

Turtle Grass

Mullet

Keeping Sarasota Bay Healthy

Nurturing Seagrass

Manatee Grass

Shoal Grass

YESTERDAY IN CORTEZ

Cortez village was founded in the 1880s, and has long been a bountiful fishing base for delicious seafood, especially mullet from Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Village old-timers grew up on “mullet and grits for breakfast, grits and mullet for lunch, and leftovers for dinner,” as Cortez fisherman ‘Blue’ Fulford used to tell it. Sarasota Bay’s seagrass meadows are a vital habitat for mullet, as well as many other fish species,



Blue Fulford on his boat, 1976. Photo courtesy of the Manatee County Public Library Historic Photos Collection

manatees and sea turtles. Seagrass provides shelter from predators for shrimp, scallops and stone crabs, and serves as a protective nursery for young fish. One acre of seagrass can support up to 40,000 fish, and Sarasota Bay has more than 10,000 acres. Seagrasses are the lungs of the bay; through photo synthesis, seagrass absorbs carbon dioxide and gives off oxygen, important for every living thing and for clear, healthy seawater.

Florida’s seven sea-grasses, turtle, manatee, shoal, Johnson’s, star, paddle, and widgeon grass, support a wide range of species including manatees. Credit: David Schrichte/Ocean Image Bank



TODAY IN CORTEZ

In the late 19th century, more than half of Sarasota Bay was covered in seagrass. Today’s seagrass levels have rebounded to similar levels. However, many estuarine ecosystems, including mangrove forests and marshes, have been greatly reduced due to development and pollution. Sarasota Bay is much different than it once was, further emphasizing the need for protecting what is left both above and below the water.

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. Seagrass illustrations ©SHERI/ Adobe Stock. Manatee illustration ©My Watercolor/Adobe Stock

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.

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