



Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin

18 January 2010

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Please note: links to sources were active on date of publication. Some sources remove links periodically.

NEWS

Controversy surrounds seagrass project (Miami, USA)

16 January 2010, MiamiHerald.com

A Washington-based conservation foundation is hoping success of its first seagrass restoration project, now under way in the Keys, will lead to a seagrass mitigation fund for Florida. But some environmental groups criticize the effort.

On 95 acres of ocean floor near the Seven Mile Bridge, a seagrass meadow damaged by boaters is Exhibit A in an environmental group's controversial quest to start a new marine mitigation fund for Florida. Washington-based Ocean Foundation has applied to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for permission to create the fund as a way for private developers or public agencies to mitigate marine habitat destruction that occurs as a result of coastal construction projects.

An initial report on the restoration work at Knights Key Bank -- the foundation's pilot project funded with \$45,000 in private donations -- shows some success repairing the important marine habitat. But the program, called SeaGrass Grow, is being criticized by other environmental groups that say mitigation funds do more harm than good and that the foundation has no track record of long-term success restoring seagrass.

"I'm not against mitigation . . . but this type of restoration doesn't make ecological sense," said Roy "Robin" Lewis, president of the non-profit Coastal Resources Group. Lewis, who in the '70s and '80s conducted the biggest seagrass mitigation project ever attempted in the Keys during the upgrading of the old Henry Flagler bridges, said the best way to fix seagrass damage is to let scars heal themselves and keep boats off the banks.

The foundation says future coastal development is inevitable, so it's necessary to do aggressive restoration. "We as a conservation organization would prefer there never is harm done to any seagrass meadows anywhere to start with," said Mark Spalding, president of Ocean Foundation founded in 2002. But, he said, the Army Corps sometimes allows coastal projects even though they damage seagrass.

Under the foundation's proposal, the group would create and run an Aquatic Resource Fund for Florida, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Agencies or developers building bridges, marinas and other coastal projects that damage seagrass beds would pay to restore double the amount of sea beds that would be destroyed. The foundation would hire contractors to restore sea beds damaged by propeller scars and vessel groundings, and monitor the site for five years. The foundation's program began as a charitable effort by private donors to repair valuable underwater meadows that provide marine habitat, protect coastlines from erosion and capture carbon to combat global warming.

For its first seagrass project at Knights Key Bank, the foundation hired Seagrass Recovery Inc. of Indian Rocks Beach to restore 4,000 square feet of scars and holes. The company used about 2,000 biodegradable sediment tubes to stabilize the ocean floor and allow recolonization of seagrass. Company president Jeff Beggins estimated it will take 18 to 24 months for the seagrass to return to original density. The initial monitoring report by the company showed an average of 50 percent coverage of new seagrass. The report also said most of the transplanted seagrass died.

Seagrass expert Margaret Hall of the state's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute said her studies using the sediment tubes at other sites in the Keys shows promising results. But she added the cost of such restoration is expensive, and she believes money would be better spent on improving water quality. '

Full story and source: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/florida-keys/v-fullstory/story/1428498.html>

Related articles: <http://www.foxbusiness.com/story/restoration-degraded-seagrass-ecosystems-project-demonstrates-success/>,

<http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/editorials/sea-grass-plan-doesnt-cut-it/1062121>

http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2010/01/17/Group-wants-fund-to-restore-seagrass/UPI-66931263706705/

<http://www.keysnet.com/news/story/174064.html>

Dugong found dead along Jamnagar coast (India)

16 January 2010, Times of India

AHMEDABAD: A dead dugong that washed ashore along the Jamnagar coast on Friday evening has raised hope that there might be a small population of the rare and endangered marine mammal surviving along the coast in Saurashtra-Kutch region.

Divisional Forest Office (DFO) at the Jamnagar Marine National Park, Prakash Sata, said that on Friday evening body of five feet and four inches long, sea mammal aged around four years was recovered. Sata said there was no apparent external mark of injury on the body which indicated that the mammal might have died on being trapped in the fishing nets. It might have got involved with an accident with a boat.

HS Singh, conservator of forests, said, "There is a history of dugong sighting along the coast from Gulf of Kutch to Pakistan. There is a large quantity of seagrass along this stretch which is suitable for the dugong presence." He said that this was the third time that the dead dugong had been found. In 2002, bodies of two dugongs were found while in 2004, a dead dugong had washed ashore. He said that the sighting was very rare and the population could be only a couple of dozens from Gujarat to Pakistan coast. A senior officials said that dugong was found in the waters towards Pakistan but this had raised hope of their population along Gujarat coast also.

Full story and source: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/surati/Dugong-found-dead-along-Jamnagar-coast/articleshow/5453856.cms>

Volunteer for bay watch (USA)

14 January 2010, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

While most of us gaze across our shorelines in awe of their simple beauty, Sarasota County and a small army of volunteers keep watch of what's going on beneath our precious bays.

For the past three years, the Sarasota Environmental Assessment Team has been surveying and mapping local seagrass habitats for information that helps scientists better understand and manage these important ecosystems. In addition to this, the SEA Team has begun enlisting waterfront property owners to help monitor sea scallop populations in the bays.

Twice a year, teams of our volunteers fan out over the bays with masks and snorkels to record the status of shoal, turtle and manatee grasses. Their reports from Sarasota County's bays supplement annual aerial surveys by the Southwest Florida Water Management District. The volunteer program has been quite successful. We started with about 15 volunteers and we're up to nearly 100.

Full story and source: <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20100114/COLUMNIST/11410472127?p=1&tc=pg>

Everglades National Park: Court Awards Everglades National Park \$295,000 in damages for Vessel Grounding Case (USA)

12 January 2010

A civil lawsuit between the United States and Mr. David E. Marlow was recently settled with Mr. Marlow agreeing to compensate Everglades National Park for damages caused by his vessel running aground in Florida Bay. Mr. Marlow agreed to pay \$295,000 in the suit filed by the United States Department of Justice on behalf of Everglades National Park.

On February 13, 2006, Mr. Marlowe was operating his 72-foot vessel, the "Rebel Yell", enroute from Snead Island on Florida's Gulf Coast to Miami. The vessel ran aground on Arsenic Bank in the southwestern portion of Florida Bay in Everglades National Park. Attempts to power the vessel off the shoal resulted in significant damage to the seagrass environment on the shallow bank. This resource damage is significant for this national park, charged with resource protection, as the seagrass beds serve as nurseries for lobster, crabs, shrimp and other recreational and commercially important fish and invertebrates.

The lawsuit was filed under the "Park System Resource Protection Act", which allows the National Park Service to seek compensation for injuries to park resources and use the recovered funds to restore and monitor such resources. Everglades National Park will engage in a dynamic restoration program at this site which will include filling in the large holes and planting seagrass.

Full story and source: <http://www.nps.gov/ever/parknews/evernewsparkservicesettlescase.htm>

Feds would give manatee more protection if they could afford it (USA)

12 January 2010, Sun-Sentinel

The endangered manatee won an empty victory Tuesday when a federal agency agreed with conservation groups that more of its habitat should be protected but said it lacked the money to do so. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said a proposal to expand critical habitat for the manatee was "warranted." But the agency said it had to give higher budgetary priority to lawsuit-generated, court-ordered actions on behalf of other endangered species.

Several environmental groups had petitioned for the expansion in 2008, arguing that the current habitat was outdated, having been drawn up in 1976, before large increases in Florida's population, waterfront development and number of boats. Miyoko Sakashita, oceans director for the Center for Biological Diversity, said the agency's decision was "particularly disappointing" because 429 manatees were found dead in Florida in 2009. Watercraft killed a record 97 of the animals.

Underwood said a critical habitat designation would cost about \$500,000, for such steps as computer mapping and an economic analysis. The service has a \$10.5 million budget for critical habitat designations throughout the United States, he said. "Will we do it? The answer is yes," Underwood said. "When? I don't know." The petition called for the protection of dozens of natural springs, seagrass beds, travel corridors and coastlines.

Full story and source: http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/palm-beach/fl-manatee-habitat-20100112_0_992264.story

Related article: http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2010/manatee-01-12-2010.html

CONFERENCES

World Seagrass Conference & ISBW9 (Thailand, November 2010)

A World Seagrass Conference (WSC) and the 9th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW9) will take place in southern Thailand in November, 2010. The region features fascinating seagrass ecosystems; Phuket is a world-renowned diving area and Trang has Thailand's largest seagrass meadows. Both the WSC and ISBW9 will be hosted by Prince of Songkla University, Southern Thailand.

World Seagrass Conference (WSC) (Phuket, 21–25 November, 2010)

Open to all and will include invited plenary lectures and oral and poster presentations. The expected cost for WSC is US\$200 which includes registration, lunches, two dinners and a half-day field trip to the seagrass meadow in Phuket (hotel and travel are separate).

9th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW9) (Trang, 27–30 November, 2010)

ISBW9 will follow the WSC and consist of a smaller group of participants, including both international seagrass experts and regional scientists and practitioners, to address problems of seagrass conservation and restoration, which so far are little known across Southeast Asia and South Asia. The expected cost for the workshop is US\$350, which includes travel to Trang from Phuket, lunches, two dinners and a full day excursion to the nearby seagrass meadow (again, hotel and travel separate).

If you are interested in WSC and/or ISBW9, please respond by filling out the short **Call for Interest** form available from <http://isbw.seagrassonline.org/isbw9/>

Important Dates for the WSC and ISBW9

March 2010	Abstract Submission Deadline
June 2010	Notification of Abstract Acceptance for Oral or Poster Presentations, Updated Programme
July 2010	Registration Closes
August 2010	Final Programme Announcement

GALLERY

Chek Jawa (Singapore): 16 January 2010 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Happy New Year from TeamSeagrass as we start our first monitoring session at Chek Jawa for 2010! It was really nice to see some familiar faces back with us after a long absence. And we also welcomed some new members on the Team! The seagrass meadows of Chek Jawa are doing just fine..

Broome (Australia): 03-05 January <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/gallery.html>

Nudibranchs, sea cucumbers, crabs, sea snakes and feather stars were just some of the living marine treasures found in the seagrass meadows of Roebuck Bay during our monitoring events on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. This season the seagrass coverage at two of the three sites was looking thick and luscious.

FROM HQ

Frequently Asked Questions <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/faq.html>

Seagrass-Watch News Issue 39 <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/magazine.html>

Seagrass-Watch Shop <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html>

Virtual Herbarium <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/herbarium.html>

Giveaways <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/shop.html#GIVE1>

Future sampling dates <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/sampling.html>

Handy Seagrass Links <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/links.html>

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Seagrass-Watch E-Bulletin is compiled by Len McKenzie & Rudi Yoshida.