quality, red tide, high rainfall, and storms. An all-time high for the event was 674 scallops, found in 2009. Bay scallops, disappeared from Tampa Bay in the early 1960s when the bay water was highly polluted from dredging operations and industrial and municipal wastes. Tampa Bay’s water quality and seagrass beds have since improved to levels that will once again support the bay scallop population. In fact, the most recent research by scientists with the Southwest Florida Water Management District’s Surface Water Improvement and Management state that Tampa Bay now supports 40,652 acres of seagrass. This continues the success of the previous mapping efforts reported in 2015, supporting the largest amount of seagrass measured since the 1950s.

Reservations are required for the Great Bay Scallop Search. Registered scallop searchers will meet Saturday, August 24 at 9:00 am at the Fort De Soto Boat Ramp in Tierra Verde to receive survey equipment and instructions for the monitoring event. At each site, a weighted transect line 50 meters in length is laid along seagrass beds. Snorkelers count scallops along each side of the transect line, within one meter of each side, creating a 100 square meter survey area.

Bay scallops or *Argopecten irradians* are secretive bivalves in the same family as clams and oysters. They may reach a shell size of three inches, and they spend their short twelve to eighteen month life

span hiding in waters with seagrasses like those of Tampa Bay. Scallops are filter feeders, therefore they are highly sensitive to changes in water quality and can be used to measure an ecosystem's health and signal changes in water quality. Adult bay scallops can pump as much as 15.5 quarts of water per hour, improving water quality resulting in long-term growth of seagrass beds. Although bay scallops are edible, it is illegal to harvest scallops in Tampa Bay in order for restoration efforts to be successful.

Photo opportunities:

Media is welcome to join us at the Scallop Search on Saturday, August 24. Tampa Bay Watch President, Peter Clark, will have a boat available at the Fort De Soto Park boat ramp, 3500 Pinellas Bayway South, Tierra Verde, FL 33715 around 9:15am to transport media for on-water interviews with scallop search participants in the Boca Ciega Bay Aquatic Preserve. Contact Rachel Arndt at 727-867-8166 extension 233 or email at rarndt@tampabaywatch.org for more information or to reserve a spot on the Tampa Bay Watch boat.

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 on upcoming events, or to become a volunteer or member, visit www.tampabaywatch.org, or call 727-867-8166.

###