

Gasparilla Sound - Charlotte Harbor

AQUATIC PRESERVE

"As the only deep water harbor between Tampa and Key West, greater Charlotte Harbor is blessed with a rich abundance and diversity of marine life and requires our constant and continued efforts to ensure the future health of its waters."

*Anna Bowditch, Honorary Member
Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program Advisory Committee*

Key Accomplishments

- After Hurricane Charley, staff worked in close cooperation with public and private agencies to survey the waterways and support the year-long debris removal efforts. Water quality and seagrasses improved rapidly after the storm.
- Annual seagrass monitoring at 20 different sites in the harbor examines types, density, distribution and other parameters. Results indicate that seagrasses vary significantly throughout the region but generally appear healthy and diverse.
- Monthly water quality monitoring by more than 20 citizen volunteers indicates that water clarity is good with high natural color from mangrove tannins but there are spikes in turbidity, bacteria and nutrients associated with rainwater runoff.



Returning home from a day of sailing in Charlotte Harbor

Project Spotlight

Comprehensive Inter-Agency Water Quality Monitoring Network

Long term health of the Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves depends on maintaining good water quality to support diverse



Water quality testing in Charlotte Harbor

submerged habitats. In 2001, the Coastal Charlotte Harbor Monitoring Network was established through a partnership of agencies and staff. Each month, 13 hydrologic regions are sampled for 19 key parameters. The data is examined to determine changes over time, relationships between

parameters and effects on seagrass habitats. Water quality conditions in Gasparilla Sound and Charlotte Harbor show good to average conditions, with very high nutrient and color levels associated with summer rain events. A summary of the findings was presented at the 2005 Charlotte Harbor Watershed Summit and will be published in the journal, Florida Scientist.

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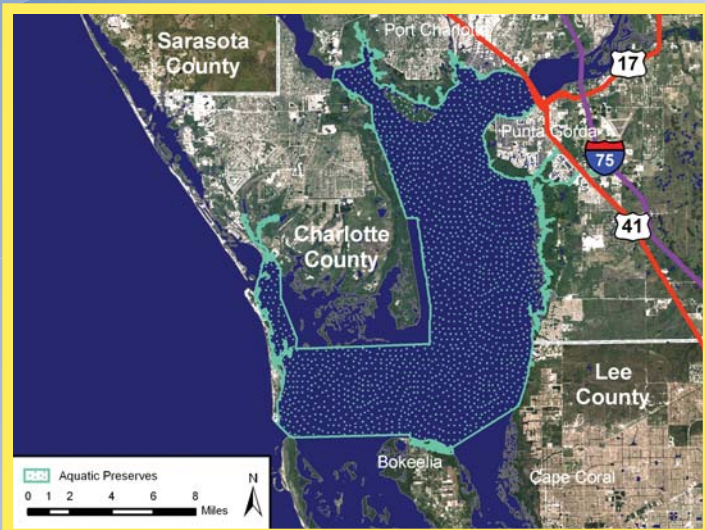


Location:

Charlotte and Lee counties

Acreage:

80,000 acres of sovereign submerged lands



Local Contact:

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Starfish



Turtle grass



Goliath grouper

Aquatic Preserve Facts:

- This is the second largest estuary in Florida and the largest, deepest and most diverse of the five Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves.
- Fresh water from the Peace and Myakka Rivers mixes with salt water coming through Boca Grande Pass from the Gulf of Mexico.
- Shallow, near-shore shoals sustain an abundance of seagrasses, oysters and mudflats. This variety of habitats support over 100 invertebrate species, 200 fish species & 150 shore and wading birds species.
- Fishing is popular among seagrass shallows, mangrove fringes and artificial reefs. Major tarpon and Goliath grouper populations are found near Boca Grande Pass.
- The harbor supports recreational boating along with commercial clam aquaculture and shrimping.



Remaining pilings of an historic phosphate loading dock at Boca Grande Pass support an impressive underwater assemblage of marine organisms



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