

Fall 2021 Issue

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Declining Seagrasses in Tampa Bay

TEN-YEAR LOW RECORDED

Scientists with the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) recently released the results of their 2020 seagrass mapping study showing that between 2018 and 2020, Tampa Bay has lost approximately 16% of our seagrass habitat for a total that is a **10-year low of 34,297 acres**. It is believed that this could be the result of a wetter rainfall pattern that we have seen over the last couple of years that is resulting in the greater availability of nutrients in the bay which has caused some die-offs. Another cause is a greater abundance of attached algae which can be out-competing seagrass.

Seagrass has many benefits to Tampa Bay: it is a vital nursery habitat for marine animal, it helps stabilize shifting sands on the bottom of the bay; and it improves water clarity by trapping fine sediments and particles.

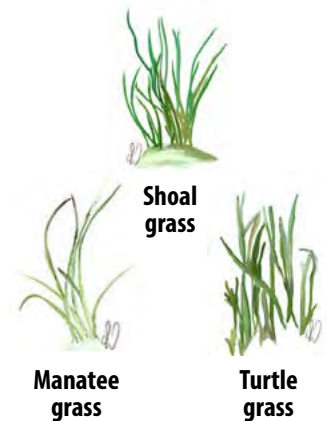
Documenting the extent of seagrass and how it changes overtime is a valuable tool for scientists throughout Florida as seagrasses

are an important barometer of a bay's health because they require relatively clean water to flourish, thus they are sensitive to changes in water clarity and quality.

What can you do to help?

- Consider native plants instead of grass. Ask yourself which is more important: a green lawn, or a blue Tampa Bay?
- Volunteer and/or support Tampa Bay Watch.
- Contact your elected officials at the local and state level (city council representatives, congressional representatives) and ask them to commit to stronger water quality protections, to support continued monitoring, and to fund emergency cleanup efforts.
- Follow county ordinances of summertime fertilizer bans.

Main image credit: NOAA



Did you know . . .

Here in Tampa Bay, three species of seagrasses make up the majority of our habitats: turtle grass, shoal grass, and manatee grass. These three species are sometimes found mixed together within one area, but typically they compete with each other and are forced to grow in certain areas and depths.



Dwayne Virgint, Tampa Bay Watch CEO

Organizational Updates

Tampa Bay Watch is excited to announce changes to its executive leadership staff. Dwayne Virgint has been promoted to the CEO position and will be responsible for overall organizational leadership and implementation of strategic direction for Tampa Bay Watch.

As CEO, Mr. Virgint looks forward to addressing the growth and demands of the operation, as the organization has more than doubled in size over the last year.

Peter Clark will continue as president and founder of Tampa Bay Watch with a new focus on major development activities, community outreach, and bay restoration initiatives for Tampa Bay Watch.

“Tampa Bay Watch has grown tremendously over time, requiring that our organization evolve in order to address the current and future demands of restoring and protecting the Tampa Bay estuary,” said Clark. “Providing operational and strategic leadership, Dwayne will be able to help take our organization to the next level, and together our goal will be to ensure its environmental and community impact for the next 100 years.”

Corporate Members Demonstrate Environmental Citizenship

Tampa Bay Watch corporate members are active partners in our efforts to protect and restore the unique Tampa Bay estuary. To become a corporate member, Email Michelle Yopez at myopez@tampabaywatch.org or call 727-867-8166, x249.



Current corporate members:

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 4 th Street Family Dentistry | Ferman Auto | Resort Realty |
| 400 Beach Seafood & Tap House | Florida Info Guide | S.A.L.T. Payroll Consultants Inc. |
| Affinity CPA | Florida Pure Sea Salt | Sabal Trust |
| Alden Suites | General Dynamics | SaltyScales |
| American Strategic Insurance | Go Black Fin | Sand Dunes Beach Services |
| Amuni Financial, Inc | Grand Central Brewhouse | Saunders & Walker, P.A |
| Argos USA LLC | Great Bay Distributors | Southern Pension Services |
| ARS Wealth Advisors | Greenacre Properties, Inc. | Southpoint Financial Services |
| Baldwin Krystyn Sherman Partners | Gulf Eagle Supply | St. Petersburg Distillery |
| Bloomin' Brands | Healthcare IQ | Sweetwater Brewing Co. |
| Calhoun International | Holehouse Insurance | Tampa Bay Parrot Heads |
| Carmelita's Rum | Honest1 Auto Care | Tampa Bay Pilots Association |
| Catalina Marketing | Jabil | Tampa Bay Rays |
| COMANCO Environmental Corp | Kahuna's | Tampa Bay Yacht Management |
| Cooper's Hawk Winery | Kahwa Coffee | TECO Energy |
| Coppertail Brewing Company | Kennedy Investments / DAK Corporation | Tennant Special Risk |
| Courtesy Valet | Konica | TJM Properties |
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| Directed Capital | Limelight Photography | TruGreen Commercial |
| Diversified Telecom Services, Inc. | McNichols Company | Wilcox Nursery & Landscape |
| The Don CeSar | Mosaic | Wireless Time Partners |
| Drift Local | Mullen Corporation | Wiss |
| DSK Law | Paradise News | WRB Enterprises |
| Electric Supply, Inc. | Paradigm Learning | Xenegrade |
| Elite Watersports | Pascia & Pascia Dentistry | |
| FairWarning | Paul J. Skipper Inc | |
| | Phoenix Venture Philanthropy Foundation | |
| | Reef Innovations, Inc. | |

Featured Corporate Member: HH Insurance

HH Insurance is the premier provider of personal and small business insurance in Florida. HH Insurance is supporting Tampa Bay Watch by making a donation for each new policy written, and their generous partnership supports the restoration of critical lost oyster habitat in the Tampa Bay estuary.



Manatee

TRICHECHUS MANATUS

LENGTH: 9-10 feet | **WEIGHT:** up to 1,200 pounds

BEHAVIOR: Feasting on seagrass, resting, and traveling throughout the estuary.

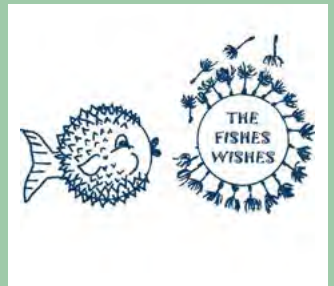
Our staff has been delighted to see manatees recently at our Marine Education Center in Tierra Verde! The manatee's closest relatives are the elephant and the hyrax which is a small, gopher-sized mammal. *Source: savethemanatee.org and Smithsonian Magazine*



Habitat restoration projects return!

FALL VOLUNTEER SCHEDULE REOPENS

We're excited that our habitat restoration projects are back this fall and open for volunteer registration! There are plenty of opportunities to participate through oyster reef ball construction and installation, oyster shell bar creation, native plantings, cleanups, and more. Visit tampabaywatch.org to sign up to help us restore the bay!



Fishes Wishes

Our sincerest thanks to Ryan Moralevitz, an amazing 14-year-old young man who has raised over \$3,000 for Tampa Bay Watch this fall through his organization, *The Fishes Wishes*. Ryan said he "chose to fundraise for Tampa Bay Watch because the organization works so hard to keep our local waterways clean and thriving."

Ryan is celebrating his tenth year of helping the ocean through awareness, hands-on projects, and fundraising.





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OUR MISSION:

Tampa Bay Watch is dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Tampa Bay estuary through scientific and educational programs.



Thank you to **George and Isabel Adams** for their sponsorship of the Bay Watch Log!

M.V. Discovery is officially christened!

NEW ECO-TOUR VESSEL UP AND RUNNING AT THE ST. PETE PIER



Our generous sponsors, board members, and staff recently christened the *M.V. Discovery*, our new 45-foot USCG-certified catamaran at the St. Pete Pier!

This eco-vessel provides on-the-water family-friendly public eco-tours and school field trips every day, four times a day, seven days a week.

Eco-tours explore Tampa Bay history and the marine life to be found in and above the bay.

Activities include a fisheries trawl, bird spotting and identifying specific traits, and dolphin and manatee identification and behaviors, all while enjoying a relaxing bay cruise.

Visit the Tampa Bay Watch Discovery Center at the St. Pete Pier to book your tickets, or visit tbwdiscoverycenter.org.

The Bay Watch Log is a quarterly newsletter designed to inform and educate the volunteers, members, partners, and sponsors of Tampa Bay Watch about environmental events, restoration opportunities, agency activities, and other environmental stewardship information.

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