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Results of Southwest Florida Scallop Searches Are In!

During August and September, three bay scallop searches were conducted in southwest Florida (Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor). The Tampa Bay search produced a record number of scallops, 674. The search conducted by Tampa Bay Watch (www.tampabaywatch.org) has been conducted since 1993 and this year's results marked the fourth year in a row that scallop numbers have increased.

A similar scallop search was conducted by Sarasota Bay Watch (www.sarasotabaywatch.org). This was the second year this organization has held this event. Again, good news, volunteers found 131 scallops. Some people seemed disappointed that fewer scallops were found than in 2008 when 900 scallops were found. However, this is not the proper way to interpret the results. Bay scallops complete their life cycle in 12-18 months, and large annual population fluctuations are normal. The good news is that bay scallops continued to be present in significant numbers.

In September, I assisted my colleague, Charlotte County Sea Grant Extension Agent Betty Staugler (www.charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu), in conducting a scallop search in Charlotte Harbor. Over a hundred volunteers braved torrential rain and extreme high tides and found 94 scallops. Given the conditions, the results were very encouraging. This was the first year this event was held.

Taken together, these surveys have documented that significant numbers of bay scallops were found in a large part of southwest Florida. Perhaps counts will be down next year, but remember the results of the past couple of years provide encouraging signs that scallops are making a significant comeback.

Florida Sea Grant and Extension in Action: A new aquaculture species for Florida?

Florida Sea Grant is supporting research to determine if the sunray venus clam (*Macrocallista nimbosa*) has a potential as a new aquaculture species to diversify the hard clam culture industry in Florida. The sunray venus clam was commercially fished in Florida during the 1970s. Although natural growth rates were estimated to be high, its patchy distribution limited commercial harvest. Recent work has shown that they can be spawned in the laboratory and successfully grown under field conditions. After 11 months, the clams reached 61-67 mm (over two inches) and were harvested for market perception tests.

The market acceptance of the cultured sunray venus clam was demonstrated within the Florida market area in 2008. Four restaurants participated in a market acceptance study with each restaurant receiving a given number of cultured clams each week for 4-6 weeks. A survey solicited the restaurant patron's reaction to various attributes of sunray venus clams. Survey findings provided insight into the acceptance of cultured sunray venus as a viable seafood product and the willingness of consumers to purchase the product again.

In general folks who tried the sunray clam liked it. Many old time Floridians will tell you it is their preferred clam because of its sweetness. In my opinion, they are GREAT! I think this species has true potential to become a new important farmed clam species in Florida. Of course, only time will tell! I will be collecting local broodstock from local waters to assist this research program.

Benefits of Indian River Lagoon Valued at \$3.7 billion

A recently completed economic assessment of the Indian River Lagoon concludes that residents and visitors received about \$3.7 billion in annual economic benefits from the lagoon in 2007. These benefits include recreation, real estate, income generated, government spending, commercial fishing, and non use value.

Most of the value was generated by residents and visitors in the counties surrounding the lagoon that spent 11 million person-days in lagoon-related recreation.

The most popular recreational activities were fishing (37% of days) swimming or wading (20%), power boating (13%), viewing the lagoon from shore (8%) and picnicking (7%).

Living on or near the lagoon also generates value to residents, as it provides athletic amenities and recreational convenience. The market value of developable real estate on or within 0.3 miles of the lagoon is about \$47 billion higher because of the lagoon.

Residents were willing to pay an additional \$762 million per year to maintain the lagoon in its existing environmental condition.

This economic assessment was developed by Hazen and Swayer, Inc. for the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program. You can find an electronic copy of the report at www.irl.sjrwmd.com.

Thinking Globally Acting Locally

Port Manatee gearing up for Panama Canal Traffic

As the closest deep water port to the Panama Canal, Port Manatee may be a logical choice for Pacific market trade destined for the United States east coast markets. The Panama Canal project, which officially started in 2007, will double the size of the canal's capacity and allow for more traffic once completed. The canal project, targeted for completion in 2014, will construct two lock complexes – one on the Atlantic side and another on the Pacific side, create new access channels to the new locks, and widen and deepen existing navigational channels. The expanded canal will raise Panama's importance as a transit hub for Asian container freight destined for the eastern United States. Currently, 70% of that cargo is offloaded in California or other western ports and then transported by truck or rail to the eastern markets.

With the expansion of the Panama Canal, the 95 year old canal will be able to accommodate the very largest vessels. Currently the canal locks allow for passage of ships carrying up to 4,800 20-foot-long containers. Once complete, the new widened locks will allow passage of ships carrying 12,600 20-foot-long containers.

Given that Port Manatee is located in close proximity to the Panama Canal, is close to the highway (on U.S. 41 and I-275 nearby) and has rail access on site, it is in a good position to benefit once the canal is complete. But, economic gains will only come if sufficient environmental protection is ensured. There was a number of environmental concerns that the Port must address including storm water runoff, dredge material disposal and loss of wetland habitats.

As part of the Port's expansion, dredging within the basin is occurring in order to accommodate deeper vessels. Dredge material must go somewhere and the spoil material dredged to date is not suitable for most activities. Currently the spoil is sitting on port property. It contains a lot of clay and is too wet for road or other construction projects. The Port is exploring its options for disposing of the material including mixing it with topsoil to use as a landfill cover (landfills are required to cover their piles daily). As mitigation, the Port has established seagrass beds and created a bird rookery. The rookery was built in partnership with the Audubon who monitors it regularly and reports successful nesting of over ten shore bird and wading bird species.

For more information about the Port Manatee expansion, visit www.portmanatee.com. For more information about the Panama Canal expansion, visit www.pancanal.com.

Special contribution by Ms. Betty Staugler, Charlotte County Marine Extension Agent.

Reminder – Marine Scene Moving Towards Electronic Format

Because of budget cuts, etc., we are working towards distributing the Marine Scene electronically. For the time being we will still send printed copies for those who do not have Internet access or still prefer a printed copy. However, (if you haven't done so already) if you would prefer to receive the newsletter electronically, please email my assistant Ms. Barbara Beach at bmbeach2@ufl.edu. and you will receive future editions via email.

2009 Gulf Hypoxic Zone Report

The scientists on the mapping cruise for this year's Gulf hypoxic zone released their report on July 24. Scientists from the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) measured an area totaling slightly more than 3,000 square miles (8,000 square kilometers). Predictions sponsored by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had put this year's zone in a larger range of 7,500 to 8,500 square miles (22,000 to 25,000 square kilometers).

The larger predictions were based on high nitrate-nitrogen loads and freshwater flows in the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers in May and June.

Gulf hypoxia, a condition of low dissolved oxygen in the lower water column, is known to be fueled by nutrient loading from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers that fertilizes massive algal blooms offshore. The decomposition of the algal blooms, coupled with stratification of fresh and salt water layers, results in hypoxia.

Researchers found several causes for the smaller than expected hypoxic zone:

- below average river flows in July which reduced freshwater and nutrient loading to the Gulf;
- west-southwest winds during the weeks immediately before the cruise that pushed low oxygen water to the east;
- high winds and waves in the area west of the Atchafalaya delta during the latter part of the cruise which mixed oxygen in shallow waters;
- limitations of current models (geared to long-term management) for predicting effects of short-term weather patterns.

While the overall size of the hypoxic area was smaller, the severity of low oxygen areas was higher in several areas measured.

Another limitation comes from the single mapping cruise for Louisiana waters each July. Budgetary constraints have prevented the multiple measurements that would provide a fuller picture of the hypoxic process during summer months.

The average size of the hypoxic zone is now at 6,000 square miles (15,670 square kilometers), and has more than doubled since regular measurements began in 1985, making it one of the largest such areas in the world. The threat that the spread of hypoxia poses to Gulf fisheries has been recognized for some time, but the policy response has been limited thus far.

A national Action Plan adopted by a federal-state Task Force has set a goal of reducing the average annual size of the hypoxic zone to 2,000 square miles (5,000 square kilometers).

Source: Lagniappe, Volume 33, No. 7.

Interested in Becoming a Florida Master Naturalist?

The Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP) is an adult education program to promote awareness, understanding and respect of Florida's natural world among Florida's citizens and visitors. Core modules cover freshwater wetland, coastal systems and upland habitats. For more information and a listing of courses offered throughout the state visit <http://www.masternaturalist.ifas.ufl.edu/>.



Announcement and Call for Papers

2010 Florida Artificial Reef Summit

Cocoa Beach, Jan. 21-23, 2010



Florida Sea Grant in collaboration with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has organized an information packed Artificial Reef Summit agenda. The last Summit was held back in 2004. It has been my pleasure to serve as the Chair of the Summit steering committee and I am very excited that we have been able to develop such an outstanding program. If you are interested in the future of artificial reef programs in Florida, you will want to make plans to attend. Due to the generosity of sponsors, early registration (before Nov. 19) is only \$70.00. Check out the Summit website at www.flseagrant.org.

Mark Your Calendars!

Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival

February 20-21, 2010

www.cortez-fish.org



Pet Waste Campaign Expands to Pinellas County



Tampa Bay Estuary Program's "Pooches for the Planet" educational campaign is expanding to animal shelters, pet-related businesses and neighborhoods in Pinellas County, thanks to funding support from the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Pinellas-Anclote Basin Board.

TBEP also is working with local pet related businesses and veterinary clinics to increase awareness of the importance of picking up and properly disposing of pet waste to prevent water pollution. Posters, rack cards, postcards and stickers are available to any business who agrees to display or distribute them.

And, TBEP is working with the city of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County to recruit civic associations willing to take part in a year-long pilot pet waste education program. The neighborhoods will receive pet waste stations and a year's supply of bags if they agree to restock the station regularly, distribute door hangers, and perform dog poop surveys using handheld GPS units (also provided). Training and support provided! Interested? Contact nanette@tbe.org.

Source: Bay Post

**Village of Cortez Folk Arts Festival at
The Florida Maritime Museum**

November 21, 2009

10:00am to 4:00pm

4415 119th St. W

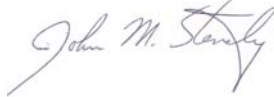
Cortez, FL 34215

www.cortez-fish.org

Enjoy a variety of authentic local folk music and tour the Florida Maritime Museum at Cortez. Explore a piece of the real Florida in the historic fishing village of Cortez. Lots of great activities: music, food, guided tours, wood boat displays, demonstrations, craft vendors', ice cream eating contest, etc.

Free parking. Free admission (donations appreciated). All proceeds to go to FISH Preserve (95 acres of environmentally sensitive land adjacent to Sarasota Bay).

Sincerely,



John Stevely

Sea Grant Extension Agent

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