



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

Tampa Bay Watch's 26th Annual Scallop Search Yields 133 Scallops in Do-it-yourself Format

Tierra Verde, FL – Tampa Bay Watch recently held their annual [Great Bay Scallop Search](#), but participants conducted the survey on their own this year in order to allow for safe social distancing. Thirty-six teams of volunteer boaters and kayakers snorkeled in Lower Tampa Bay finding a grand total of 133 scallops throughout August 15 - 23. This year's total is the highest since 2015 despite the torrential rains prior to the event which affected the total count. Additionally, many participants commented on poor visibility and seeing many fresh half shells of recently expired scallops.

Bart Valdes' team found the most scallops with 42. Mr. Valdes states, "My family and I had a great day on the water finding 42 scallops which was a record for us. I appreciate that the event was still able to take place in a safe way and am happy to support the mission of Tampa Bay Watch."

The Scallop Search 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."

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.

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.

A special thanks to our sponsors SeaWorld Busch Gardens Conservation Fund and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program who supported the event.

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.

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