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## **Manatee habitat gets a helping hand at Warm Mineral Springs Creek**

Sarasota County has been awarded a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to enhance a critical manatee habitat along Warm Mineral Springs Creek, which is an important warm winter refuge for the animals. Work on the project is scheduled to begin by May 31 and be completed by Aug. 31, in advance of the return of manatees to the upper portions of the creek

According to Sarasota County Environmental Specialist Michael Elswick, several factors are reducing overall access to the creek and impacting its water quality. These factors include trash and yard waste, artificial dams that impede water flow, and the presence of large invasive exotic trees that shed debris. That debris prevents water flow and obstructs manatee access.

“The main goal is to work in conjunction with state and federal wildlife officials to improve habitat quality along the Warm Mineral Springs Creek corridor for the federally endangered West Indian manatee,” said Elswick. “A major portion of the habitat improvement plan will be to replace these exotic trees with native beneficial plants.”

Manatees won't be the only beneficiaries, said Elswick. Neighboring communities should see improvements to scenic vistas, better security and more wildlife using the area.

Wherever possible, efforts will be made to reduce the impacts of planned work to both manatees and surrounding residents. Sarasota County also hopes to engage local citizens in volunteer capacities as the project moves forward.

For more information about the project or work in and around Warm Mineral Springs Creek, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Natural Resources.

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