



# Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserves

## Volunteer Information Guide



## Program Overview

Thank you for volunteering with Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserves! Our program relies on caring and passionate citizens like yourselves to assist us in keeping the aquatic preserves in their best condition. We hope that your experience with us will be both enjoyable and educational. If you'd like to read more about our program, you can visit our [website](#).

For your day of action, you will be helping us with our **habitat restoration project**. This project mainly consists of traveling out to various islands within the preserve and **removing invasive plant species**. An invasive species is defined as a species that is non-native to an ecosystem and whose presence causes harm economically, environmentally, and/or to human health. They are primarily spread through human activity, often unintentionally, and must be managed so that they do not out-compete our native plants. The main invasive species we will be removing are **Brazilian pepper** (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), **Carrotwood** (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*), **Australian pine** (*Casuarina spp.*), and **Lead Tree** (*Leucaena leucocephala*). The other portion of our island work involves re-establishing native plants and shade trees such as **Gumbo-limbo** (*Bursera simaruba*), **Jamaican dogwood** (*Piscidia piscipula*), and **Florida strangler fig** (*Ficus aurea*). We will also likely be maintaining the walking trails on one of our islands.

### Examples of Invasives:



*Brazilian pepper can be recognized by red berries an opposite leaf arrangement. Photo courtesy of U.S. National Parks Service.*



*Carrotwood has subtle alternate leaf arrangement and waxy leaves. Photo courtesy of UF IFAS extension.*



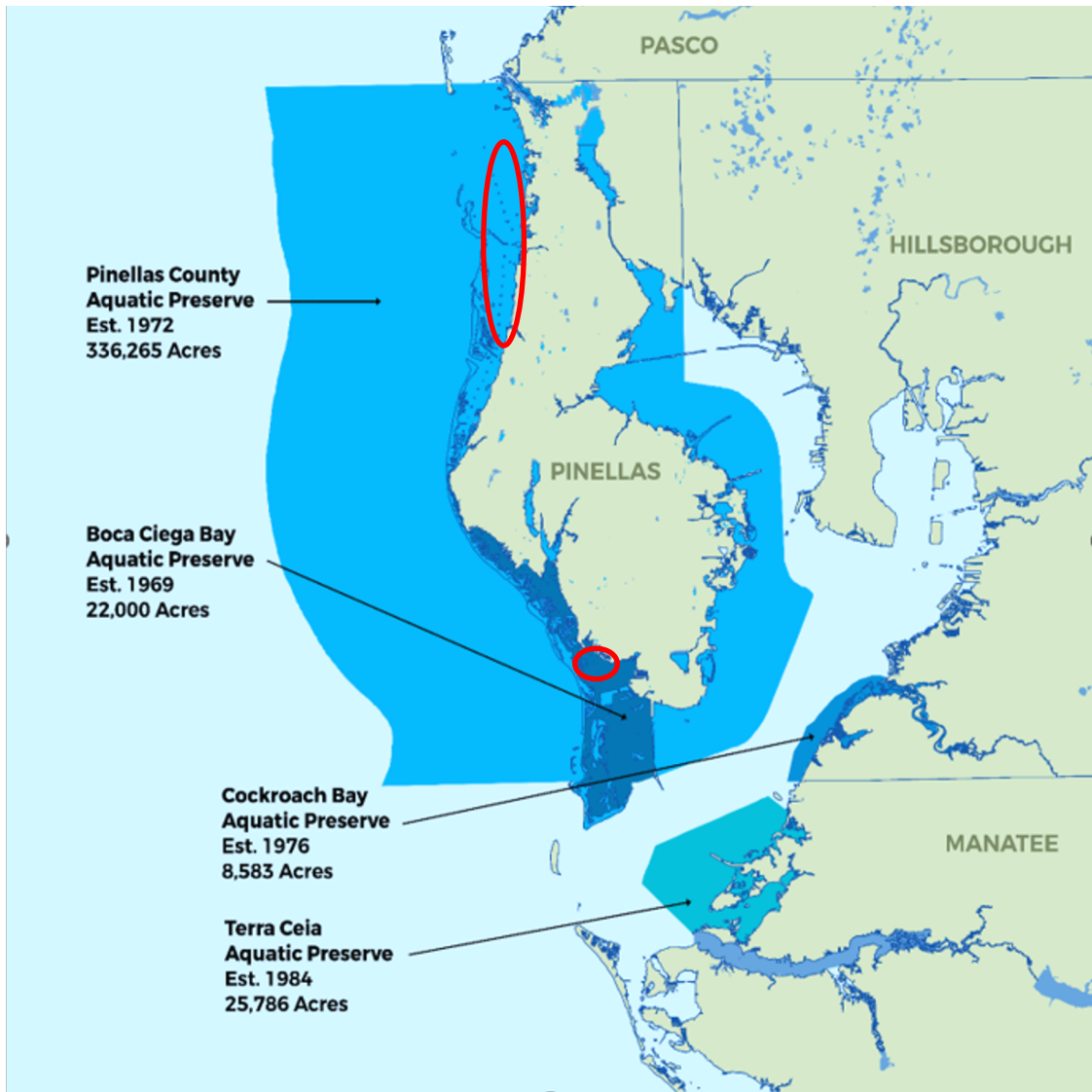
*Australian pine, which is not a true pine, has a shallow root system. Image courtesy of Everglades CISMA.*

# Where We Work

We manage multiple spoil islands within Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve (circled, below) as well as Boca Ciega Bay Aquatic Preserve (circled, below).

The spoil islands are a result of dredging the seafloor to create channels for boats and ships to pass through. Native plant, bird, insect, reptilian, and even mammalian species have colonized these islands, in addition to invasive plants we will remove.

It is important that we remove invasives and restore native plants on these islands as they provide sediment stabilization, habitat for native animal species, and a spot for boaters and visitors to appreciate Florida's natural environment.



# What To Bring

## Attire:

- Sweatshirt and/or jacket (weather dependent)
- Close-toed work shoes (ex. hiking/work boots, durable sneakers)
- **Close-toed water shoes** (ex. old gym shoes, rain boots)



- Long, breathable pants (ex. hiking pants)
- Work appropriate shirts (ex. breathable hiking shirts, long-sleeve shirts)
- Multiple pairs of socks (anticipate socks getting wet)

## Other:

- Re-usable water bottle
- Backpack (to carry water, lunch, etc.) during work days
- Beach towel
- Hat (sun protection)
- Chapstick/lotion (saltwater can be very dehydrating)
- Personal medication
- Personal hygiene items

## Optional:

- Lunch bag
- Sunglasses
- Camera
- Binoculars\*
- Field Guides
- Snorkel Gear\*
- Sunscreen\*
- Insect Repellent\*
- Gardening gloves\*

\*Indicates items that TBAP supplies, but you may want to bring a preferred type/brand.

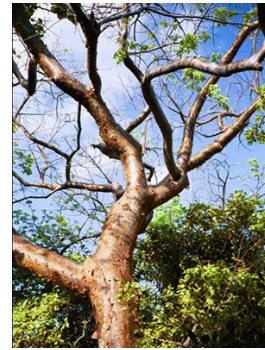
## We will supply:

- |                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| - work gloves       | - first aid supplies |
| - eye goggles       | - hydrogen peroxide  |
| - earmuffs          | - eye wash           |
| - tools             | - hand sanitizer     |
| - bug spray         | - toilet paper       |
| - sunscreen         | - igloo water cooler |
| - snorkel mask/fins | - drinking water     |

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. *Why is it important to remove invasives and plant natives?*

Invasive plants such as Australian pine and Brazilian pepper thrive in environments where they have minimal native grazers and can out-compete native plants for nutrients and sunlight. Australian pine also has an incredibly shallow root system, therefore when they fall, they destabilize the sediment and can allow for erosion of the island. We remove Australian pine and gradually replace it with native shade trees such as gumbo-limbo, strangler fig, and Jamaican dogwood to provide native habitat as well as a nice area for island visitors to take refuge from the harsh sunlight.



*A mature gumbo limbo tree, with its signature peeling bark.*



*A fallen Australian pine tree.*

## 2. *Why do I need to bring two pairs of close-toed shoes?*

The work that we will be doing on the islands requires tough footwear, since we will be using hand tools and walking on rough terrain. Often, we are not able to anchor the boat right next to shore, so accessing the islands may require walking through the water. A second pair of shoes (and socks) is highly recommended, so that you can change out of your wet wading shoes once ashore. Open-toed shoes or slip-ons (ex. flip flops, tevas, chacos) may lead to serious injury, as sharp oyster shells, rocks, and various critters lie on the sea floor.



*Volunteers create an assembly line to transport mulch from the boat.  
Image courtesy of Jacob Snider.*



*Oyster shells are sharp and can cause injury if stepped on. Ouch!  
Image courtesy of Florida Oceanographic Society.*

### **3. Are there restrooms on the islands?**

Our islands have little to no amenities. There may be a bathroom at the boat ramp or marina where we meet in the morning, but once we are on the islands, assume there will be no facilities other than natural vegetation. We will provide toilet paper and hand sanitizer/soap.

### **4. Do I need to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts?**

For terrestrial field work, expected conditions including weather and the work site will determine what you'll need for safety and comfort. You are not required to wear long clothing; however, sunburn, insect bites, scratches from vegetation can all be mitigated by wearing long sleeves and pants. It may be a good idea to bring a variety of clothing, should you want to adjust throughout the week. Hats that can protect you from the sun are also highly encouraged!

### **5. What kind of wildlife should I expect to see?**

Our aquatic preserves provide habitat for various terrestrial, marine and aquatic organisms. On the boat ride, keep an eye out for dolphins, manatees, and ospreys. On the island shores, we frequently spot marine invertebrates like horseshoe crabs and whelks. Marsh rabbits are often found in the brush further inland. We aim to restore and protect our island habitats so we can continue to host native species as well as foster environmental stewardship from members of the community.



A marsh rabbit hides in the brush of an island in St. Joseph Sound, FL.



Horseshoe crab spawning on the shores of a natural island in Boca Ciega Bay, FL.

## 6. *What does a typical day in the field look like?*



*Volunteer supplies set up on an island for the day.*



*A proud volunteer poses with her finished work on an island in North Clearwater Harbor.*

On the morning of a field day, after eating breakfast and packing for the day, you will travel with your group to meet Tampa Bay Aquatic Preserves (TBAP) staff at a chosen boat ramp (dependent on the island we're working on). Together, we will load gear, tools, and personal items onto the boat and head out to an island or hardbottom habitat to work for the day. Once we arrive, TBAP staff will explain the goals for the day and go over safety information. Depending on what needs to be done, you may split up into smaller groups. Some examples of island tasks include planting native trees, cutting down invasives, and picking up debris. Larger group tasks may include setting up an informational kiosk or mulching a trail. We will all come back together for a lunch break in the afternoon (still on the island), finish up the last few hours of work, then load everything back onto the boat and return to the marina. Each day will look slightly different depending on where we will be meeting in the morning, which project we will be working on, and whether your group needs to be back by a certain time.