

**Jan. 5, 2009**

**Media contact:** Pat Haire, 941-861-5104; cell 941-650-2850; [phaire@scgov.net](mailto:phaire@scgov.net)

**Project contact:** Amanda Dominguez, 941-861-0894; cell 941-650-1089; [adomingu@scgov.net](mailto:adomingu@scgov.net)

## **Get your feet wet this winter during county's winter seagrass survey**

Sarasota County is seeking volunteers for its winter seagrass survey, which runs through February, 2009. The volunteers will gather descriptions of local seagrass, algae, depth and water clarity from different points throughout Sarasota's bays.

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 to the state of Florida annually from out-of-state and resident recreational and commercial fishermen," says Dominguez.

Sarasota County's mapping program has been submitting their survey findings to the Southwest Florida Water Management District's existing seagrass mapping effort since 2006. The program's success has prompted Florida's Department of Environmental Protection to invite county staff to train volunteers and help launch the program in the Crystal River area.

"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 a training class, which consists of a brief program overview and hands-on training in the water. The session will be held from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, at the Casey Key Fish House, 801 Blackburn Point Road, Osprey. In case of rain, the session will be held from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 1.

Volunteers should bring swimwear and water shoes. Depending on the weather, volunteers may wish to bring a wetsuit or waders. Participants in the survey should have their own global positioning systems and watercraft; but Dominguez says those who do not have them will be paired with those who 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.

-end-