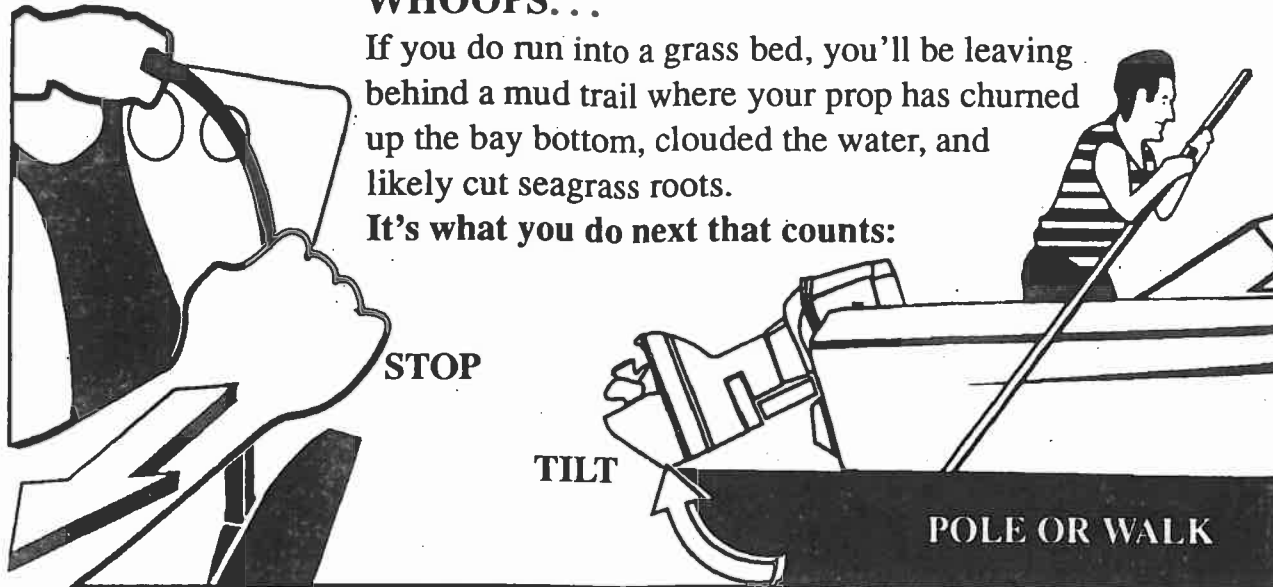


WHOOOPS...

If you do run into a grass bed, you'll be leaving behind a mud trail where your prop has churned up the bay bottom, clouded the water, and likely cut seagrass roots.

It's what you do next that counts:



Boaters GUIDE TO Seagrass

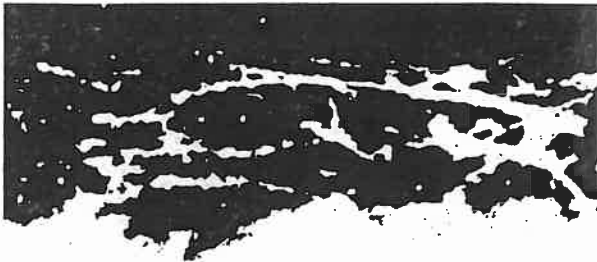
Seagrass beds in Sarasota Bay are shrinking. Cloudy bay water (muddied from storm water runoff and sewage discharge) as well as the dredging or filling of the bay are believed to be the leading causes of seagrass loss.

Motorboats can also damage grass beds. Surveys show almost half of local motorboaters run aground in grass beds—spinning propellers slice seagrass blades and roots, carving out bare, sandy trenches.

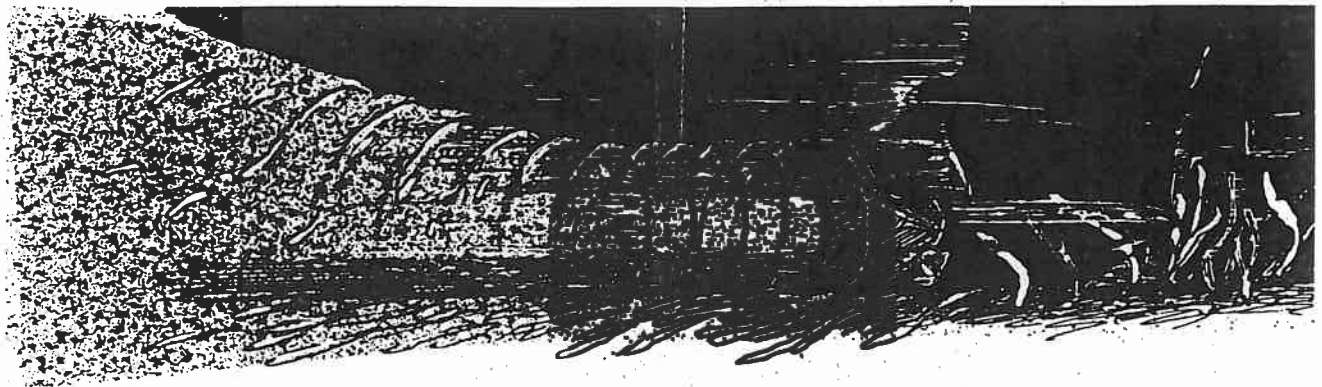
With 30,000 registered boats in Manatee and Sarasota counties, these occasional prop cuts really add up...

Avoid running through grass beds with your motorboat.

- Keep track of the tides. Even at high tides some beds are vulnerable.
- Look for buoys, which mark the edges of some grass beds.
- Read navigation charts. Seagrass is shown as light green or with "Grs."
- Read the water. A grass bed may appear as a large dark area underwater.



The damage a motorboat creates in ten seconds may take ten years to heal. Some grass beds in Sarasota Bay are so sliced up they are disappearing, as shown in the aerial photograph above. The scratchy white lines are trails of exposed sand left when propellers cut through dense seagrass.



Seagrass beds enrich our bay life

- **The sheltering canopy** of seagrass leaves rising into the water and the net of roots penetrating into the sediments below, create a calm, stable and protected habitat for a wide assortment of bay life. Grass beds are especially important as nursery areas for young stages of fish, shrimp and crabs.
- **A green leafy feast** of rapidly growing seagrasses is waiting for grazers, such as manatees, sea urchins, and loggerhead turtles. Most of the seagrass, however, becomes part of the food chain as detritus, or decaying matter. Microbes, shrimp, many fish and others feast upon the decaying seagrass. Predators visit grass flats in their search for food.
- **Seagrasses help other organisms** by recycling nutrients from the sediments to the water, aiding the growth of other marine life.

The root of the problem: Although seagrasses are totally adapted to living underwater they are related to land plants. They have leaves, stems and flowers, as well as roots. In healthy seagrass beds, when leaves are cut by storms, frost or predation, they grow back quickly, just like lawns. But when seagrass roots are damaged, often by motorboat propellers, they may not grow back for years, if ever . . .

seagrasses Luxuriant Bay Meadows

Rays of warm sunlight pierce clear subtropical waters. A lush carpet of dark green plants sways with the currents and tides. Young fish, shrimp, and crabs dart and scurry, searching out food and avoiding predators.

For centuries the grassflats of Sarasota Bay have supported a rich array of wildlife. And while most of the beds remain, they are suffering—about one quarter of our bays' seagrass acreage has vanished in the last 40 years. With your help we can stop and possibly reverse this decline.

