



While COVID-19 has cancelled or postponed a lot of volunteer-based work and programs, the Research and Conservation department has been hard at work in the field and behind the scenes.

We have a new Director of Scientific Research and Conservation at Florida Oceanographic Society. Dr. Loraé Simpson started on March 9th and has been busy learning the ropes of the department. She is a mangrove ecologist and her research focuses on how ecosystem function is affected when ecosystem structure is altered. She spent the last 11 years working at and with the Smithsonian Marine Station in Fort Pierce and the Whitney Laboratory for Marine Biosciences in St. Augustine. She is excited to expand her research into seagrass and oysters and hopes to use applied and citizen science to better understand how to restore the Indian River Lagoon.

Updates for our flagship programs and additional projects are as follows:

Flagship Programs

FLOOR

- On March 11th, our department helped Education with their FLOORed field trip. Our staff helped facilitate the filling of oyster bags by 7th graders.
- We deployed 500 oyster bags for a living shoreline in Stuart with the help of our Publix volunteers on March 12th.
- For the health and safety of our community, our shell recycling program was put on hold on March 20th. The restaurants were very understanding and look forward to starting the program back up once they are up and running again.
- Staff surveyed a site at Mariner Bay on March 25th to determine its suitability for oyster habitat restoration. Dr. Coldren is currently writing up the plan to present to their board of directors.

FOSTER

- Seagrass work has been slow due to the growing season but should pick up again soon.
- Staff have been cleaning the tanks and wet lab culverts as that volunteers have been suspended at this time.
- There are a few odds and ends to finish up for the seagrass nursery expansion and we hope to complete these while the doors are closed to the public.

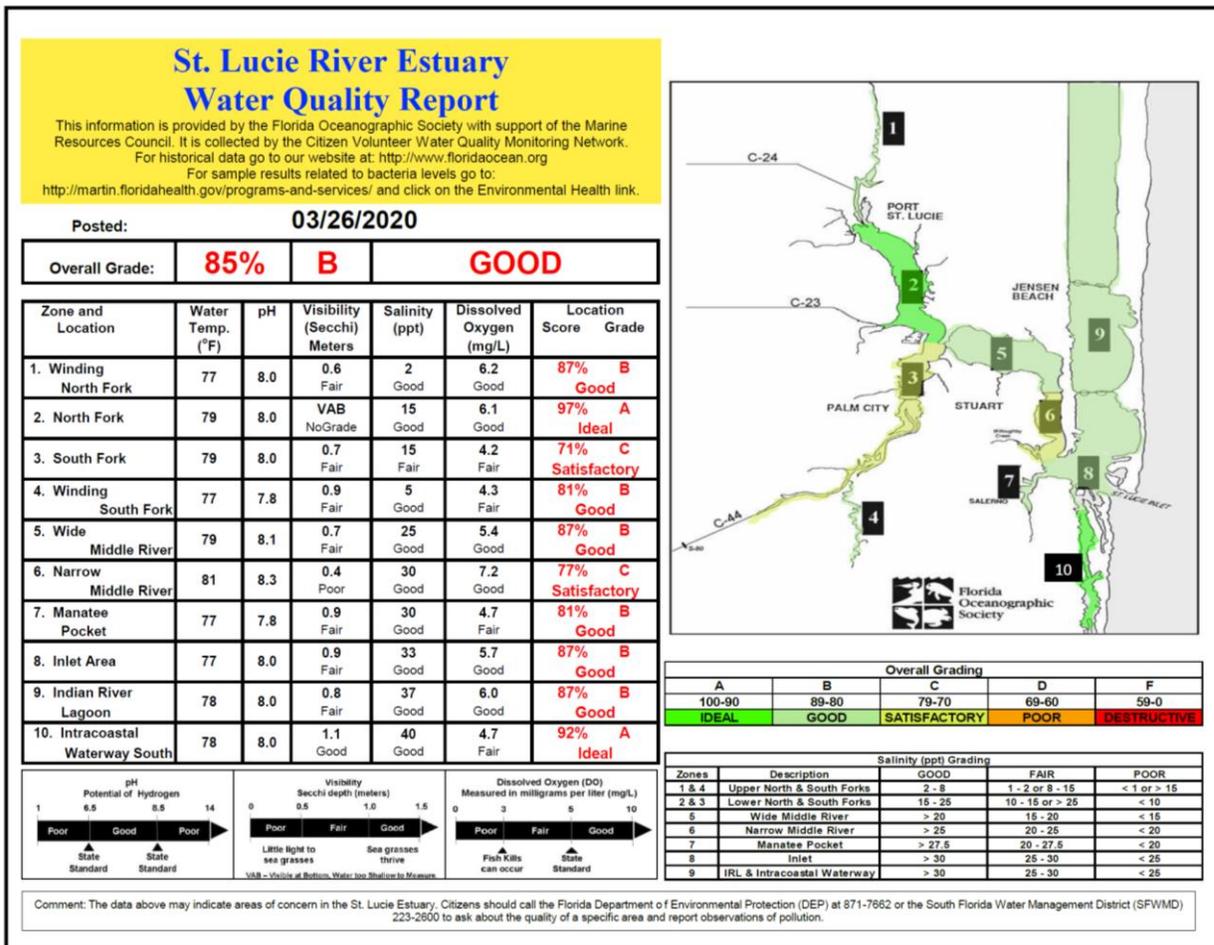
Water Quality

- Six members from the "Treasure Coast Explorers" visited FOS on March 13th, to learn about water quality monitoring from Dr. Katie Tiling. Members tested water samples from various locations to gain an understanding of different water quality tests, parameters, and what they mean for the health of the estuary.
- Water quality has been business as usual. We have suspended water quality monitoring at public locations, but private testers are still hard at work. We were elated to receive water quality data from 17 of our 28 of testers the week of March 23rd. In the interim, staff are still



publishing water quality reports, working on updating protocols, and taking inventory of necessary chemicals.

Water quality is looking good!





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Additional projects:

IMPACT 100 – Dr. Coldren submitted a grant proposal to Impact 100 in February. We are delighted to report that it made it to the second round and we are currently in the top 10. On March 11th we hosted 12 members from Impact 100 to pitch them our idea and tour them around the new lab, seagrass nursery and shell collection area. We are anxiously awaiting any news from them!

Microplastics – Water collection for the microplastics project wrapped up in February and now Samantha Smith is working through the 500+ samples to identify plastic pieces and fragments. Preliminary data suggests that there is an uptick in plastic fragments found in the IRL after major storms but we will not know the actual findings until the data is analyzed by the University of Central Florida. Samantha will be done with samples in mid-April.

Research Lab Replacement – We are making ourselves at home in the new lab. Sinks and plumbing have been installed but the covered work area has been put on hold during this uncertain time. Creating an inventory and organizing are on the list of things to accomplish this month.

Further details on all projects and programs are available by contacting Dr. Simpson.

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