

# Proposed Port Key Messages

January 2026

- TBEP estimates that approximately 295 acres of natural habitats are located within the proposed project footprint submitted to Manatee County in January 2026, including:
  - **16.8** acres of jurisdictional freshwater wetlands
  - **10.4** acres of salt marshes and salt barrens
  - **122.6** acres of mangroves
  - **2.7** acres of oyster bars
  - **1.8** acres of artificial reefs/hard bottom
  - **28.4** acres of tidal flats
  - **112.7** acres of seagrasses
  - **0** acres of uplands
- Impacts to habitats within the proposed project footprint would reduce progress attaining [Habitat Master Plan](#) 2030 restoration targets by **5%** for freshwater wetlands, **23%** for salt marshes and salt barrens, **67%** for oyster bars, and **13.8%** for seagrasses.
  - Habitat creation, above and beyond preserving existing coastal habitats, should be required to offset any potential losses to habitats within the proposed project footprint that cannot be avoided or minimized.
  - [Consistent with regional goals](#), the Manatee County Comprehensive Plan calls for continued protection of these existing habitats (e.g., [CON 3.3.1](#), [CON 3.3.2](#), [COA 4.1.1](#), [COA 4.1.3](#), [COA 4.1.5](#), [COA 4.4.2](#)).
- Our region has demonstrated that we do not have to trade environmental quality for economic growth.
  - Overall, Tampa Bay habitats, including areas within the proposed footprint, already convey significant economic impacts (more than **\$32 billion** per year) to surrounding communities by supporting various industries, storing carbon, reducing nutrients, and buffering flood and storm surge impacts ([Economic Valuation of Tampa Bay](#)).
  - [1 in 10 jobs](#) depend on a healthy Tampa Bay.
  - The existing cruise industry continues to grow in Tampa Bay. [Data from Port Tampa Bay](#) show that over the past decade, cruise passengers have doubled from 800,000 passengers in 2016 to 1.6 million passengers in 2025.
- Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve is one of the most vibrant parts of Tampa Bay.
  - There are more than **40** pre-Columbian archaeological sites within nearby portions of Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve and at least one within the proposed project footprint.
  - [Sediment quality](#) within the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve is generally good, with nearly **700** species of benthic animals that live on or near the bay bottom documented since 1993.
  - According to [long-term fisheries monitoring data](#), approximately **200** unique species occur in the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve.
  - Of the 88 species documented within the proposed project footprint, **30%** (26) are recreationally or commercially important species, including snook, spotted seatrout, red drum, sheepshead, gag grouper, gray snapper, blue crab, and pink shrimp.
  - Seven species of sharks and rays, including the spotted eagle ray, and six species of seahorses or pipefish, including the dwarf seahorse, occur within the proposed project footprint.
- Secondary and cumulative impacts associated with a new port facility, such as [increased erosion from ship wakes](#), should also be considered ([Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve Management Plan](#), p.42).
- State and federal laws require that impacts to undeveloped coastal regions be in the public interest, be compatible with surrounding areas, and minimize the community's exposure to risk (e.g., [258.42, F.S.](#), [Zabel v. Tabb](#), [Coastal Barrier Resources Act](#)).
- TBEP supports the protection of [Rattlesnake Key](#) and adjacent habitats.

