



2024

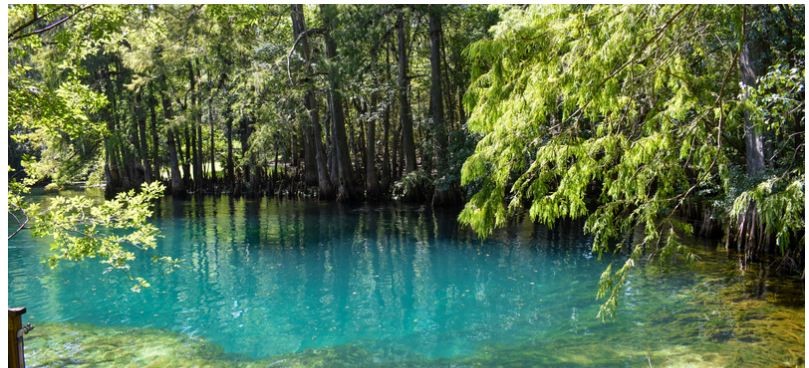


# ANNUAL REPORT

[SAVECRYSTALRIVER.COM](http://SAVECRYSTALRIVER.COM)



**SAVE CRYSTAL RIVER IS COMMITTED TO RESTORING AND PROTECTING THE BEAUTY AND HEALTH OF CRYSTAL RIVER AND FLORIDA'S WATERWAYS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.**



“

**The Kings Bay Restoration Project in Crystal River stands as a beacon of resilient restoration, showcasing how dedicated efforts can revive and sustain a vital aquatic ecosystem.**

**Pounded by recent hurricanes and tropical storms, this project has rebounded, proving how resilient mother nature really is when strategic nature-based restoration techniques are used.**

**- FLORIDA SPECIFIER -**

”



Crystal River has a storied history of recognizing the ecological importance of its waterways, for the citizens and wildlife who call it home.



Known for being the “Home of the Manatees” and for having a first magnitude spring system which discharges over 64.6 million gallons of water daily, Crystal River is cherished for its plentiful resources, as well as its exotic beauty.

Yet in 1993, Crystal River was threatened when acres of hydrilla and other freshwater vegetation were killed by the influx of a huge plume of salt water following the “No Name Storm”.



When the salt and vegetation sank to the bottom of the riverbed floor, an invasive blue-green algae, Lyngbya, formed and took over Crystal River. As a result of the decomposition process, an oxygen deficient environment formed, clogging the spring vents, suffocating future growth and forcing wildlife to evacuate.



**In 2012, help arrived when a group of concerned citizens formed Save Crystal River with the goal to restore and protect the beauty and health of Crystal River and Florida's waterways for future generations.**

**What started as an experimental initiative to eradicate the invasive Lyngbya algae and replant eelgrass evolved into a thriving success story thanks to dedicated efforts, committed volunteers, the invaluable backing of the community, and the bold actions of forward-thinking Legislators.**





**THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW A COMMUNITY, BUSINESSES, AND GOVERNMENT CAN WORK TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE FEATS, BY STARTING SOMEWHERE, SETTING GOALS AND NEVER GIVING UP.**



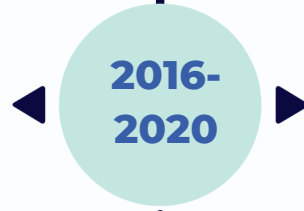
Noxious blue green algae and Lyngbya consumed Crystal River, resulting in clogged springs and very little aquatic life.



24 boxes full of 6,000+ letters were taken to the Florida Legislature asking for support to restore Crystal River. This resulted in \$1.6M in funding for the 3.2 acre Kings Bay Restoration Pilot Project.

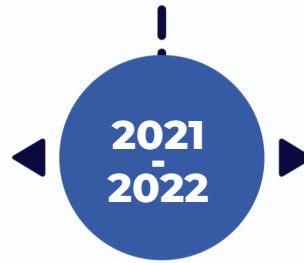


The Kings Bay Restoration Project broke ground (the first of its kind in Florida) and proved to be a success. These results yielded additional funding for restoration of Hunter, Jurassic and House Springs canals.



Continued project success earned greater awareness and funding to restore 10 important canals including manatee corridors and warm water habitats, Magnolia Springs, and waterways.





Funding received to complete the first four (4) Phases, including all upland canals, Schatz Island to Plantation Point, Palm Springs, and more.

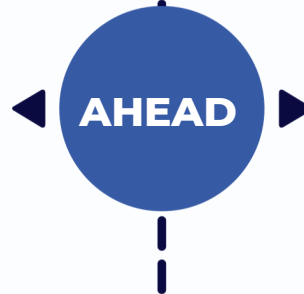


The first goal of four Phases (92 acres, spreading to over 300 acres) of the Kings Bay Restoration Project was completed in time for the 100th Anniversary of The City of Crystal River in July 2023.

In November, 4.75 acres of Hunter Springs Basin was restored.



An additional 85 acres have been permitted to further the restoration and protection efforts for Crystal River.



Restoration of shoreline and salt marsh grasses on Kings Bay's protective inland barrier islands in partnership with USFWS, DEP, City of Crystal River, and Citrus County government.





## THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF HURRICANES

Save Crystal River is dedicated to preserving and nurturing the natural beauty of Crystal River. While we never claim to control Mother Nature, we do commit to supporting and healing with her, time and again. Hurricanes Idalia, Helene, and Milton, along with a tornado in between, have tested the strength of Crystal River, but they've also highlighted why our work is so crucial.

Biological surveys have confirmed the grasses are rebounding while limited supplemental planting will be required. Biological surveys have confirmed the grasses are rebounding while limited supplemental planting will be required.







Despite these challenges, signs of recovery are emerging. The native grasses are beginning to regrow, demonstrating that restoration efforts have laid a strong foundation for resilience.

Nature is both unpredictable and resilient, and so are we. Although storms have taken their toll, they've underscored the need for continued support to restore the aquatic grasses and habitats that are vital to Crystal River's ecosystem.







## CRYSTAL CLEAR RESULTS

**680M+ LBS**

LYNGBYA REMOVED

**850+**

PREVIOUSLY UNIDENTIFIED  
SPRING VENTS OPENED

**590,000+**

EELGRASS PODS PLANTED

**105+**

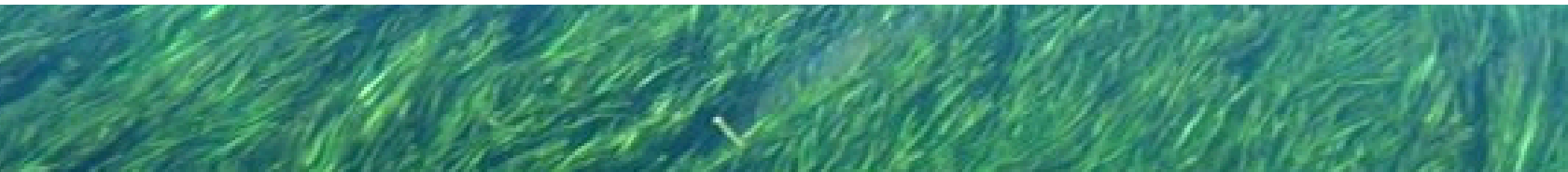
ACRES PLANTED  
(OUT OF 171 PERMITTED ACRES)



## Restoration and protection efforts have created:

- **Water clarity & healthier conditions for wildlife to thrive in Crystal River**
- **The revitalization of clear waters for fishing enthusiasts and tourism**
- **The stimulation of community economic growth**
- **The lowest rate of unique mortality events with manatee**

**These things and many others have distinguished Save Crystal River and The Kings Bay Restoration Project as an exemplary model of success. This success serves as an inspiration for similar environmental restoration efforts in Florida and across the world.**







# 2025 FOCUS: RESILIENCY





**With each challenge, we are reminded that rehabilitation is not a single achievement but a long-term commitment to nurturing the earth and the life in and around our waters for generations to come.**



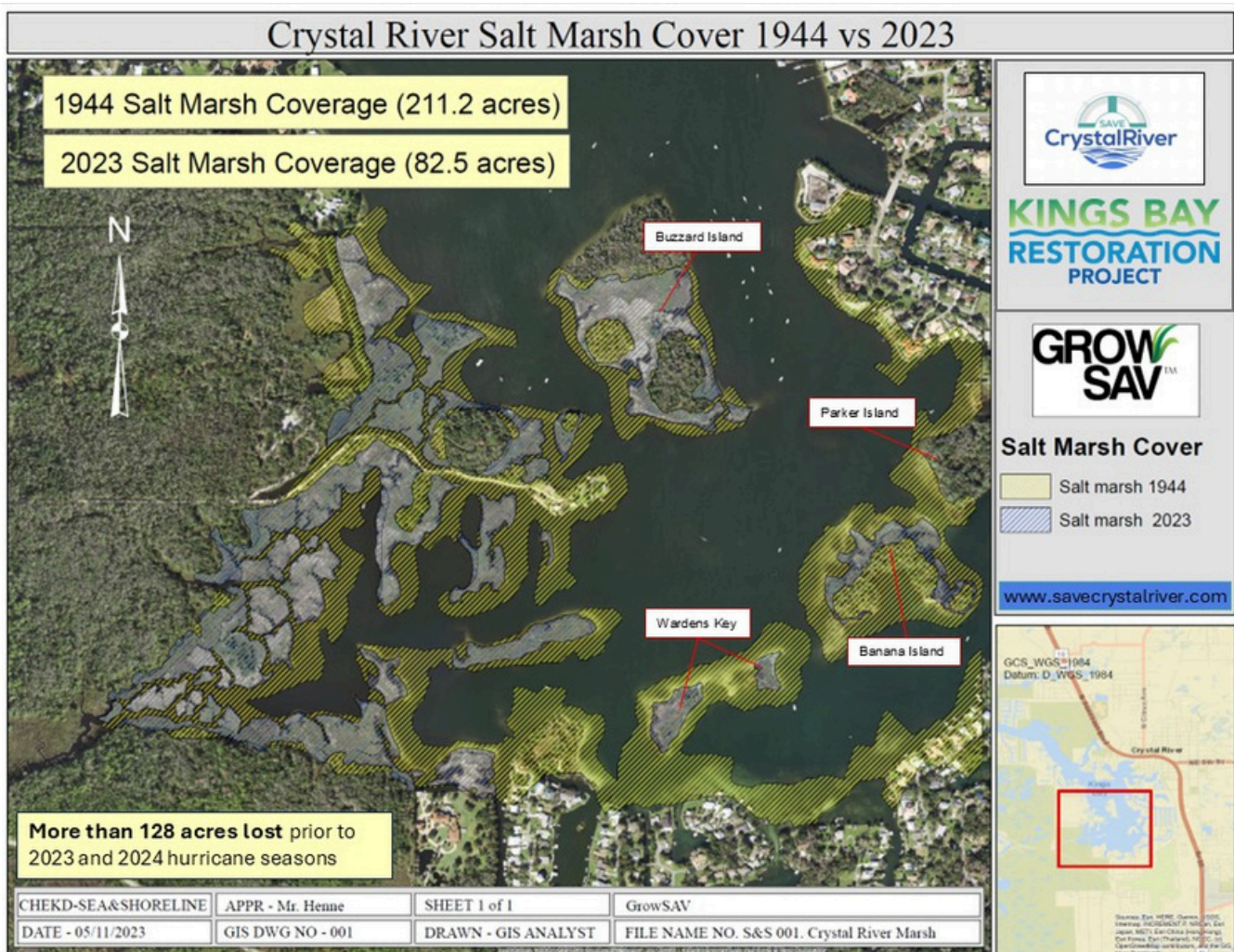


# 2025 GOALS & BEYOND

**A GREAT DEAL HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, YET MUCH REMAINS:**

## EELGRASS PLANTING AND PROTECTION INITIATIVES

- **CLEAN, PLANT AND PROTECT PHASES 5-7 (85 ACRES) IN CEDAR COVE, MAGNOLIA SHORES, PETE'S PIER, AS WELL AS WOODLAND ESTATES, MONTEZUMA WATERS, CRYSTAL SHORES, AND OTHER UPLAND RESIDENTIAL CANALS**
- **ONGOING MAINTENANCE TO PROTECT THE THRIVING EELGRASS FROM NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND REGROWTH OF HARMFUL ALGAE**
- **MANATEE MUNCHIES (GRASS COLLECTION) INITIATIVE TO FEED THE MANATEES IN REHABILITATION CENTERS (AND EXTENDING TO OTHER AREAS)**



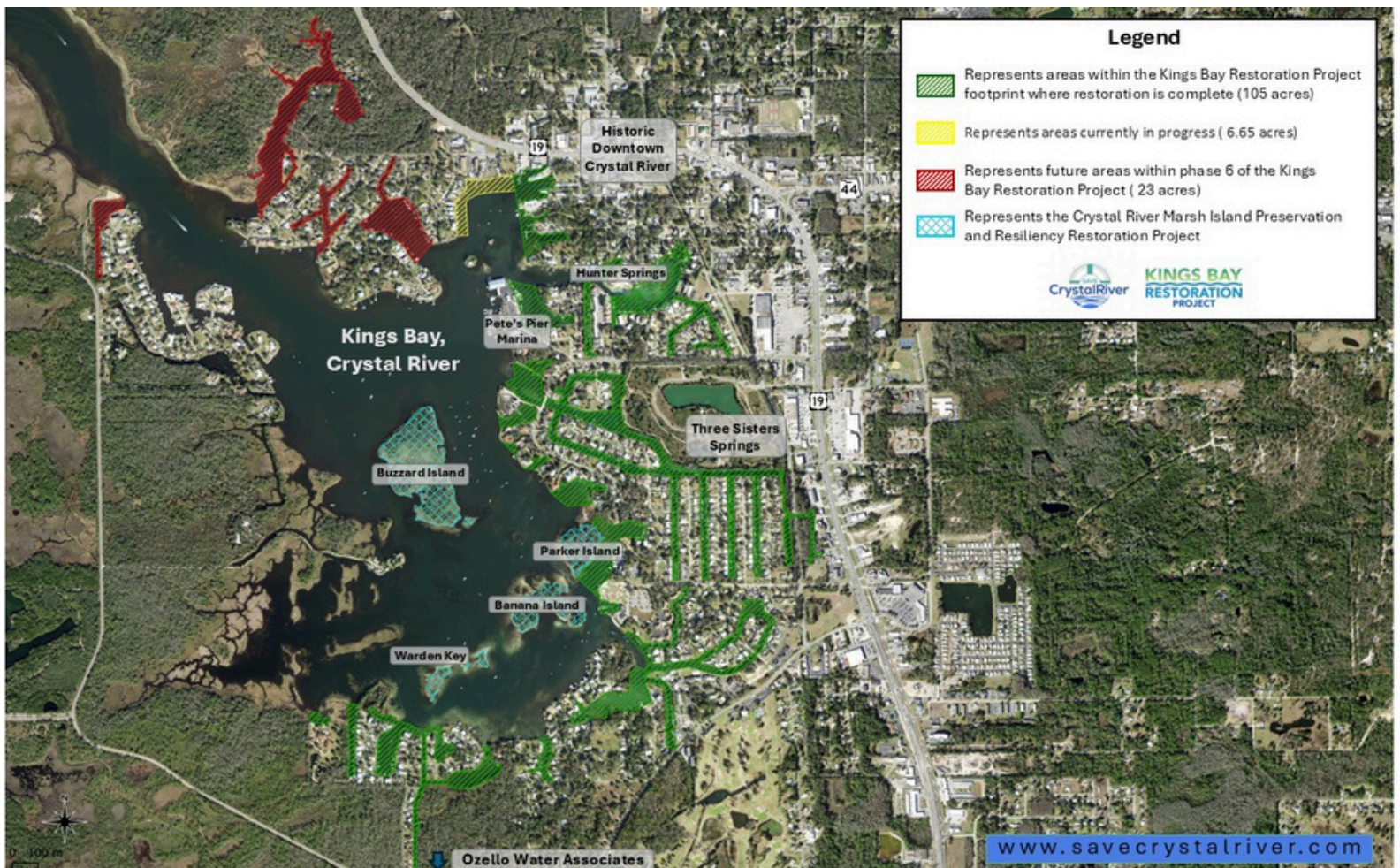
**More than 128 acres lost** prior to 2023 and 2024 hurricane seasons



# 2025 GOALS & BEYOND

## MARSH & SHORELINE RESILIENCY INITIATIVES

- A MARSH AND SHORELINE RESILIENCY PROTECTION PILOT PROJECT IS UNDERWAY TO RESTORE THE NATURAL SHORELINES AND VEGETATION OF PARKER ISLAND.
- REMOVE THE LAND BRIDGE FORMING BETWEEN THE ISLAND AND THE MAINLAND TO RESTORE THE NATURAL WATER FLOW, PROTECT BIRD COLONIES, AND ELIMINATE THE FORMATION OF A DETRITAL MATERIAL SINK IN THE RECENTLY RESTORED EELGRASS BEDS BEHIND THE ISLAND.
- RESTORE AND PROTECT THE SEVERE EROSION OF SAWGRASS MARSHES SURROUNDING THE ISLANDS IN KINGS BAY THAT SERVE AS STORM SURGE BARRIERS TO THE COMMUNITY AND PROVIDE CRITICAL FISH AND BIRD HABITATS.



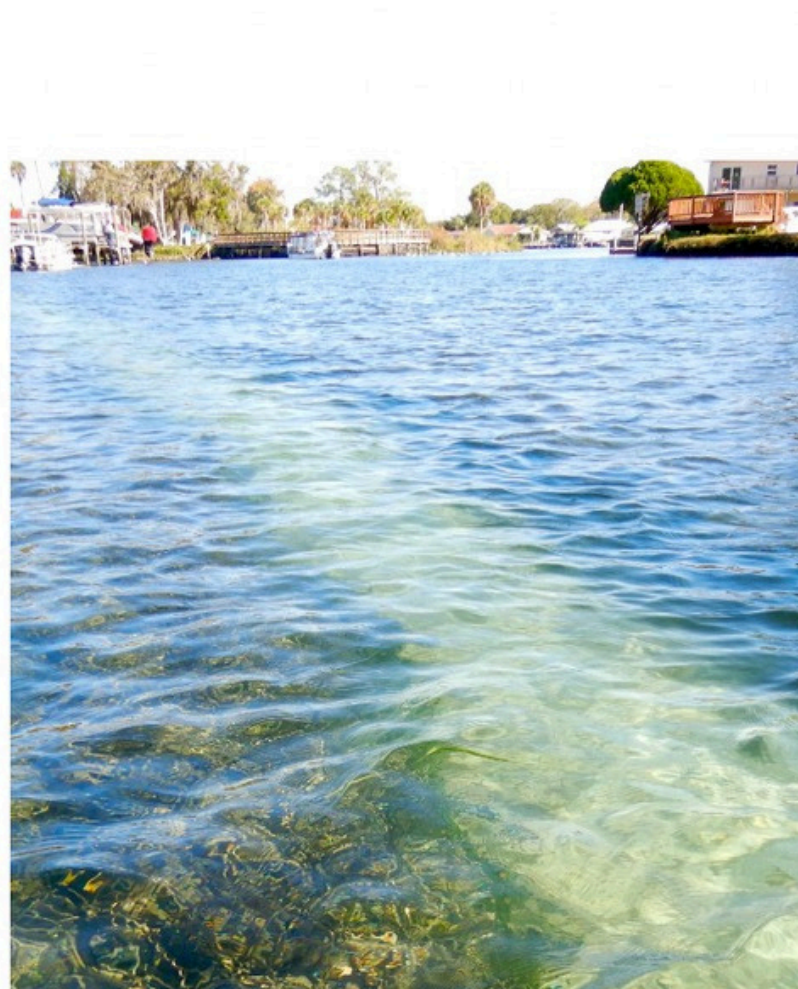


## RESPONSIBLE ANCHORING

Eelgrass is resilient, but hazardous anchoring practices, such as dragging anchors or propellers in shallow water, rip the grass out of the ground.

Even if a boater is only moving a few feet, it can cause scars to the bottom of the waterways, creating scars for decades. This destroys the eelgrass that was carefully planted to rehabilitate the area.

Save Crystal River's Responsible Anchoring Program offers rebates towards the purchase and installation of spud poles in Crystal River (for qualifying tour operators) to mitigate the damage and continue to support the efforts of beautifying Crystal River.





## MANATEE MUNCHIES

Save Crystal River's Manatee Munchies Program generated significant brand awareness and an opportunity to directly engage younger generations in the conservation conversation.

When props are not lifted in shallow waters, they "trim" the grass, resulting in floating eelgrass gathering on the surface. Additionally, as fall and winter set in and sunlight is less plentiful, the eelgrass releases most of the leaves, much like oak or maple trees.

As a secondary program to all planting and protection efforts, Save Crystal River works with Sea & Shoreline who utilize a surface skimmer, which traverses the waters of Crystal River and collects the grasses. These grass clippings are offered to rehabilitation facilities for manatees to give them access to their natural food source, making it easier for them to re-acclimatize when they return to the wild.



## EDUCATING FUTURE GENERATIONS

### ROCKSTAR EELGRASS CURRICULUM

Save Crystal River developed a "Rockstar Curriculum" in partnership with Crystal River Primary School almost a decade ago. Save Crystal River works with teachers and students from K-5 on a "Rockstar Eelgrass Curriculum" to show them how eelgrass grows, teach them how to plant it, and its benefits to the ecosystem. This curriculum is available at [savecrystalriver.com/education](http://savecrystalriver.com/education) for use by educators around the world.

Since 2007, Crystal River Primary School teachers have worked with their students showing them how eelgrass grows and teaching them how to plant it in Hunter Springs once a year during planting days. The success of this critical project is designed to ensure a legacy that will protect this unique gem of the Nature Coast for future generations.

### OTHER INITIATIVES

Save Crystal River "Eelgrass Planting Days"

Citrus County Public Library's "Ocean of Possibilities" Summer Programs

Central Florida "SCUBAnauts" Chapter Meetings

Eco Week- teaching the benefits of cleaning, restoring and protecting the river





**SAVE CRYSTAL RIVER 2024 MEDIA COVERAGE  
GENERATED AN AUDIENCE REACH OF OVER  
350M VIEWERS & READERS.**

**THE KINGS BAY RESTORATION PROJECT CONTINUES  
TO SET AN EXAMPLE FOR SUCCESSFUL AQUATIC  
PROJECTS ACROSS THE GLOBE.**

**SUCCESS HAS GARNERED ATTENTION FROM JOURNALISTS,  
REPORTERS, AND TELEVISION PERSONALITIES WORLDWIDE.**



*Southern Living*

**Orlando Sentinel**

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**A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS, DONORS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PARTNERS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED THE SUCCESSFUL RESTORATION AND PROTECTION OF CRYSTAL RIVER.**





# SCIENTISTS & PARTNERS



**JIM ANDERSON,**

**Sea & Shoreline Founder**



**CARTER HENNE,**

**Sea & Shoreline President & Lead Biologist**



Sea & Shoreline is the foremost expert in rehabilitating aquatic environments into thriving ecosystems. Based in Florida, this knowledgeable, experienced team is able to utilize scientifically proven, patented processes to successfully restore waterways throughout the Southeastern US and the Caribbean.



David W. Ceilley, M.S. is a Certified Senior Ecologist by the Ecological Society of America with 33 years of experience conducting aquatic and wetland biological assessments in Florida.

Mr. Ceilley is principal ecologist and owner of Ceilley Aquatic Science & Ecology, LLC working specifically on aquatic and wetland restoration projects for State and Federal Agencies and NGOs. He is a graduate faculty member at Florida Gulf Coast University.



**DAVID CEILLEY,**  
**Senior Ecologist**



## SPONSORS

Save Crystal River is humbled and grateful for the outpouring of consistent community support. We feel added recognition is in order to the superlative support of a few companies that go the extra mile.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO:



**CRYSTAL**

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The community engagement and enthusiasm for Save Crystal River is alive due to the generous, continued support by:

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# CASE STUDY

## CASE STUDY: SAVING THE HOME OF THE MANATEES

### *The Rehabilitation of Crystal River through Eelgrass Restoration*

#### **Introduction:**

The rehabilitation of water bodies is a crucial environmental endeavor that requires comprehensive strategies and community involvement to restore the health and beauty of aquatic ecosystems. This case study focuses on the successful rehabilitation efforts undertaken by Save Crystal River in restoring Crystal River, Kings Bay, and other waterways in Florida through the restoration of eelgrass (seagrass).

#### **Background:**

Crystal River, Kings Bay, and surrounding waterways had suffered for several decades due to human and environmental factors, rendering the waters unsuitable for native plants and aquatic life, and unattractive for recreational activities. In response to this ecological crisis, Save Crystal River was established in 2012 as an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to revitalizing Crystal River and its surrounding areas.

The rehabilitation of Crystal River and its surrounding waterways through eelgrass restoration stands as a testament to the power of collective action and the importance of proactive environmental initiatives. By successfully addressing challenges, implementing sustainable solutions, and engaging the community, Save Crystal River has created a model for environmental programs and inspiration for other communities seeking to restore their waters and protect precious ecosystems.

In 2025, Save Crystal River's Board of Directors look to share this story and tools broadly to empower other communities with knowledge and resources to better the world as well.





# THANK YOU

IT IS WITH THE SUPPORT OF LEGISLATORS, THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PARTNERS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS, AND THE GENEROSITY OF MANY DONORS THAT THIS OVERWHELMINGLY BRAVE RESTORATION PROJECT HAS BEEN POSSIBLE AND SUCCESSFUL.

OUR SINCERE AND HUMBLE APPRECIATION,

THE TEAM AT SAVE CRYSTAL RIVER



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