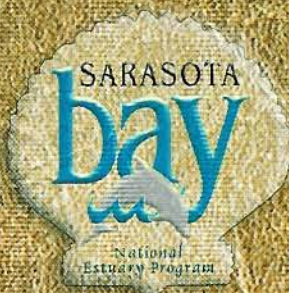


A Chronicle of Florida's Gulf Coast



The Sarasota Bay
National Estuary
Program is dedicated
to improving and

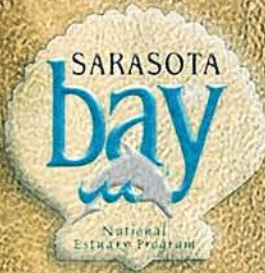


protecting the area's
greatest and most
important natural asset
— Sarasota Bay.



This document is presented by the Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program (SBNEP) to develop a spirit of stewardship and an appreciation of the assets and natural treasures of the area. Congress established the National Estuary Program (NEP) through the Clean Water Act Amendments of 1987 in recognition of the importance of preserving and enhancing coastal environments. In 1989, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated Sarasota Bay as an estuary of national significance. The SBNEP is one of 28 National Estuary Programs in the nation.

Five staff coordinate and facilitate program objectives, manage projects, and support community outreach activities.



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*A Chronicle
of
Florida's Gulf Coast*

Nature, History, Culture, Recreation

*A Project of the
Sarasota Bay National
Estuary Program*



Mark Alderson – Executive Director

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Design & Illustrations by Patti & Tom Cross*

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Prepared & Edited by:
Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program
Mark Alderson, Director
Diane Murray, Public Affairs Director
Dr. Kurt Gustafson, Scientist

Art Production & Illustrations by:
Patti Cross & Tom Cross
of Tom Cross Inc.

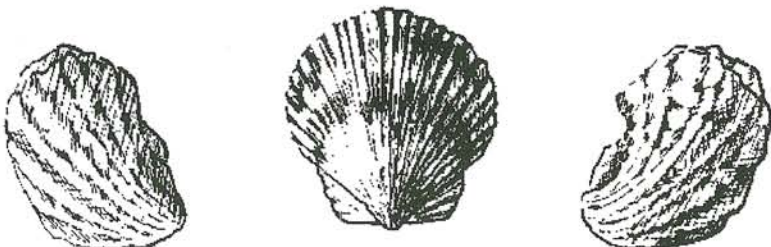
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Gulf Coast Heritage Trail development: Jaime Doubek-Racine
Project Assistant: Matt Osterhoudt

Special thanks to the Gulf Coast Heritage Trail Advisory Committee:

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Joe Cooley | Roxanne Williamson | Alisa Bennet |
| Jaime Doubek-Racine | John Stevely | Dave Davis |
| Jack Brown | Dr. Gus Antonini | Don Galloway |
| George Mendez | Cathy Slusser | Joan Abrahamson-Voyles |
| Charlie Hunsicker | Ann Shank | Mark Bierner |
| Maggie Marr | Larry White | MaJunta Bulovic |
| Vivian Roe | Monica Luff | Patricia Caswell |
| Greg Fagan | Kevin Lawler | John van Zandt |
| John McCarthy | John Evans | Ken Natoli |

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| Paul Roat | | |

Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program Policy Committee:

Mollie Cardamone, Sarasota City Commission
Rebecca Eger, Manasota Basin Board, SW Florida Water Management District
Deborah Getzoff, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (Replacing Rick Garrity)
Pat Glass, Manatee County Commission
Mike McGhee, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Nora Patterson, Sarasota County Commission (Replacing Shannon Staub)

Management Committee:

David Sollenberger, City of Sarasota
Mark Hammond, Surface Water Improvement (SWIM)
Charlie Hunsicker, Manatee County Planning
Jim Ley, Sarasota County Administration
Gary Comp, Department of Natural Resources
Annon Bozeman, Army Corps of Engineers
John Stevely, Florida Sea Grant
Tom Olds, Jr., U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Felicia Robinson, U.S. EPA, Region IV
Roger Lutz, City of Holmes Beach
George Henderson, Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI)
Jon Thaxton

Editing Assistance:

Paul Roat

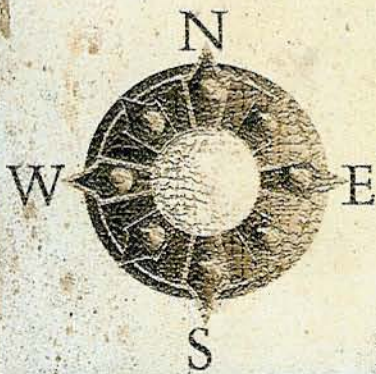


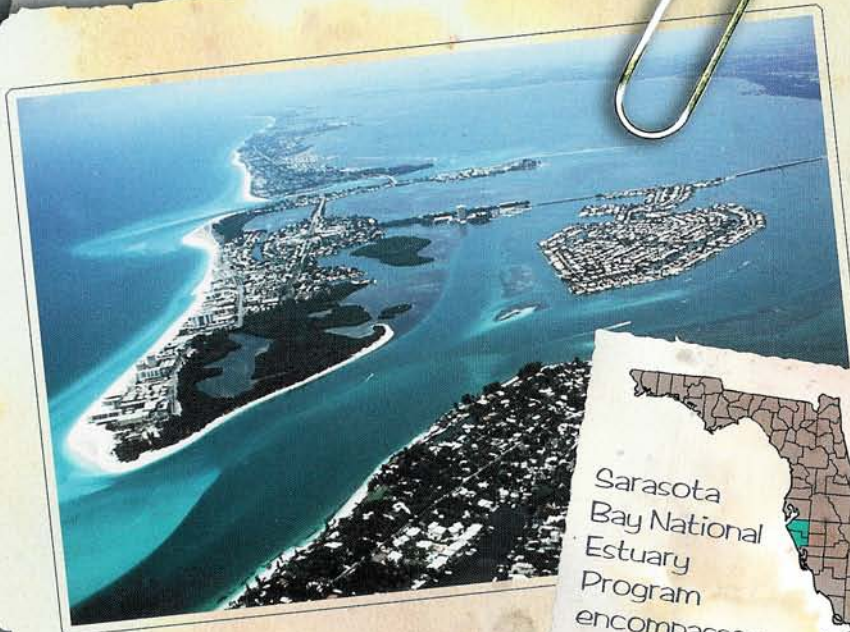
Stand on the beach and look to sea.
You will see creatures as strange
as the trees and plants - the rare
and lonely manatee, the great sea
turtles, the slowly turning dolphin,
the flashing tarpon and the king.
Then the old tales begin to take
shape, tales of Spanish cavaliers, and
smuggled drugs and Chinamen, of
the wrecks when bitter lash of the
northwester has struck the coast.
The sun is setting. Look about you.
The saying goes that if you once
get the sand of the Coast in your
shoes, you will itch forever after
with the longing to return to bury
your toes in the sand of this shore,
to smell its morning winds, and gaze
at its high blue sky.

-The Mangrove Coast
Karl Bickel
© 1989, Omni Print Media Inc.

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Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program encompasses Sarasota and Manatee counties.

About the Bay

The Gulf Coast of Florida is a tropical paradise best known for its aquamarine waters and white sandy beaches. The area features outstanding fishing, boating and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Located on the Southwest Coast of Florida, The region encompasses numerous bays and rivers and is bordered by aquatic preserves, extending from Terra Ceia Bay to the north and Lemon Bay to the south. The crown jewel of the area, Sarasota Bay, is a small, subtropical estuary currently classified as an Outstanding Florida Water and an Estuary of National Significance.



The Sarasota Bay region is home to a wide variety of marine life, including: Dolphins, Manatees, Black Mullet, Red Drum, Spotted seatrout, Snook, Blue Crab, Stone Crab and Bait Shrimp. The endangered West Indian Manatees occupy Sarasota Bay during most months, and the large Bottlenose Dolphin population, which is largely comprised of permanent residents, calls Sarasota Bay home year round. In addition, the Gulf beaches along the bay's barrier islands support Loggerhead Turtles and their annual nesting activities. In 1998, more than 4,538 nests of loggerhead turtles were documented for the region.

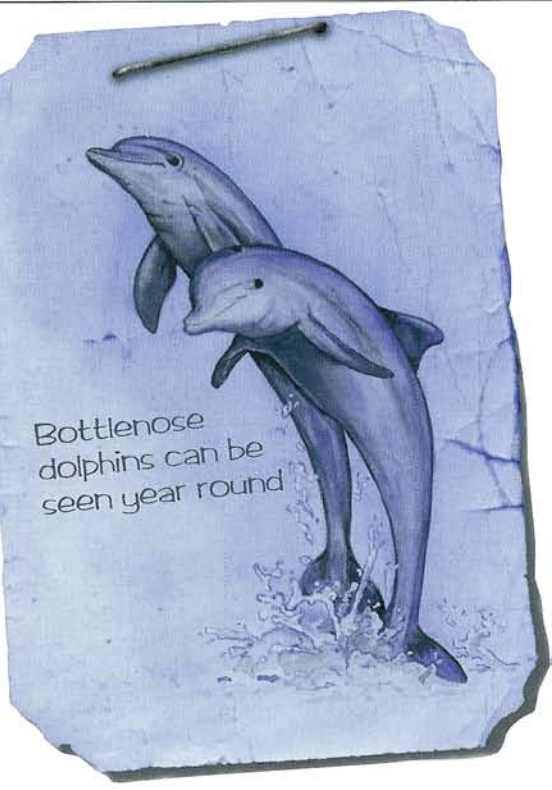


West Indian Manatees call Sarasota Bay their home.

An estuary is a coastal area where fresh water from rivers and streams mixes with saltwater from the ocean. Also known as “cradles of the sea”, estuaries provide important spawning grounds and nurseries for at least two-thirds of the nation’s fisheries. The area affords tremendous recreational fishing opportunities.

The Gulf Coast of Florida is also known as the Mangrove Coast. Historically, mangroves, sea oats, sea grapes, palmettos and cedars dominated the lands that lie along the miles and miles of white sandy beaches that make up the Gulf Coast. Healthy wetlands and mangroves (integral components of the estuary ecosystem) provide a number of essential benefits to Sarasota Bay. These habitats provide food and shelter for baylife, filter sediments and pollution and help to protect shorelines from erosion.

During the past 50 years, development has caused a decline in the quantity and quality of Sarasota Bay’s wetlands. You can learn more about the importance of these vital wetland habitats, and what you can do to help, at one of the many wetland restora-

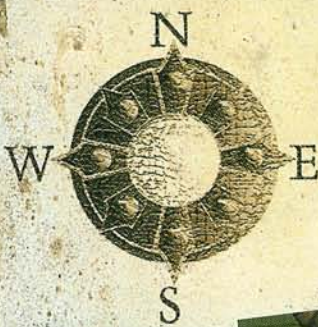


tion sites located on the Gulf Coast Heritage Trail. Each site offers boardwalks, nature trails, educational signage and brochures. Visit the Coquina BayWalk at Leffis Key, Joan M. Durante Park, Quick Point Nature Preserve, Sarasota BayWalk, Bayfront BayWalk and Selby Gardens Shoreline Restoration Project.

Enjoy the view of Sarasota Bay at the Coquina BayWalk at Leffis Key.



White Pelicans at Cortez in winter.



The system will link the areas cultural, natural and historical resources promoting a sense of place, enhancing stewardship and ecotourism for the region.

Mapping exercise at the 1997 Heritage Community Forums.





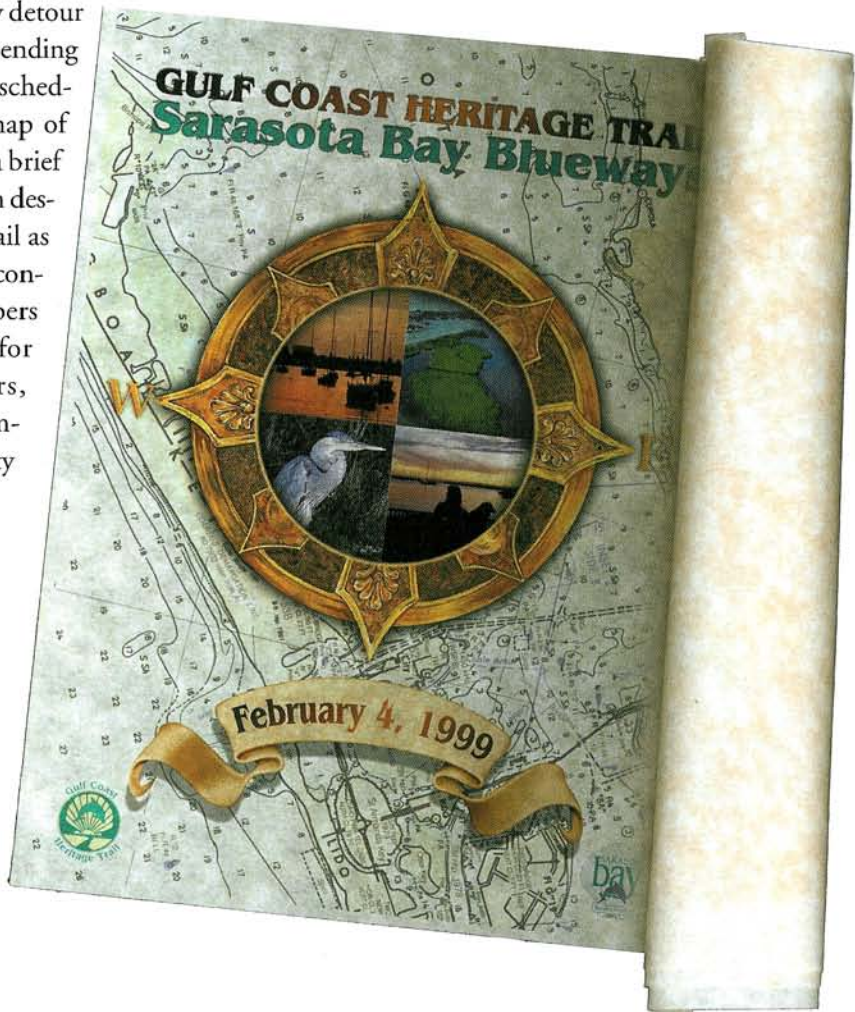
About the Gulf Coast Heritage Trail

The Gulf Coast Heritage Trail (GCHT) is an auto tour route that integrates Sarasota and Manatee County's environmental, cultural, and historical points of interest through a color-coding system. There are 117 possible destinations to visit along this scenic vehicular route. Museums, visitor centers, art and cultural locations present many educational and recreational opportunities and are complimented by locations that offer nature walks and scenic trails, wildlife viewing sites, bicycling through natural areas, and kayak and canoe aquatic trails.

Because it would be difficult to travel the GCHT in a day, the route has been segmented into three areas, North, Central, and South. Each loop can be followed closely or one may detour to nearby sites depending on the traveler's schedule. A fold-out map of the trail includes a brief description of each destination on the trail as well as important contact phone numbers including those for visitor centers, chambers of commerce, and county and state parks.

Road signs have been installed along local, county, and state roads with arrows directing traffic to the GCHT destinations. Each of the 80 signs is clearly marked with the Gulf Coast Heritage Trail logo above easy-to-read directional arrows. By following road signs and with the map in hand, even the most novice explorer can visit all 117 points of interest proficiently.

The "Gulf Coast Heritage Trail Brochure" is a companion document to the "Blueways Guide" and "Chronicles of Florida's Gulf Coast." These publications offer additional information to Southwest Florida's ecology and marine environments.





Map of Southern Florida, 1885.

A Little Bit Of History

The rich heritage of Manatee and Sarasota counties centers around the Manatee River and Sarasota Bay. Burial, midden, and temple mounds located along the river banks and bay shore have provided evidence of human habitation 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. Over the centuries, waterfront locations continued to attract inhabitants. When settlers first arrived in the 1840s, Florida was not yet a state. The territory was populated by scattered fishermen who came from Cuba and established fishing camps called ranchos on the coast for use primarily during the fishing season. Seminole Indians, though restricted by the federal government to interior lands, mingled with the new arrivals.

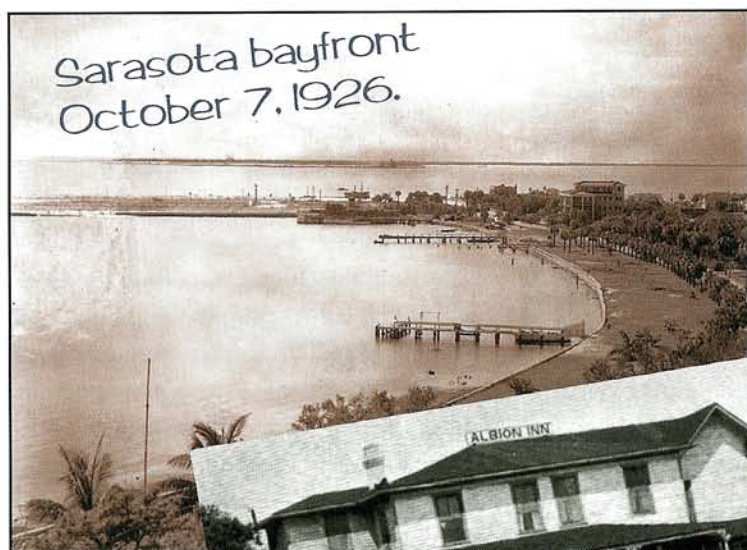
At its founding in 1855, Manatee County consisted of 5,000 square miles and extended from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Okeechobee and from Tampa Bay to Charlotte Harbor. In the 1870s, the notion of Sarasota Bay as a place for recreation originated. By that time the Webbs (early area homesteaders) were advertising the Webb Resort Hotel at Osprey and seasonal visitors began visiting the local bay area. A variety of schooners, some built locally, were used in the bays. In the early 1920s, all of Florida experienced a period of rapid growth. Within the first five years of that decade, the area's population more than tripled, and Sarasota County broke away from Manatee.



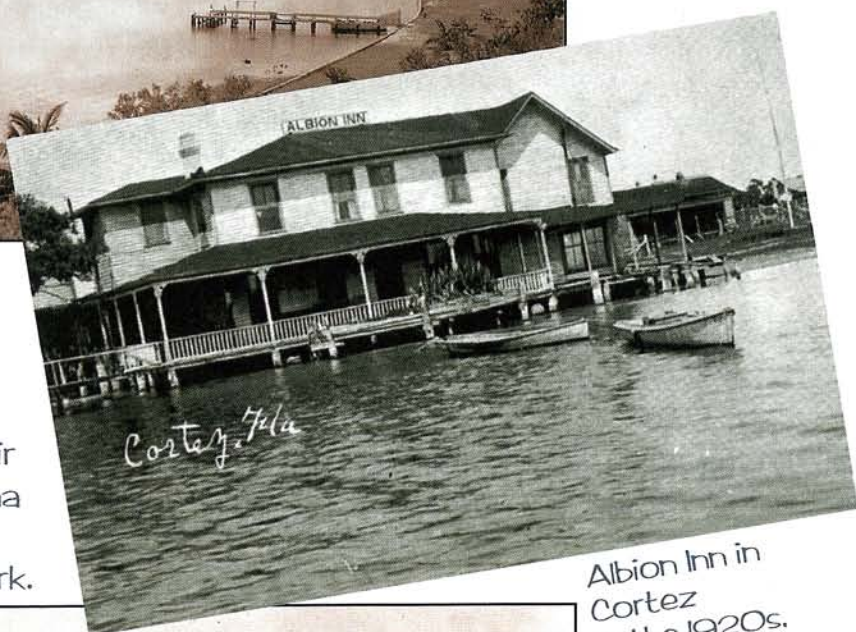
Beachcombers on Anna Maria Island in the early 1900s.

Always important industries— agriculture and fishing— eased the counties through the depression of the 1930s.

The region experienced a population explosion after World War II, with the accompanying growth in industry, shopping centers, schools and tourist attractions and accommodations. As they did decades ago, the scenic and bountiful waters of Manatee and Sarasota still draw new residents and visitors to its beautiful shores.



Sarasota bayfront
October 7, 1926.



Cortez, Fla

Cortez fishermen pulling in their nets off Anna Maria in Bayfront Park.



Albion Inn in Cortez in the 1920s. a popular winter resort. It is now the site of a Coast Guard station.



Culture



The Gulf Coast Heritage Trail offers an array of cultural attractions, which range from visual and performing arts and nationally famous museums to internationally renowned festivals. Home to many writers, artists and patrons, Manatee and Sarasota counties present a year-round festival of the arts. Among the riches from which visitors may choose are productions on 12 theatrical stages, including six professional theater companies and three dinner theaters. At the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall (designed by Frank Lloyd Wright Associates), you can see a full season of artistic performances. Music lovers can select from among a symphony orchestra, an opera company, choral groups, smaller orchestras, concert bands and numerous jazz ensembles. The region's cultural community also offers outstanding ballet and ballroom dance companies. Visual arts are enhanced by six community arts organizations, four college galleries and nearly 50 commercial art galleries. A world-class collection of Baroque art along with a Circus Museum and Venetian-styled mansion are part of the Ringling Museum, a gift of John and Mable Ringling to the people of Florida. Other sites and museums such



Sarasota Opera House
in the 1920's and today.



Van Wezel
Performing Arts Hall.



Crosley Museum.

as the Crosley Museum and De Soto National Memorial educate visitors about the area's history. Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium is a renowned marine research and educational facility with exhibits featuring sharks, manatees, sea turtles and other marine life that inhabit nearby coastal waters. The South Florida Museum triplex showcases Florida from the stone age to the space age, and also offers a planetarium and manatee aquarium. Many local towns and cities within the region celebrate with art fairs and annual festivals. The Gulf Coast cultural heritage is further heralded by a Confederate reenactment, a colorful parade, a historic fishing village celebration in the Village of Cortez, and Spanish Conquistador-themed events. Other options that draw enthusiastic audiences include film, jazz, new plays and chamber music, plus a six-month-long repertory theater festival. It is from all over the United States—as well as from many other parts of the world—that visitors and residents have traveled, each adding to and enjoying the cultural richness of this region.



Gamble
Plantation.

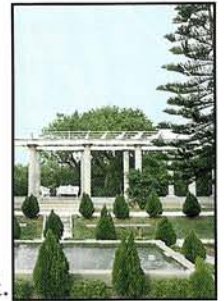
Manatee
County Arts
Fest 1998.



Ca' d'Zan.



Heritage Park.



Spanish Point.



De Soto National Memorial.



Manatee Village
Historical Park.



Estuarine Habitats

Estuaries, where fresh water from rivers and creeks mixes with saltwater from the sea, are also known as “cradles of the sea.” Estuaries provide important spawning grounds and nurseries for at least two-thirds of the nation’s fisheries and are among the most biologically productive areas in the world. The two most locally important Bay habitats are seagrasses and mangroves.

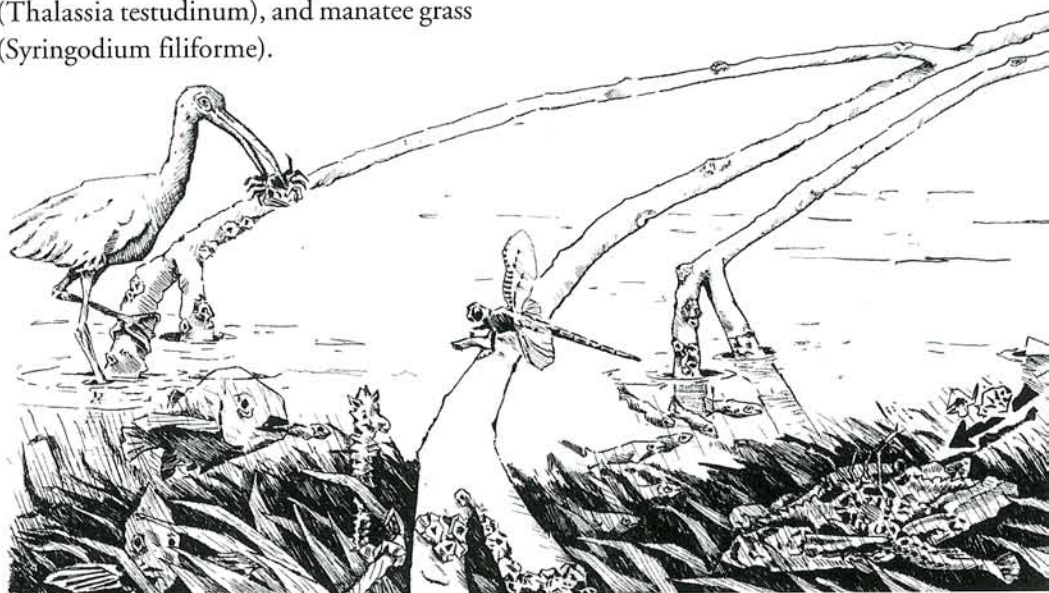
Seagrasses

Seagrass meadows characterize most of the shallow waters of the area. The most common species of grass in the area are shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*), widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*), turtlegrass (*Thalassia testudinum*), and manatee grass (*Syringodium filiforme*).

Seagrass beds are important to estuarine productivity in many ways. They contribute to the nutrient cycle through decomposition of leaf fragments. The grass beds provide protective nursery area for juvenile fish, shrimp, and crabs, and provide a surface for growth of algal epiphytes which serve as food for fish and crustaceans. Manatees feed directly on seagrasses. Seagrass roots also bind soils and reduce erosion and turbidity during strong tidal currents or storms.

Sarasota Bay lost about 30 percent of its seagrass beds between 1950 and 1990, with additional significant losses prior to 1950. Dredge-and-fill projects covered and removed grass beds, and pollution from wastewater and stormwater damaged or killed seagrass. This decrease in habitat, in turn, contributed to a decrease in the Bay’s fishery production.

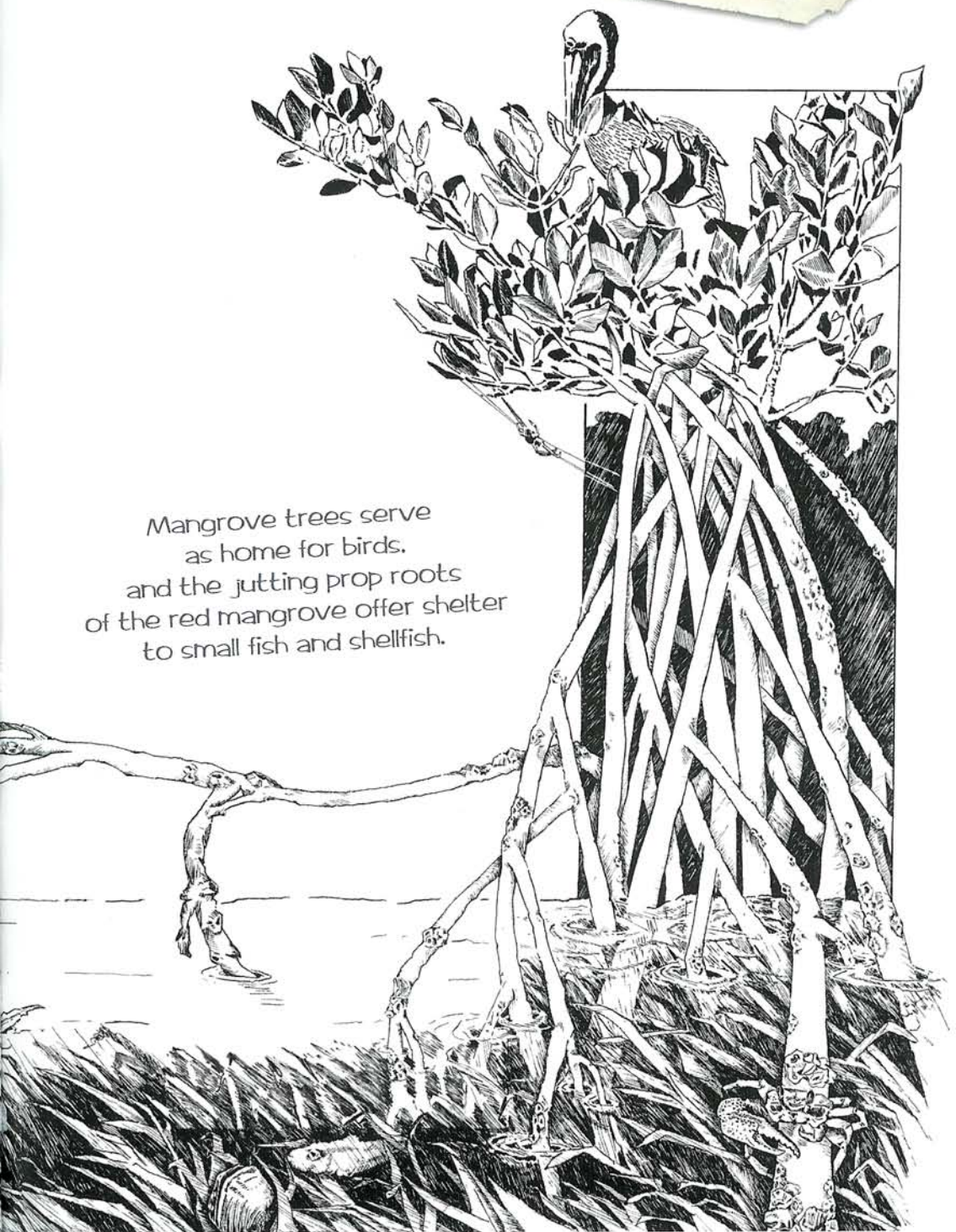
Recent improvements in wastewater and stormwater treatment have led to some recovery of seagrass beds. Between 1988 and 1996, seagrasses have increased by 18 percent for an additional 1,751 acres of seagrass meadows. The increase is correlated with a 47 percent reduction in nitrogen pollution.



What does the recovery mean for Sarasota Bay? Ultimately, more seagrass means a healthier, cleaner Bay—and a better Bay means enhanced fisheries. The 1,751 acres of recovered seagrasses are estimated to provide habitat for an estimated 330 million more shrimp, 81 million more crabs, and 110 million more fish in Sarasota Bay.



Mangrove trees serve as home for birds, and the jutting prop roots of the red mangrove offer shelter to small fish and shellfish.

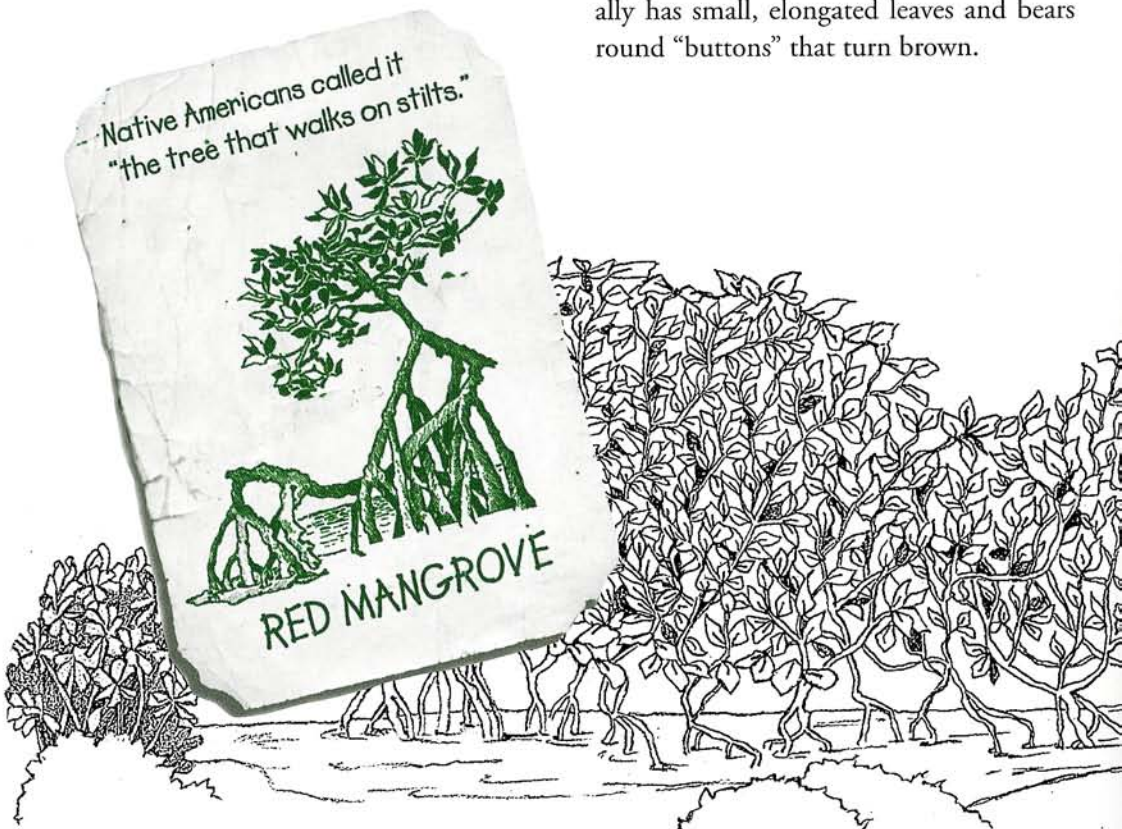


Wetlands & Mangroves

Healthy wetlands and mangroves are an integral component of the estuary ecosystem. These habitats provide a number of essential benefits to Sarasota Bay— food and shelter to bay life, filtration of pollutants, and shoreline protection from erosion.

In the past 50 years, effects of development have caused a decline in quantity and quality of Sarasota Bay's wetlands. Since the 1950s, approximately 39 percent of mangrove forests and saltwater wetlands have been lost due to dredge and fill activities for creation of residential bayfront property and the Intracoastal Waterway. Exotic vegetation such as Australian pines and Brazilian pepper now dominate impacted areas. The decline has been reversed only recently. Since 1989, approximately 100 acres of this vital wetland habitat have been restored, and plans are in place to restore an additional 100 acres. Mangroves and wetland areas are an important natural resource because of their beauty, wildlife value, erosion protection, and importance to estuary ecology.

Floridians should work to protect them. Here are identification tips on the four different mangrove species found throughout the Bay area. Red mangroves (*Rhizophora mangle*) are found closest to open water. They have arching prop roots and their seeds, or propagules, resemble green cigars. Their leaves are large and bright green. Black mangroves (*Avicennia germinans*) are usually found growing landward of red mangroves. Black mangroves "sweat" salt from their leaves and send up twiggy projections from their roots called pneumatophores, which provide oxygen to the tree's roots. Their leaves are dull green with silver undersides. White mangroves (*Laguncularia racemosa*) usually grow landward of or are interspersed with black mangroves. Their leaves are more rounded than those of other species, have a small notch at the tip, and are lighter in color. On each leaf stem at the base of the leaf is a pair of small bumps. Green buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*), not a true mangrove, grows in the most landward location of the littoral zone. It generally has small, elongated leaves and bears round "buttons" that turn brown.





You can visit and learn more about the importance of these wetlands at one of the many restoration sites located on Sarasota Bay by referencing to the Sarasota Bay Blueways Guide. Each wetland site offers

boardwalks, nature trails, educational signage and brochures. Sites such as Quick Point Nature Preserve, Coquina BayWalk at Leffis Key and the Sarasota BayWalk are accessible by boat and land.

Other Types of Area Ecosystem Habitats



In addition to the important saltwater wetland habitats of the Sarasota Bay Region, there are other equally significant habitats that make up the watershed: flatwoods, prairies, hammocks, and freshwater marshlands. These types of diverse habitats with

unique wildlife can be seen at state and county parks within the region. For a glimpse of "Old Florida," visitors should not miss the spectacular Myakka River State Park. The park includes more than 28,000 acres where Deer, Bobcat, Bald Eagle and the American Alligator roam free.

