Living on the Edge
The Balance Between Economy and Environment

Florida is a coastal state — the environment matters. Floridians need jobs — the economy matters.

Most of Florida’s 20 million residents live in coastal counties, and over 80 million tourists visit the coast each year. This concentration of people, activities and economies contributes more than 80% — almost $562 billion — to the state’s economy annually.

Florida Sea Grant is a university-based program that helps balance the growth of local economies with protection of the coastal environment. It has become the “go to” organization around the state on a wide range of issues affecting economic prosperity of coastal communities and businesses, as well as the protection of natural resources.

SCIENCE-BASED TOOLS THAT SAVE TAXPAYER DOLLARS
Florida is the nation’s top boating destination, a boon to many coastal economies that has also intensified the need for more navigable waterways, improved boater safety and better protection of sensitive marine habitats — the health of which is a key reason that boating is so popular.

Florida Sea Grant waterways planning specialists have developed GIS-based tools that help communities more effectively manage their waters, save tax dollars and reduce environmental impacts. Community planners and resource managers use these tools to estimate demand for boating facilities, streamline permitting for navigational access and quantify economic impacts derived from marinas and boat ramps.

According to the West Coast Inland Navigation District, Florida Sea Grant’s waterway management system in Southwest Florida has saved taxpayers an estimated $5 million since 2006.

PROVIDING SCIENCE BEHIND THE STATE’S EVOLVING ARTIFICIAL REEF PROGRAM
Artificial reefs are man-made underwater habitats that support a variety of marine life. A recent economic analysis found that fishing and diving activity on artificial reefs provides 39,119 jobs annually to Floridians, generating $3.1 billion in the state’s economic activity and providing $1.3 billion in income to Floridians.

Florida Sea Grant study estimates artificial reef users contribute $253 million annually to the economy of the populous six-county region.

SUPPORTING EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Managing Florida’s ocean and coastal resources for economic growth and sustainability becomes more complex each day. There is a critical need to support the educational development of future marine science professionals, as well as provide required training for those already in the coastal workforce.

As a university-based program with ties to 18 major research universities and over 800 faculty experts, Florida Sea Grant is uniquely positioned to respond to this challenge. It does not “teach” or “graduate” students in the tradition of an academic department. Florida Sea Grant supports 30 to 40 college students each year through scholarship programs and research projects, which require that a student actively work on the project.

Funding comes from both public and private sources, including the Aylesworth Foundation for the Advancement of Marine Science, the Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation and the Florida Outdoor Writers Association.

With extension agents in more than 20 coastal counties, Florida Sea Grant can also provide locally relevant training that develops and supports a workforce critical to a sustainable economy. Extension agents and specialists typically provide required training to hundreds of professionals in seafood safety, oyster harvesting and processing, GIS-based applications and eco-friendly landscaping.

For more information: www.FISeaGrant.org

FOSTERING GROWTH FOR AN EMERGING INDUSTRY
In Cedar Key, where about 80% of Florida’s clam farming occurs, aquaculture has helped preserve a way of life. And clam farming now has a statewide economic impact of over $50 million, supporting more than 550 jobs in Cedar Key alone.

Florida Sea Grant plays an integral role. Its legal extension team has assisted the community with proactive planning of a Community Redevelopment Area, a special finance district in which future increases in property values are set aside to pay for waterfront improvements. The team also helped clam farmers earn exemptions for their qualified waterfront aquaculture operations, saving them nearly $27,000 in property tax each year.

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