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Fishing Guides Join Effort to Protect Seagrass Habitat

Islamorada - March marks the second annual Seagrass Awareness Month, and the start of an important new partnership for seagrass protection. The Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association has joined the Seagrass Outreach Partnership to help protect the habitat that sustains their way of life. The guides will form a Seagrass Awareness Team, educating boaters who use the shallow Keys waters about the importance of seagrass to our environment and how responsible boating practices can help protect seagrass habitat.

A message from Capt. Tad Burke of the Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association regarding the guides' involvement in the Seagrass Outreach Partnership follows.

"Across the nation, headlines on every major paper announced that Yellowstone was burning. Pictures said it all, thousands of acres charred. Visions of that magnificent park being destroyed tugged at the heartstrings of every human.

Every year, thousands of acres of our undersea forests are scarred and destroyed by unknowing or too often careless watercraft operators. Due to the fact that our undersea forests are not as visible, their destruction goes unnoticed. Yet one square foot of seagrass houses more life than one square foot of forest. The majority of this devastation takes place in water that is less than three feet deep. This constitutes the majority of Florida Bay and Everglades National Park.

As professional fishing guides, we understand the importance of seagrass to a healthy aquatic environment. Continued destruction not only jeopardizes a way of life, but will rob future generations of the chance to enjoy these wonderful resources. Guiding is more than just pursuing fish for clients - we must be caretakers of this special place. We live a tidal life and feel the pulse of this aquatic wonderland. Through our daily observations, we see firsthand the changes that are taking place. Ruination of habitat is a chief factor in the reduction of fish populations. We can reduce bag limits and practice catch and release, but without a place for the fish to live, we're going backwards. We must do what we can to protect these undersea gardens of Eden that are home to such a variety of life, from the small crustaceans to the giant tarpon. Our existence is intertwined with theirs.

The Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association joins the Seagrass Outreach Partnership in hope that we can help educate others about the importance of protecting seagrass. We accept the responsibility to ensure that our underwater resources remain healthy for ourselves, as well as for our children.

In every community, there is a battle to save a piece of this precious planet. We must save the seagrass, as it is a barometer of Florida Bay's health, and consequently our own. As we progress, we must realize we are at the top of the food chain only because we are sustained by what is below us."

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