

PROTECTING TERRA CEIA AQUATIC PRESERVE (TCAP)



2026

VOICES FOR WATER: ADVOCACY PROGRAM

WHY THIS MATTERS

Protecting the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve is critical to preserving one of the last remaining natural estuarine systems in Tampa Bay, an area set aside for its exceptional ecological, cultural, and economic value. Established under the Florida Aquatic Preserve Act and designated as an Outstanding Florida Water, the preserve is meant to remain in its natural condition, with strict protections against degradation. Proposals to increase density or introduce incompatible development, such as a multi-berth cruise terminal, threaten not only sensitive habitats and water quality but also conflict with state protections and Manatee County's Comprehensive Plan. This is not just a land use decision, it is about upholding longstanding legal safeguards and ensuring that this vital resource continues to support our communities, economy, and way of life for future generations.

KEY CONCERNS

- **Irreversible Environmental Impacts**
 - The preserve contains over 21,000 acres of interconnected habitats, including seagrasses, mangroves, salt marshes, and hardbottom communities.
 - Dredging required for cruise ships would permanently destroy habitats and degrade surrounding ecosystems through turbidity and sedimentation.
 - Altering shallow bay bottoms increases storm surge and tidal flooding risks.
 - Loss of mangroves and wetlands removes natural buffers protecting nearby communities.
 - The site is located in high-risk coastal zones where development is limited to protect life and property.
- **Threats to Water Quality**
 - Dredging increases turbidity, smothering seagrasses and nearby aquacultural areas
 - Dredging for the project would significantly degrade water quality by resuspending toxic heavy metals and other contaminants, posing risks to shellfish, fish, and human health.
 - The existing legal framework governing aquatic preserves and Outstanding Florida Waters reflects clear legislative intent to safeguard these resources from incompatible uses.

PROTECTING TERRA CEIA AQUATIC PRESERVE (TCAP)



2026

VOICES FOR WATER: ADVOCACY PROGRAM

KEY CONCERNS

- **Economic Impacts**
 - Tampa Bay's economy, generating over \$32 billion annually, depends on clean water.
 - Commercial and recreational fishing, along with aquaculture, support local jobs, culture, and food systems.
 - Water quality degradation threatens these industries, risking job loss and reduced natural ecosystem benefits.
- **Cultural & Community Value**
 - The preserve contains more than 40 documented archaeological sites, including areas within the project footprint.
 - The Terra Ceia community has strong ties to the area through fishing, boating, and recreation.
 - It remains one of the last places in Tampa Bay with an intact natural shoreline for residents and visitors to experience.

KEY ASKS

1. **Oppose any rezoning applications that increase density within the preserve's geographic boundaries.**
2. **Uphold the legal protections and intent of state and local policies.**
 - Ensure strict adherence to Outstanding Florida Waters protections and aquatic preserve rules.
 - Reject proposals that cannot clearly demonstrate no degradation and overwhelming public benefit.
3. **Support land conservation efforts within the preserve's geographic boundary.**
4. **Protect fisheries, aquaculture, and recreation industries that depend on a healthy estuary.**
5. **Promote economic development that aligns with environmental protection, not large-scale industrialization.**

