



## Seagrass Outreach Tool Box

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Hammer, pliers, wrench, measuring tape, nails & screws are typical items you would find in a well-stocked toolbox. The Seagrass Summit Outreach Partnership has developed a different kind of toolbox that contains fact sheets, press releases, news articles, brochures, photographs and videos. This toolbox has everything necessary to spread the word about the value of and dangers to seagrass communities in the Florida Keys.

The Seagrass Summit Outreach Partnership. A group of education/outreach professionals, resource managers and other concerned organizations who joined together to plan an education program highlighting the status of seagrass habitats in the Florida Keys. Members include Florida Sea Grant, the Monroe County Cooperative Extension Service, Everglades National Park, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Florida Park Service, Monroe County Marine Resources Department, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Beginning over a year ago, these organizations began to assess the state of seagrass health, the threats to seagrass communities, and how to reach audiences with information on both of those topics.

The "toolbox" was developed for organizations and individuals that are involved in education and outreach to the boating public. Who is that? Rental boat operators, dive boat operators, school teachers, Coast Guard Auxiliary, Power Squadron, boat sales businesses, non-profit organizations, and anyone else who interacts with people who buy, rent, or use boats in the Florida Keys.

Here is what you will find in your "toolbox". First, included is a list of those organizations that can provide information and/or programs on seagrass habitats and minimum impact boating. A list of educational products available that contain information on seagrass habitats is also included. Three news articles with facts and figures pertaining to seagrass communities such as costs associated with prop dredging. Two pieces of art depicting the "alive" status of seagrass and the damage vessels can do in seagrass communities. A seagrass fact sheet for quick reference when preparing presentations or news articles. Five message sheets detailing the economic value of seagrass communities, safe boating skills, your connection to seagrass habitats, costs associated with seagrass

damage, and the biology and ecology of seagrass habitats. Next in the "toolbox" are four photographs suitable for reproduction which show both healthy and damaged seagrass beds. Three brochures are included which provide safe boating tips and information on the nature of seagrass habitats. Finally, an 8-minute video is included which provides information on safe boating in the Florida Keys and seagrass and coral reef habitats.

These products are available for use by anyone who wishes to provide education and outreach on seagrass habitats in the Florida Keys. There is no charge but the supply is limited. To acquire a "toolbox" please contact Mary Tagliareni at the Upper Keys Regional Office of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, (305) 852-7717.

There are over 1.4 million acres of seagrass in Monroe County. This is the largest seagrass community in the world. Seagrass stabilize the bottom and help absorb excess nutrients from land run-off. Hundreds of species of fish and invertebrates spend part of their lives in seagrass beds. In 1997 alone, seagrass communities in the State of Florida supported an estimated harvest of roughly \$116 million for shrimp, stone crab, spiny lobster, yellowtail snapper, gray snapper, blue crab, and pinfish. Half of that came from Monroe County.

Seagrass habitat is important to our economy, our safety and our general enjoyment of life in the Florida Keys. One careless propeller scar in a seagrass bed can take 5 to 10 years to heal. Large areas of damage from a boat grounding take over a century to heal according to Dr. Jay Zieman, renowned seagrass biologist.

We can each do our part to protect this resource. Follow a few simple rules when boating. Study your charts. Read the waters. Know your depth and draft. Losing our seagrass means more than a few blades of grass. Remember, Seagrass.....It's Alive!

For more information contact the Florida Bay Education Project at 305-852-3592. Additional information on a variety of topics is available from the University of Florida/Monroe County Cooperative Extension Service, 5100 College Road, Stock Island or call at 292-4501; fax = 292-4415; email [monroe@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:monroe@mail.ifas.ufl.edu) or visit our web site <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>. Our services are free and available to all without regard to race, color, sex, or national origin. #####