

Bird Islands

The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP) is proposing to provide erosional protection for two coastal islands that are important roosting and nesting locations for many protected species of birds. They are also proposing to fund the construction of a habitat restoration project on a third coastal island, Tidy Island, that is owned by the New College Foundation. All three projects have been vetted and are included in the SBEP's Five Year Habitat Restoration Plan.

The **Cortez Key Bird Sanctuary Island** is approximately eight acres of sovereign submerged land owned by the State of Florida and managed by the Audubon Society. The project is in northern Sarasota Bay, east of the ICW, and south of the Cortez Fishing Village and the F.I.S.H. Preserve within an embayment locally referred to as "The Kitchen". This is a natural mangrove island which is surrounded by seagrasses and oyster reefs. The island is an important roosting and nesting location for many protected bird species. The island's northwestern edge currently shows signs of erosion from wave action generated in the ICW and is at further risk of land mass loss due to sea level rise. The proposed plan is to install a series of breakwater structures to dissipate wave action and to protect the island's shore (see attached Figure – Potential Restoration Options). Audubon of Florida currently manages this island and the attached management plan describes the existing conditions as well as proposed improvements. Birds are the most diverse and most highly visible wildlife taxon of the area, with more than 160 species known or likely to occur in Sarasota Bay (Powell 1987). A relatively high proportion of the species that occur are not generally common in Florida. In fact, 12 of the resident species are currently listed by the federal and state governments as threatened, endangered, or species of special concern. Migrant and wintering species, occurring seasonally, make up another significant segment of the region's avifauna. **Dit Dot Dash** is a group of mangrove islands managed by the Audubon Society that is also in need of protection from wave action generated in the boat channel and are at further risk of land mass loss due to sea level rise.

Tidy Island

The Tidy Island project site covers approximately 183 acres of estuarine wetlands owned by the New College Foundation. The project is in eastern Sarasota Bay opposite of Longboat Pass and nearby multiple private residential communities. This natural island primarily consists of mangrove swamp which has been ditched for mosquito control. Ditch spoil was deposited in sporadically-located mounds and on upland ridges which are now infested with N/E species. South of the mangrove swamp are historic salterns which were severely degraded by drainage alterations introduced by the mosquito ditches. The island also contains a semi-closed bayou.

This project proposes removing NE species from portions of the upland ridges followed by a replanting of native species in select areas. Project plans also include the removal of a portion of the upland ridge to open a pass between the semi-enclosed bayou and the Bay. The resultant water exchange which will improve water quality within the bayou thereby improving habitat value for estuarine species. The project includes strategically-located ditch blocks chosen to restore a hydrology which will support the natural regeneration of the salterns (see attached Figure –

Potential Restoration Options). The proposed project would improve water quality within the Bayou, restore historic saltern habitat, reduce the seed source of N/E species, and improve wildlife habitat.

Cortez Key Bird Sanctuary provides very important bird nesting habitat for colonially nesting waterbirds that nest in the mangrove trees. Birds that nest in the trees include Brown Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Anhingas, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons, Tricolored Herons, Reddish Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Green Herons, Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Black-crowned Night-Herons, and Roseate Spoonbills. In some years, White and Glossy Ibis also nest there (Robertson and Woolfenden 1992).

The breakwater structure could be constructed of either oyster bags or pH-balanced artificial reef balls. Oyster bags are less expensive, easier to install, and easier to permit while reef balls more effectively dissipate wave energy and attract larger fish species. Both options occupy the same footprint which may include seagrass beds and will require appropriate permitting. Installation of the breakwater structure would not occur during the breeding season. These are both viable breakwater components which will bolster the vulnerable mangrove island shore while increasing EFH in the Bay.