



## The Coastal Program at Tampa Bay

*Caring for Our Coastal Habitats*

### Overview

The Coastal Program is one of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most successful and effective cooperative conservation programs. The mission of the Coastal Program is to protect and recover Federal Trust Species (threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and inter-jurisdictional fish) by supporting voluntary restoration and enhancement of high-priority coastal habitats.

The Coastal Program at Tampa Bay follows the mission of the national Coastal Program to conserve healthy coastal ecosystems for the benefit of fish, wildlife and people. We achieve this goal by working as partners

### Coastal Program at Tampa Bay Accomplishments FROM 2001-2006

#### Restored

- 572.5 acres of coastal wetlands
- 311 acres of coastal uplands

#### IN FY 2006

- 6 Partnership agreements

#### Restored

- 239 acres of coastal wetlands
- 148.5 acres of coastal uplands

with many state and local groups and individuals to identify priority natural resource needs and assisting in implementing actions to address those issues.

### Priorities

Each of our coastal habitats is an integral part of creating an ecosystem that provides the range of environmental values and niches necessary for a fully functional estuarine system. All of the coastal habitats along Florida's

west coast are at risk but certain groups become habitats of special concern because of their ecological importance, the difficulty of reestablishing them or their vulnerability. Three habitat types that rise to those of special concern are seagrasses, coastal wetlands and coastal uplands.

There are four species of seagrasses in Tampa Bay – shoalgrass, turtlegrass, manatee grass and star grass. Seagrasses are known for the multiple functions they serve in estuaries. They contribute to improved water quality in several ways. Some species of fish, manatees and sea turtles feed directly on living seagrass, while many other species feed on the decaying leaves or on the epiphytes that grow on the leaves. Seagrasses also provide critically important nursery and adult habitat for the great majority of the recreationally and commercially important fishery species in the Gulf of Mexico.





Coastal wetlands are important in estuarine systems because of their hydrological, biological and societal functions. Coastal wetlands ameliorate the effects of extreme hydrological events from either the upland or water side. Contaminants and excess nutrients can be retained either in plant materials or soils lessening their biological effects. Coastal marshes are some of the most productive habitats in the world and are vital pieces of the mosaic of habitats that all contribute to healthy estuarine ecosystems. Coastal wetland systems can offer physical protection to manmade structures by helping intercept extreme physical events.

Coastal uplands are extremely vulnerable to loss from development because there are no substantive protections for them. Uplands within the Coastal Program's area historically included pine flatwoods, mixed hardwood forests and maritime forests.

### **Threats**

The pervasive threat to all of our coastal ecosystems is unrestrained development and all of the activities associated with and resulting from it. Seagrasses are at danger from dredging, increased boat prop scarring and increased nutrient and contaminant inputs. Wetlands have some protective measures to lessen impacts, but acreage and function are still being lost. Coastal uplands have almost no protection and their location adjacent to the wetlands and water front sites makes them prime development sites. All coastal habitats are also at risk from exotic invasive species.

### **Conservation Strategies**

Conservation strategies for coastal habitats run the gamut from regulatory guidelines, to water quality improvement, to acquisition and restoration. Each contributes to some extent. Our Coastal Program conservation efforts are implemented by working as a partner, offering

technical assistance and project funding, with the other natural resource agencies and groups that are persistently working to find the means to ensure that our estuarine habitats are functional and healthy.

### **Partners**

A partial list of our Partners includes:

- Tampa Bay Estuary Program
- Sarasota Bay Estuary Program
- Tampa Bay Watch
- Southwest Florida Water Management District
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- National Audubon Society
- Pinellas County
- Hillsborough County
- MacDill Air Force Base
- Friends of Rookery Bay
- Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage
- The Nature Conservancy

### **For More Information**

For more information about the Coastal Program, contact the Coastal Program at Tampa Bay Coastal Program Coordinator at 727-510-1021 or visit us on the internet at <http://www.fws.gov/coastal/>