

Seagrass Facts

What are seagrasses?



Seagrasses are one of the most productive plant communities on Earth. They are flowering plants that live underwater, and because they require sunlight, they are found mostly in waters that are shallow. Florida has over 2.5 million acres of seagrass meadows and seven different species exist in Florida waters.

Why are they important?

Seagrasses are important because they:

 provide habitat and food for nearly 70% of all sea life, including manatees, sea turtles, and dolphins, and recreationally and commercially important fish and shellfish species, such as redfish, sea trout, snapper, pink shrimp, and blue crabs.

 stabilize sediments, and improve water quality by filtering pollutants from water bodies.

Seagrasses are disappearing at an alarming rate. As seagrasses disappear worldwide – globally, a seagrass meadow the size of a soccer field is lost every thirty minutes – countless aquatic species that depend on seagrasses for food, shelter, and habitat are declining.

Why are seagrasses in trouble?

Around the world, the causes of seagrass decline are from human impacts.

 Human population growth and coastal development increase polluted run-off from roads, and pesticides and herbicides from lawns. The result is more nutrients, which block the light that seagrasses need to survive.

 Widespread propeller scarring of seagrass beds have occurred. It is believed that every seagrass bed in Florida contains at least some scarring. Scarring happens when boaters try to motor through water too shallow for the draft of their boat. Flats boats are among the most popular vessels sold in the boating industry. These vessels can be operated in shallow waters less than a foot deep, where seagrasses are most vulnerable to damage.



What can I do to help?

 If you boat over shallow seagrass beds, turn off your engine and tilt it up. You should never use combustion motors to plow through these environmentally important areas.

 Comply with pole and troll zones that have been established in some areas to protect seagrasses. In these areas, only a pole or trolling motor can be used for propulsion.

 Support Boating Restriction Zones (No-Motor, No-Entry). A study in the Indian River Lagoon (Brevard County, Florida) found that the most effective way to restore scarred seagrass beds is to protect them from boat traffic. Natural recovery is faster than any active restoration methods attempted, and is also much less expensive.

 Encourage management practices on the local, state, and federal levels that reduce water pollution from point sources (pollution originating from a single, identifiable source, such as a discharge pipe from a factory) and nonpoint sources (pollution resulting from a wide variety of human activities that can be carried in stormwater runoff). For more information, go to www.waterencyclopedia.com/Po-Re/Pollution-Sources-Point-and-Nonpoint.html.

For more seagrass information, go to www.sms.si.edu/IRLspec/Seagrass_Habitat.htm.



Save the Manatee® Club

500 N. Maitland Ave. • Maitland, FL 32751
800-432-JOIN (5646) • www.savethemanatee.org