YESTERDAY IN CORTEZ



A man poses on the first shelled road from Fairview Avenue (14th Street West) in Bradenton leading to Cortez. Courtesy of Manatee County Public Library Historical Digital Collections

By 1950, the annual statewide oyster population had shrunk by half due to overharvesting and pollution.

Commercial shell fishing was banned in Sarasota Bay until 1965, due to pollution. Oysters, clams, scallops and mussels all filter pollutants from the water yet retain them internally, making them a potentially harmful food source when their estuary habitat is compromised.

Oyster shells dredged from the Manatee River – formerly called the Oyster River – were the material for Bradenton's first paved roads, constructed at the turn of the 20th century. At the time, Florida oysters were plentiful, and oyster shells were key building materials for Florida roads, railroads and other key industries. This bounty of Gulf Coast oysters was made possible by healthy estuaries, which are fertile habitats that occur where flowing freshwater meets the sea. Sarasota Bay is one of about 30 critical estuary systems in the United States.



Example of an oyster bed and an American Oystercatcher

TODAY IN CORTEZ

The Florida State Board of Conservation began the work of rehabilitating and reconstructing oyster beds in 1949. The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program has made clean waters and oyster reef habitat restoration part of its primary conservation and management action plans for Sarasota Bay, which was declared a Bay of National Significance by Congress in 1989. Small oyster beds can be found across our bay and inside the FISH Preserve, many easily seen at low tide.

Oyster bed photo courtesy of Oyster River Ecology.

Keeping Sarasota Bay Healthy signs are a Cortez Village Historical Society project, funded with a grant from the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program with additional support from the Florida Maritime Museum. 2024

FOR A BETTER TOMORROW... What you can do to keep Sarasota Bay healthy



Practice responsible landscape
management. Replace pavement with
porosity: stones and shells permit rainwater
reabsorption. Reduce runoff of fertilizers,
chemicals, and waste. These can overtax
the coastal wetlands' vital role in filtering
water entering our Bay.



Be a safe boater. No discharges (fuel, chemicals, waste), avoid anchoring and running through shallow seagrass beds.



Protect mangroves and seagrass by reducing runoff and supporting natural habitats like the FISH Preserve.



Improve wastewater treatment. Make sure public officials understand the importance of upgrading wastewater treatment facilities to accommodate population growth.



Visit the FISH Preserve and other Florida wildlife areas on foot or by paddling to see nature in action and to learn more about these critical environments.



Educate others. Follow the QR code to read up on how to keep Sarasota Bay healthy, and share what you have learned about the important work of coastal wetlands preservation.





Español al otro lado