

Contact: Nanette O'Hara
nanette@tbep.org
(727) 893-2765

Grant Partnership Will Boost Bay Restoration



An innovative public-private grant partnership forged by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program will offer more than \$600,000 this year for important restoration, research and education projects in the Tampa Bay watershed.

The Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund (TBERF) is financed with contributions of \$350,000 from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD); \$175,000 from The Mosaic Company Foundation through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; \$75,000 from Manatee County; and \$10,000 from TECO Energy. Grant applications are being accepted now from local governments, non-profits, universities and other groups. The deadline is March 14, 2014 with recipients to be notified in June.

The grant program is being managed jointly by the Estuary Program and Restore America's Estuaries (RAE), who have pledged to work together to recruit financial donors and achieve measurable conservation outcomes from the funded projects. They have set a goal of securing \$1 million a year in grant funding.

"It's exciting to be part of a partnership with such a clear focus on achieving tangible improvements to Tampa Bay," said Jeff Benoit, President of Restore America's Estuaries.

The funding and administrative partnership was cobbled together by the Estuary Program as a permanent replacement for the highly successful Pinellas County Environmental Fund. That program provided more than \$10 million over a decade for bay restoration projects; when it was phased out, TBEP led the search for new sponsors to keep this important grant opportunity afloat. In 2012, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, SWFWMD, The Mosaic Company Foundation and Hillsborough County funded the program as the Tampa Bay Environmental Fund. This year, Restore America's Estuaries – a respected national alliance of 11 community-based conservation organizations, including Tampa Bay Watch – agreed to join the Estuary Program in a key management role, and the name of the program was modified to the Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund.

"We are looking forward to providing a stable, long-term source of funding to keep the momentum going and sustain the remarkable progress we've made as a region in improving Tampa Bay," said Holly Greening, executive director of the Estuary Program.

Grant requests may address water quality improvement, habitat restoration, fish and wildlife protection, environmental education, or applied research and monitoring needs. A selection committee composed of representatives of the Fund's partners and local scientists will review and select projects for funding. Each project is required to have a dollar-for-dollar match, further leveraging the impact of the grant funds.

The grant application and review criteria are at www.tbepotech.org

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