

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Shell Island, Inc.

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Area Groups Team to Educate Boaters on Seagrass Preservation

PANAMA CITY, FLA. – “Seagrass meadows” can be found in abundance in St. Andrew Bay and in some of the shallow waters around Shell Island, an outstanding natural area attraction. Seagrass provides a home for scallops, crabs, fish eggs and other marine life, provides food for manatees and other species, and helps keep the bay clean by filtering nutrients. The result is a thriving ecosystem that supports our boating, fishing and outdoor lifestyles - and the economy.

While overall water quality is one of the main threats to seagrass health, boaters can do their part to help by avoiding damaging it with their propellers. So Friends of Shell Island, MarineMax Panama City Beach, and Florida Department of Protection’s Florida Coastal Office have teamed up to produce and install educational signs which help boaters learn how to prevent propeller damage as they enter shallow waters that are over seagrass.

The team recently installed a new “Be Seagrass Safe” educational sign at the boat ramp of the St. Andrews State Park. The sign, a creation of Florida Sea Grant, is eye-catching, brief, and direct, helping boaters learn quickly how to avoid grasses, trim their engines, and push their boats as appropriate to prevent scarring. MarineMax and Friends of Shell Island provided the sign, and the Florida Coastal Office installed it. By the start of boating season next spring, the group plans more signs for other area boat ramps and places on land that are frequented by boaters - especially by visiting boaters who may be less-seagrass aware than local boaters.

“For Friends of Shell Island, conservation of our natural resources should be achieved foremost by educating people versus restricting their access. When people know what they can do to help, they are equipped to be a part of the solution” said Stephanie Somerset, Executive Director of the organization.

Caleb Peavler, General Manager of MarineMax Panama City Beach adds that “Shell Island is a beautiful natural treasure that belongs to the people. We are proud to help boaters learn how to protect the natural resources around it, so we can all enjoy the nature of this area in perpetuity.”

[Friends of Shell Island, Inc.](#) is a tax-deductible non-profit advocacy group based in Panama City, Fla. whose mission is to protect our access to Shell Island, conserve its resources, and educate the public about its beauty in order to preserve its place in the lives of residents and visitors who come to Bay County to experience it.

[MarineMax Panama City Beach](#) is our local MarineMax store delivering all of boating’s magical moments. We’re a community of boaters, United by Water, ready to guide your journey. Whether you’re an experienced boater or a first-timer, we’ll get you on the water, creating fun and great memories.

The Florida Coastal Office is home to the St. Andrew Bay Aquatic Preserve, founded to oversee the aquatic preserves' natural condition so that its aesthetic, biological, and scientific values may endure for the enjoyment of future generations.

Florida Sea Grant is a university-based program that supports research, education and extension to conserve coastal resources and enhance economic opportunities for the people of Florida. [Be Seagrass Safe](#) is a project of Florida Sea Grant and University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS).



New Seagrass educational sign installed at the St. Andrews State Park Boat Ramp by Friends of Shell Island, MarineMax Panama City Beach, and the Department of Environmental Protection Florida Coastal Office

Left to right:

Katie Davis, Florida Coastal Office Environmental Specialist III

Jonathan Brucker, Florida Coastal Office Aquatic Preserve Manager

Stephanie Somerset, Executive Director, Friends of Shell Island, Inc.

Jason Hatcher, Business Manager, MarineMax Panama City Beach

Sherrie Campbell, Client Relations Coordinator, MarineMax Panama City Beach

Nikkie Cox, Florida Coastal Office Environmental Specialist I

Not pictured: Megan Christopher, Florida Coastal Office Environmental Specialist I
