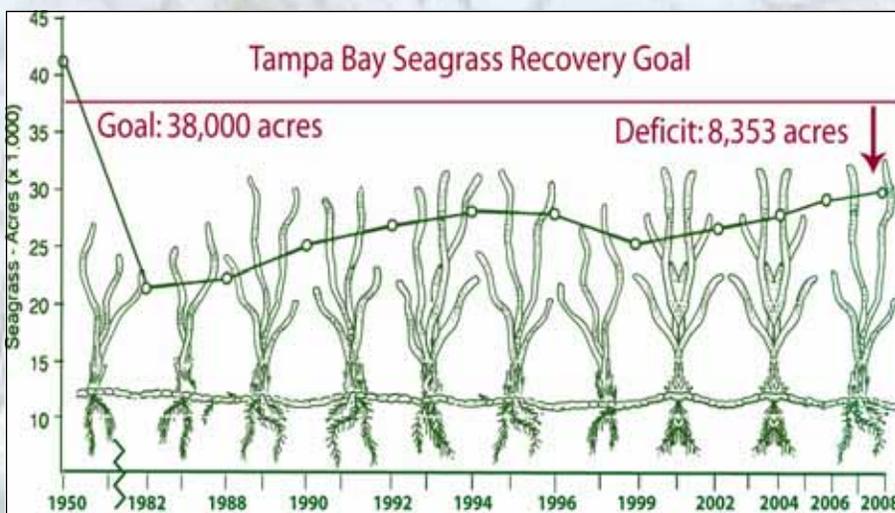


## TAMPA BAY CONTINUES TO REGAIN SEAGRASS

Tampa Bay gained more than 1,300 acres of seagrass between 2006 and 2008, and now supports more seagrass than at any time measured since the 1950s, according to the most recent aerial surveys of the bay.



Overall, the amount of seagrasses in Tampa Bay increased by 5% percent from 2006-2008, according to surveys conducted by scientists with the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Program. This slightly exceeds the 4.7% increase tallied between 2004 and 2006, the last time seagrass coverage was assessed.

Seagrasses – which generally grow in waters less than 6 feet deep – are a key indicator of the bay's health because they require relatively clean water to flourish.

Scientists cautioned that these latest gains may be due, in part, to the ongoing drought, since less rain means less stormwater runoff flowing to the bay. Nutrient-laden runoff clouds the water, preventing sunlight from reaching the underwater grasses. The increase may also be partially a function of even clearer water than usual when the aerial photos were taken, allowing better views of seagrasses in deeper waters.

Tampa Bay now has an estimated 29,647 acres of seagrass – far less than the Estuary Program's goal of 38,000 acres, but the highest recorded total since the benchmark 1950s period adopted by the Program. The highest increases, of 31%, were documented in Middle Tampa Bay, which extends from the Gandy Bridge to the Manatee County line. Hillsborough Bay, traditionally the most polluted bay segment, nearly doubled its seagrass coverage, from 415 to 810 acres in the 2-year period.

Seagrass declines of 6%, 7% and 22% percent, respectively, were reported in Boca Ciega Bay, Terra Ceia Bay and the Manatee River.

The Estuary Program's seagrass recovery strategy relies on controlling nitrogen loadings to the bay to maintain sufficient water clarity for seagrasses to grow. Overall, the pace of seagrass recovery in Tampa Bay has quickened over the last decade, to about 510 acres per year, up from 427 acres per year before 1999.



## Online Boater's Guide Launched

Check out the digital Boating and Angling Guide to Tampa Bay, designed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI), at [http://research.MyFWC.com/boating\\_guides](http://research.MyFWC.com/boating_guides).

The online guide was created with a TBEP Mini-Grant, and is the first digital version of the popular boating guide series produced by FWC. The guide contains everything found in the printed version and much more. Users can download info, zoom in and out on specific areas of the bay, and enlarge and print out sections of interest.

Anglers can access up-to-date fishing regulations specific to the Tampa Bay area, learn about proper and see an expanded list of popular local sport fish. Paddlers can plan trips with a list of area paddling trails linked to the corresponding trail Web sites and maps.

## BASIS 5 Conference To Chronicle 30 Years of Bay Science



The fifth Bay Area Scientific Information Symposium will be held October 20-23 at the Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort in St. Petersburg. TBEP is a major sponsor of this conference, which brings together the bay area scientific community periodically to review progress in restoring the bay and identify emerging issues.

The theme of BASIS 5 is "Using Our Knowledge To Shape Our Future." The entire conference will focus on revisiting and updating the science presented at the very first BASIS conference in 1982. Among the topics to be explored are the geology and hydrology of Tampa Bay; wildlife; seagrasses and other habitats; and climate change.

Registration is \$75 for the full conference; \$35 for one day. Abstracts for papers will be accepted until June 19. Special poster and student poster sessions also are being offered. For more info about registration, abstracts or poster submittals, visit <http://tbep.org/news.html>



*CAC Member Marjorie Karvonen (far right) with awardees Ervin Shannon, Lisa Hickey and Christine Callahan*

## Manatee Extension Volunteers Honored for Grant Project

The Manatee County Friends of Extension group has received the "Golden Mangrove Award" as the Tampa Bay Estuary Program's most outstanding Bay Mini-Grant project for 2008.

The Friends of Extension were honored for their "Cultivating Kids/Coastal Crusaders" project at Anna Maria Elementary School. Extension experts and volunteers in the Master Gardener program used \$4,400 in TBEP grant funds to create sustainable, bay-friendly landscaping at the waterfront school. A variety of specialty gardens (such as vegetable, butterfly and peace gardens) were planted, rain barrels were installed; and rain gardens and pervious surfaces used to minimize runoff to Tampa Bay. All aspects of the project were incorporated in the school curriculum, and the students created educational signs, videos, field guides and a book about their efforts.

This is the second year an award has been given by TBEP's Community Advisory Committee to an exceptional community-based grant project.