



June 21, 2019

Noah Valenstein, Secretary
Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection
3900 Commonwealth Blvd. M.S. 49
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

RE: Tampa Bay Equine Activity

Dear Secretary Valenstein,

The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC) and its environmental sub-committee the Agency on Bay Management (ABM), have both voted to express to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), a concern about commercial/recreational horseback riding activities that are taking place in the waters of Tampa Bay's aquatic preserve in Pinellas County. Our collective concern is that the commercial horseback riding activity is inappropriate in this area leading to a degradation of both water quality and restored seagrass beds within Tampa Bay. Attached please find recent aerial photographs that depict the negative impact horseback riding has caused to seagrass beds in a specific area of Tampa Bay adjacent to the Sunshine Skyway Bridge.

There are 41 Aquatic Preserves in Florida that receive additional protection through the Florida Aquatic Preserve Act of 1975, §258.36, F.S. This Act ensures the continuation of aquatic preserves' natural conditions so that "their aesthetic, biological and scientific values may endure for the enjoyment of future generations." We believe, in this instance, that the Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve be respected and that all activities within the preserve be consistent with preserving precious seagrass beds, maintaining water quality and reducing nitrogen content. We also believe that protecting public health in the Tampa Bay region is a shared responsibility for all of our citizens and that the Aquatic Preserve Act is an essential ingredient in this effort.

Therefore, TBRPC would respectfully advise you that we fully support the efforts of both FDEP and Pinellas County staff to incorporate language into the management plan for aquatic preserves that prohibits horseback riding and other uses detrimental to Florida's Aquatic Preserves. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Barbara Sheen Todd
Chair, Agency on Bay Management

Ronald E. Kitchen
Chair, Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council

Enclosures: Aerial Photos of Sea Grass Beds from 2014-2018

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