

Jan. 18, 2012

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Volunteers sought for seagrass survey program

Sarasota County is following up its successful summer seagrass survey with a call for volunteers to participate in its winter survey, which will run through February 2012. The program provides valuable information to local scientists regarding the current status of seagrass within Sarasota's bays.

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 local recreational and commercial fishermen," said Amanda Dominguez, Sarasota County environmental specialist.

Local boaters have participated in the surveys since they began, gathering descriptions of local seagrass, algae, depth and water clarity from different spots in Sarasota Bay.

"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," said 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 class will be held 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 4, at the Turtle Beach Community Center, 8919 Midnight Pass Road, Sarasota. The rain date is Sunday, Feb. 5, at the same time and location.

Boaters attending the training should bring swimwear and water shoes. Participants should have their own global positioning systems and watercraft; however, those who do not will be paired with those that do.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask about the seagrass survey program.

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