

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This is a Boating and Angling Guide to the resources of the Sarasota County inshore waters. The maps show both natural and human-made features of the waterway environment. Images and text offer more information on native habitats, common inshore fish, protected species, boating regulations and recreational opportunities. The guide includes a marine map of Sarasota County waterways that depicts main channels, seagrasses, boating speed zones, anchorages, artificial reefs, aquatic preserves, fishing piers, parks, marinas, and boat ramps that are open to the public. It also features information about bay habitats and animals, popular sport fish, boating safety and protocol, and a resource directory. This guide should not be used for navigation.

This guide provides useful information for boaters using Sarasota County waters. It also provides vital information to educate boaters about responsible use of the waterways and protection of natural resources. We hope that you will enjoy your time spent boating in Sarasota County and will carefully operate your vessel.

The *Boating and Angling Guide to Sarasota County* was produced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (<http://research.myfwc.com>) and Sarasota County Government (www.sarasota.org). We welcome your comments and inquiries. Contact the following agencies, or visit <http://research.myfwc.com>.

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
100 Eighth Avenue S.E.
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
(727) 896-8626

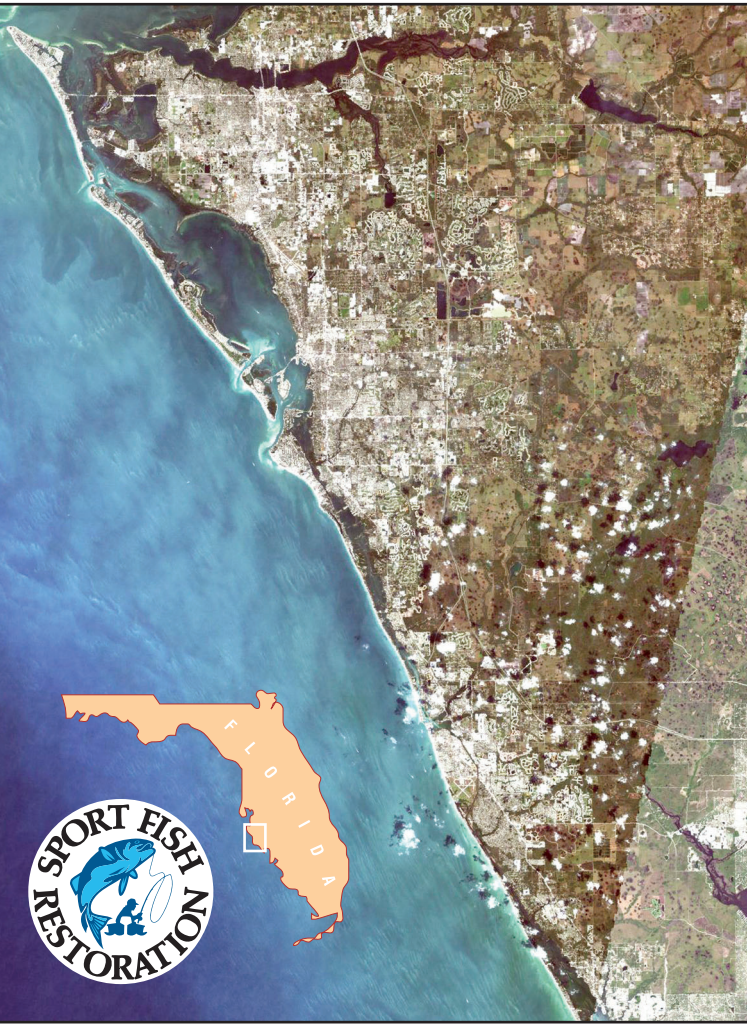
Sarasota County Natural Resources
2817 Cattlemen Road
Sarasota, FL 34232
(941) 861-6230

The producers extend special thanks to the following organizations for their contributions to this guide:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration Program
Southwest Florida Water Management District
U.S. Coast Guard
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Florida Sea Grant
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Sarasota Bay Estuary Program
Sarasota Audubon Society
Sarasota Convention and Visitor's Bureau

NOT FOR RESALE
2004

BOATING AND ANGLING GUIDE TO

Sarasota County



RESOURCE DIRECTORY

BoatU.S. Foundation Hotline 1-800-336-BOAT
Sarasota Power Squadron 941-388-3532
For information on boating skills and safety courses offered locally

County Cooperative Extension Service 941-861-9800
Provides scientific knowledge related to agricultural, human, and natural resources

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission 1-888-404-3922
Law Enforcement

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute 727-896-8626
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
For information about Florida's fish and wildlife resources and research

Hart's Landing 941-366-TIDE
24-hour hotline for the latest tides and fishing information

Note Marine Laboratory 941-388-4441
For assistance with injured marine mammals or sea turtles. A private, non-profit marine research and education facility including an aquarium open to the public

National Marine Fisheries Service 727-570-5301
Southeast Regional Office
Responsible for managing marine fisheries in federal waters

NOAA Weather Service Broadcast 813-645-2506
24-hour weather and marine forecast

Pelican Man Bird Sanctuary 941-388-4444
Provides assistance with, and operates a bird sanctuary for, injured seabirds

Sarasota Audubon Society 941-364-9212
For information on the Roberts Bay Bird Colony or to get a copy of "Birding Hotspots" www.sarasota-audubon.org

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program 941-955-6085
Working to implement a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Sarasota Bay

Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau 1-800-522-9799
941-957-1877
For information on attractions, amenities and events in Sarasota County

Sarasota County Government 941-861-6230
Natural Resources—Coastal Resources Unit 941-861-6113
Natural Resources—Resource Protection Unit 941-373-7894
Parks and Recreation—Beaches and Natural Areas 941-861-5800
Sarasota County Sheriff's Office, Main Switchboard

Sea Grant Marine Extension Agent 941-722-4524
For educational information about Florida's coastal zone and marine resources

U.S. Coast Guard 941-794-1261
VHF Channel 16; Emergency Call "CG" Non-emergency 941-794-1867
U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Hotline 1-800-368-5647
For answers to boating safety questions and to report safety defects

West Coast Inland Navigation District 941-485-9402
For information on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway

WELCOME TO

Sarasota County

Sarasota County is a subtropical coastal community that offers the resources and amenities of a metropolitan community and also offers access to quality natural areas and recreation. Sarasota is located on the southwest gulf coast of Florida between Tampa and Fort Myers. Sarasota County waterways cover over 50 square miles, 211 miles of which are bay shoreline. These waters offer quality recreational opportunities for pleasure boating and fishing, as well as associated activities like birding and swimming.

Estuaries like Sarasota Bay, where salt water from the sea meets and mixes with fresh water from rivers and uplands, are nurseries for young fish, shrimp, and crabs. Over 70 percent of all fish, shellfish, and crustaceans spend some critical stage of development in these nearshore waters, protected from larger predators that swim the open sea.

Wildlife abounds along our shores. The coastal waters of Sarasota County are home to a variety of marine life, including bottlenose dolphin, loggerhead turtles, and West Indian manatees. A wide variety of shorebirds, such as the familiar Brown Pelican and the majestic Great Egret, are year-round residents. Others, including sandpipers and White Pelicans, are seasonal visitors.

Sarasota County offers enjoyable activities for everyone. Anglers will find an array of game fish and crustaceans within the bays and in the Gulf of Mexico, especially at the county's numerous artificial reefs. Outdoor enthusiasts can find numerous nature-based recreational opportunities in county parks and preserve lands. Sarasota County waterways provide ample opportunities for swimming and sunbathing on award-winning beaches, diving on numerous artificial reefs, boating on bay and gulf waters, and canoeing and kayaking. Adjacent to the waterways are shopping areas, restaurants, cultural events, galleries, and nighttime entertainment.

While the county is an interesting and exciting place to enjoy yourself, the coastal habitat is an important and sensitive natural area that requires protection. By boating safely and with greater awareness of the natural environment, you can help protect Sarasota County waterways and the wildlife that depend on these waters for survival.

HABITATS

Sarasota County waterways encompass a rich mosaic of fish and wildlife habitats that form life-sustaining links in an ecosystem as biologically productive as some of the world's most celebrated rain forests. From coastal mangroves and marshes to underwater meadows of seagrass, from Sarasota Bay to the salty mouth of the Gulf of Mexico, each interdependent habitat plays a vital role in this "Estuarine Machine."

Waterway habitats supply food and shelter for creatures as diverse as the Great Blue Heron and the spiny sea urchin. Seagrasses and mangroves, most notable among these habitats, contribute significantly to a dynamic food chain that draws nutrients from the bay floor. As seagrass and mangrove leaves decay, they provide food for small creatures that are ultimately consumed by fish and larger predators in an endless cycle of life.

OYSTER BARS

In their grayish-white, irregularly shaped shells, immobile oysters filter water as they feed. Live oysters and empty oyster shells form mounds on the bay floor, creating bars and reefs. Oyster bars, most prevalent near river mouths and sections of the bay that receive a steady diet of fresh water, are popular fishing spots that attract adult snook and redfish. Exercise caution in these areas. Oyster bars may severely damage boat hulls, and the shells' sharp edges are also treacherous for people on foot.

Florida regulates shell harvesting. For information on seasonal closures and size and bag limits, contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Division of Law Enforcement at 1-888-404-3922.

SALT MARSHES AND MUD FLATS

A rare habitat in Sarasota County, salt marshes, composed of salt-tolerant rushes, sedges, and grasses, occur along the shorelines of estuaries where wave action is minimal. These marshes, which periodically become submerged, nourish and

protect many fish and animal species. They also buffer upland areas from storms and help filter pollutants that run off the land. Mud flats around the bay's fringe are exposed at low tide. Although these flats are barren of visible vegetation, they are teeming with life. Fiddler crabs, clams, and worms, which burrow in the mud, supply a veritable feast for birds wading at low tide.

MANGROVES

Mangroves are tropical trees that thrive in salty environments along the water's edge. Like seagrasses, they provide food and cover for a vast array of small fish and animals. Their roots anchor shorelines, and their branches serve as nesting sites for a wide variety of birds. Shoreline development (i.e., dredge-and-fill activities, seawalls) has eradicated nearly half of the mangroves that once ringed Sarasota County waterways.

Loss of important mangrove habitat has contributed to a decline in fisheries throughout the area. To protect mangroves, local and state regulations restrict pruning and removal. Consult with the County Resource Protection unit before trimming mangroves.

Several species of mangroves are common in Sarasota County waterways. Red Mangroves are easily distinguished by their tangled reddish roots that branch out over the water. Mounds of oysters frequently colonize their base. Black Mangroves feature numerous pneumatophores, finger-like projections that surround the base of the tree. White Mangroves, which often occupy the highest elevations of the three species, have no visible aerial root system. Burtonwood Mangroves are also present in Sarasota County.

Many conservation and preservation areas exist along Sarasota County's shoreline. Please consult the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, at 813-744-6100, before trimming mangroves. For mangroves in conservation or preservation areas, please consult the county's Resource Protection unit at 941-861-6113.

SEAGRASSES

Seagrasses are flowering underwater plants found at shallow depths in protected bays and lagoons and in patches along the continental shelf of the Gulf of Mexico. The seagrass habitat is perhaps the most important of our bays. As a nursery environment, seagrasses support small fish, shrimp, and crabs that hide among the blades and feed on decaying leaves. Manatees also rely on seagrasses as a food source. Seagrasses help stabilize shifting sands on the bottom of the bay and improve water clarity by trapping fine sediments and particles.

Once plentiful, seagrass beds have declined significantly from their original acreage in Sarasota County waterways. These losses can be attributed to historical dredge-and-fill activities and declines in water quality. In addition, damage from motorboats is severe in areas as

boats carve through shallow grass flats, their propellers cutting sandy trenches that may remain barren up to 15 years.

Over the past 20 years, seagrass beds have begun increasing in the county. You can help maintain this growth and preserve the existing seagrass habitats in Sarasota County waterways.

- Stay within marked channels.
- Avoid shallow grass beds.
- If you run aground or enter grass flats to fish, stop your motor, tilt it up, and pole or push your boat through.
- Wear polarized glasses to reduce glare on the water so you can see shallow areas.

TAKE CARE OF SARASOTA COUNTY WATERWAYS

Residents and visitors share Sarasota County's waters and coastal beaches with a magnificent array of birds and marine animals, including species that are threatened or endangered. Boaters should be on the lookout for these creatures and take special care to protect them and to preserve their habitats. As a boater, you can also protect the waterways by following a few guidelines:

- Always stow your trash carefully for disposal on shore, and make it a habit to pick up plastics and other marine debris encountered while boating. Carelessly discarded trash can trap and kill birds, fish, and other marine animals.
- Properly collect and dispose of fishing line and hooks.
- When fueling your boat, be especially careful not to "top off" your tank, which can allow gas to spill over the tank and into the water. Small toxic spills can add up quickly.
- Discard sewage from holding tanks only at approved pump-out stations and marinas. A partial listing of pump-out facilities is provided in the *Boating and Angling Guide* marina listing. All state-designated "Clean Marinas" have pump-out facilities.

BOATER'S TIPS

For information on public boating safety, seamanship, and navigation courses offered by U.S. Power Squadrons and U.S. Coast Guard auxiliaries in the Sarasota County area, call BoatU.S. toll-free at 1-800-336-BOAT. An operator will provide up-to-date information on course schedules, local contacts, and course times and locations.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary offers a free boat inspection to advise boaters of state and federal safety requirements. Violations found during these courtesy exams will not be reported to authorities.

POPULAR SPORT FISH

Name and Habitat	Location	Fishing Tips
FLOUNDER —Channel edges on sandy bottoms, near tidal passes and docks	City Island flats, Ringling Causeway, Tony Sapirto Pier, Middleground (flats north of New Pass), Big Pass	Use live shrimp, sand fleas, sardines, pinfish, or jigs bounced along bottom as you drift.
REDFISH (RED DRUM) —Near docks and pilings, deeper holes and channels during warmest and coolest months; around grass beds and oyster bars	City Island flats, New Pass Bridge, Ringling flats, San Remo Basin, Roberts Bay (north of Phillippi Creek)	Use live shrimp fished on bottom or free-lined; use soft-bodied jigs bounced slowly on bottom, or use small silver spoons.
SHEEPSHEAD —Near bridges, docks, seawalls, pilings, and artificial reefs	Ringling Causeway, Tony Sapirto Pier, New Pass Bridge, San Remo Basin, Roberts Bay docks (Siesta Key)	Use live shrimp, sand fleas, or hermit or fiddler crabs on small hook. Fish just off bottom. On first tug, lower the rod, then strike hard. Skin fish before eating them.
SNOOK —Canals, tidal creeks, and other deep, warm waters in cool months; near tidal passes and mangrove fringe at high tide	Phillippi Creek (cold weather), New Pass Bridge (warm months), San Remo Basin, mouth of Alligator and Forked creeks	Use live pinfish, small mullet, shrimp, or sardines free-lined or fished with a bobber, or use jigs and minnow-like lures. Beware of snook's razor-sharp gills.
SPOTTED SEATROUT —Seagrass beds when water temperatures are moderate and deeper waters adjacent to beds during warmest and coolest months	Bird Key flats, Marina Jack flats, South Lido Park, City Island flats, Little Sarasota Bay grassflats, and Lemon Bay shorelines	Use live shrimp or pigfish (grunts) fished near bottom by free-lining or under a popping bobber, or use soft-bodied and fish-like lures. Cast with jigs or surface plugs as you drift.

Go to www.myfwc.com, or contact FWC Law Enforcement for license requirements and information on size and bag limits and seasonal closures.



The Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program (MRRP) is a statewide effort to educate the public on the problems caused by monofilament line left in the environment, to encourage recycling through a network of line-recycling bins and drop-off locations, and to conduct volunteer monofilament line clean-up events. Outdoor recycling bins constructed of PVC are mounted at many piers, boat ramps, and marinas throughout the state. Indoor recycling bins are hosted by tackle shops and department stores.

Commit yourself to ethical angling. The future of your sport depends on it!

- Help fish stocks increase through catch-and-release.
- Limit your take and vary your target.
- Observe regulations and report violations.
- Only keep fish for food.
- Share what you know to help the sport grow.

