

Dec. 4, 2007

Seagrass survey builds on summer success with call for winter volunteers

Sarasota County is following up its successful summer seagrass survey with a call for volunteers to participate in its winter survey, which will run from December through February, 2008. The county began its mapping program last winter to provide supplemental information to the Southwest Florida Water Management District's existing seagrass mapping effort and has since been asked by SWFWMD to become the role model for other counties so that they too can carry out similar seagrass survey techniques.

According to Sarasota County Water Resources' Amanda Dominguez, seagrass is vital to maintaining healthy aquatic ecosystems, improving water quality, stabilizing shorelines and providing food and cover for a variety of wildlife. "In addition, it's directly responsible for bringing in millions of dollars annually from out-of-state and resident recreational and commercial fishermen," says Dominguez.

Nearly 30 local boaters have participated in the surveys since they began, gathering descriptions of local seagrass, algae, depth and water clarity from 566 different points in Sarasota Bay. Dominguez says that SWFWMD was so impressed with Sarasota County's program that it requested staff data so they can incorporate it into its own seagrass map-making process.

"It's actually quite rewarding to know that this fairly simple task can help and that it truly is playing a profound role in what we know about seagrass," adds Dominguez. "We've had great success with our program because of our volunteers and individuals who have helped promote the program within boating and fishing associations."

All program volunteers for the winter seagrass survey must attend one of two training classes, which consist of a brief program overview and hands-on training in the water. The first session will be held Saturday, Dec. 15, at the Ken Thompson Parkway pavilion, 1700 Ken Thompson Parkway, Lido Key. The second will take place Saturday, Jan. 12, at Cedar Point Environmental Park, 2300 Placida Road, Englewood. Both training classes will be held from 1-3 p.m.

Boaters attending the trainings should bring swimwear and water shoes. Participants should have their own global positioning systems and watercraft; but Dominguez says those who don't will be paired with those that do.

For more information about the seagrass survey program, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Amanda Dominguez in Water Resources.