



Sarasota Bay Walk  
1500 Ken Thompson Parkway  
Sarasota, Florida

### Sponsors:

- City of Sarasota
- Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Sarasota County

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# Sarasota BayWalk

## Wetlands -

a vital link to the health of Sarasota Bay

Wetlands are vital to the health of Sarasota Bay. Wetlands filter pollutants, provide food and shelter for bay life and help prevent shoreline erosion.

Over the past 50 years, development has caused a decline in the quantity and quality of Sarasota Bay's wetlands. In Sarasota County, 80 percent of the mangrove shoreline has been lost to urban development, while Manatee County has seen a drastic decline in freshwater wetlands due to agricultural development.

The Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program recommends enhancement and restoration of wetlands, rather than just protection of the bay's remaining wetlands. Since 1990, the Program has restored more than 45 acres of this vital habitat and has identified another 35 acres for restoration in 1995.

## About the Sarasota BayWalk

The Sarasota BayWalk was the first habitat restoration project sponsored by the National Estuary program. The 4.5-acre restored island habitat is located on City Island in Sarasota. Like many other areas around Sarasota Bay, Sarasota BayWalk was a wetland area that was used to place spoil material from dredging the intracoastal waterway in the 1960s. The spoil material created higher, dry land where non-native, invasive plants thrived.

At the Sarasota BayWalk, invasive plant species were removed and the elevation of the shoreline was restored to natural levels. Tidal lagoons were excavated and created as nurseries for young fish. More than 20,000 plants and trees native to Florida's tidal ecosystem were planted at the site.

The variety of marine life has increase dramatically since the \$200,000 project was completed in 1992. The \$200,000 project was jointly funded by the City of Sarasota, The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Sarasota Bay National Estuary Program.

## You are the Future of Sarasota Bay

Increasing demands are being placed on a limited resource — Sarasota Bay — as our population grows and more people live, work and play in our coastal areas.

Each of us has a stake in Sarasota Bay, and each of us can take part in ensuring a healthy future for the bay.

- Visit the BayWalk, Coquina BayWalk at Leffis Key, and other restoration sites to learn about the bay ecosystem.

- Recycle, reuse, and reduce. Trash is unsightly, unhealthy and damages the environment.

- Support conservation and restoration of bay habitats.

- Participate in coastal cleanups, or better yet, just pick up trash when you see it. Volunteer for bay improvement projects.

- Share the wonders of our bay with others, especially children.



## 1. A Tangled Forest

Much of the mangrove forests along Sarasota Bay were lost when rapid development replaced the mangrove fringe. Mangroves filter pollutants and slow erosion by holding the shoreline in place. They also provide a nursery for fish and shellfish, and a nesting place for birds and other wildlife. Mangrove leaves are vital to the Bay's food web.

Three types of mangroves grow here — red, black, and white.

The red mangrove has tall, arching prop roots that stand in the water. The tree's pencil-like seeds, called propagules, can float long distances before taking root in the sandy soil along the water's edge.

Black mangroves are found upland from the red mangroves. Their above-ground roots, called pneumatophores, help the tree breathe in its watery habitat.

White mangroves grow above the high tide line and have round, thick leaves. At the stem of the leaf, the white mangrove has a gland that releases salt, allowing it to live in a salty environment.



**Did you know...** Black mangrove leaves taste salty because the trees, rooted in brackish sediment, "sweat" salt through their leaves.

## 2. Two-way Stream

With each ebb and flow in the tide, the tidal creek changes direction. Plant matter and animals come and go, traveling with the tide among the ponds. The tidal creek supplies all the water for the BayWalk lagoons except for rainfall or flooding from storms or very high tides. The tidal creek is a

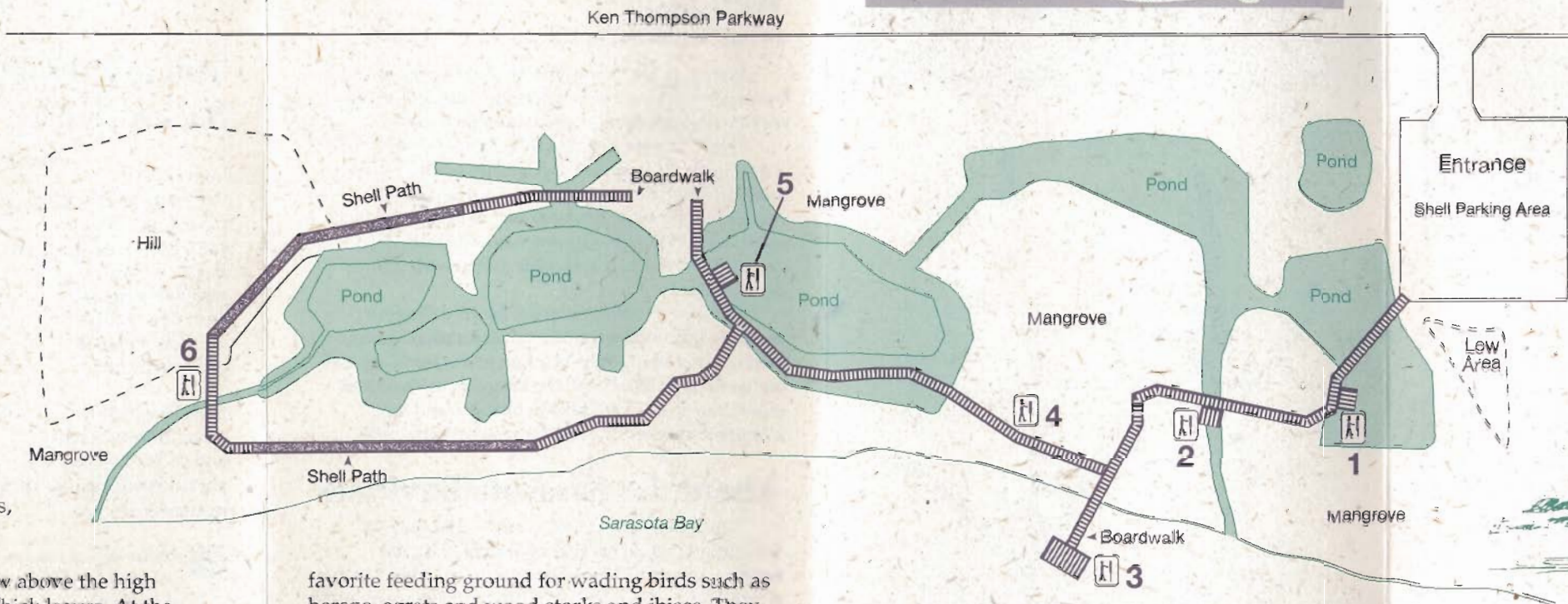
**Did you know...** More than 80 percent of our local fish species, during at least a portion of their life cycle, require intertidal habitat such as the BayWalk provides.



shoreline vines also are a part of our coastal areas. At the BayWalk, volunteers helped plant more than 20,000 plants and trees to help stabilize the shoreline and provide habitat for birds and animals. The native plants replaced non-native or invasive species such as Australian pine and Brazilian pepper trees, which smother mangroves and other important plants.

## 5. Lagoons

The six lagoons in the BayWalk were excavated to different elevations and depths to attract different kinds of animals. You may see tunicates, whelks, conchs, ragged sea hares, and many kinds of small fish, including mullet, black drum, killifish, and fan-tailed mollies. Live scallops, a rare occurrence in this area, also have been seen. The ponds also may contain blue-green and brown algae, an important food source for some of the lagoon's residents.



favorite feeding ground for wading birds such as herons, egrets and wood storks and ibises. They can often be seen looking for food at the narrow mouth of the creek or along the lagoon edges.

## 3. Bay Watching

Bay watching is a favorite use of Sarasota Bay. However, the view illustrates the serious loss of natural shoreline along the bay. A concrete shoreline interrupted only briefly by mangroves makes up 80 percent of the shoreline now. These hard structures do not provide habitat, do not filter runoff from the land, and do not help soften waves. Instead of rolling up a gradually sloping shoreline and then

receding, waves crash against the vertical wall and bounce back across the bay, churning up sediment and contributing to cloudy water. The more sand in the water, the less light reaches underwater plants.

## 4. Taking Root

Sarasota Bay's natural shoreline should be dominated by a fringe of mangrove trees. Salt marsh grasses and

**Did you know...** Birds like the mangrove cuckoo, prairie warbler, and black-whiskered vireo occur nowhere else in Florida except mangrove forests.

## 6. An Upland

To create the small hill at the west end of the BayWalk, non-native plants were buried under fill taken from the excavation of the lagoons. This created an upland area which has been planted with native vegetation such as Gumbo-limbo and Sea grape trees. In time, the area will grow into an upland hammock that will support a diverse wildlife population.