

# 2019 Tampa Bay Water Quality Assessments

A Tampa Bay Estuary Program Initiative to Maintain and Restore the Bay's Seagrass Resources



## Historic results:

|      | OTB    | HB     | MTB    | LTB    |
|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1975 | red    | red    | yellow | yellow |
| 1976 | red    | red    | yellow | yellow |
| 1977 | red    | red    | red    | red    |
| 1978 | red    | red    | red    | yellow |
| 1979 | red    | red    | red    | red    |
| 1980 | red    | red    | red    | red    |
| 1981 | red    | red    | red    | red    |
| 1982 | red    | red    | red    | red    |
| 1983 | red    | yellow | red    | red    |
| 1984 | red    | green  | red    | yellow |
| 1985 | red    | red    | red    | yellow |
| 1986 | red    | yellow | yellow | green  |
| 1987 | yellow | yellow | yellow | green  |
| 1988 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 1989 | red    | yellow | yellow | yellow |
| 1990 | yellow | green  | yellow | green  |
| 1991 | green  | yellow | green  | yellow |
| 1992 | green  | green  | green  | yellow |
| 1993 | yellow | green  | green  | yellow |
| 1994 | yellow | yellow | yellow | red    |
| 1995 | red    | yellow | yellow | yellow |
| 1996 | yellow | green  | green  | green  |
| 1997 | green  | green  | yellow | green  |
| 1998 | red    | yellow | red    | red    |
| 1999 | yellow | green  | green  | yellow |
| 2000 | green  | green  | green  | yellow |
| 2001 | yellow | green  | yellow | yellow |
| 2002 | yellow | green  | green  | green  |
| 2003 | red    | green  | green  | green  |
| 2004 | yellow | green  | green  | yellow |
| 2005 | green  | green  | green  | yellow |
| 2006 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 2007 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 2008 | yellow | green  | green  | yellow |
| 2009 | yellow | yellow | green  | green  |
| 2010 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 2011 | red    | green  | yellow | green  |
| 2012 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 2013 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 2014 | green  | green  | green  | green  |
| 2015 | yellow | green  | yellow | green  |
| 2016 | yellow | green  | green  | green  |
| 2017 | yellow | green  | green  | green  |
| 2018 | yellow | green  | green  | green  |
| 2019 | yellow | green  | green  | green  |

## Background

Light availability to seagrass is the guiding paradigm for TBEP's Nitrogen Management Strategy. Because excessive nitrogen loads to the bay generally lead to increased algae blooms (higher chlorophyll-a levels) (Figure 1) and reduce light penetration to seagrass, an evaluation method was developed to assess whether load reduction strategies are achieving desired water quality results (i.e. reduced chlorophyll-a concentrations and increased water clarity).



## Decision Support Approach

Year to year algae abundance (measured as chlorophyll-a concentrations) and visible light penetration through the water column (depth of secchi disk visibility) have been identified as critical water quality indicators in Tampa Bay. Tracking the attainment of bay segment specific targets for these indicators provides the framework for developing and initiating bay management actions. TBEP management actions adopted in response to the annually-assessed decision support results are shown to the right.

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Green  | "Stay the Course" Continue planned projects. Report data via annual progress reports and Baywide Environmental Monitoring Report.                            |
| Yellow | "Caution" Review monitoring data and nitrogen loading estimates. Begin/continue TAC and Management Board development of specific management recommendations. |
| Red    | "On Alert" Finalize development and implement appropriate management actions to get back on track.   |

## 2019 Decision Matrix Results

Water quality (chlorophyll-a and light penetration) remained supportive of seagrass in Hillsborough Bay (HB), Middle Tampa Bay (MTB), and Lower Tampa Bay (LTB) (Table 1, Figure 3). The nuisance alga, *Pyrodinium bahamense*, was again reported in Old Tampa Bay (OTB) during the Summer and Fall 2019, contributing to a small magnitude chlorophyll-a exceedance. In all bay segments, separate algal bloom events contributed to individual stations exceeding the bay segment chlorophyll-a targets (Figure 4). However, effective light penetration was supportive of seagrass in all bay segments (Table 1).

Table 1: Observed water quality indicators & recommended management outcomes for 2019.

| Bay segment | Chl-a (ug/L) |        | Effective Light Penetration ( $m^{-1}$ ) |        | outcome |
|-------------|--------------|--------|--|--------|---------|
|             | 2019         | target | 2019                                     | target |         |
| OTB         | 10.64        | 8.5    | 0.76                                     | 0.83   | yellow  |
| HB          | 11.31        | 13.2   | 0.97                                     | 1.58   | green   |
| MTB         | 5.83         | 7.4    | 0.59                                     | 0.83   | green   |
| LTB         | 4.05         | 4.6    | 0.61                                     | 0.63   | green   |



Figure 3: Historic chlorophyll-a annual averages for the four bay segments.

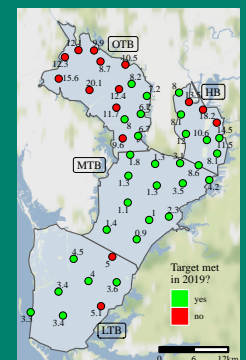


Figure 4: Chlorophyll-a attainment outcomes by site for 2019.

Figure 2: Decision matrix results for 1975 to 2019.

**Acknowledgments:** Continuing water quality monitoring support provided by the Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County. Consulting support provided by Janicki Environmental, Inc. Full methods in Janicki, A., Wade, D., Pribble, R.J. 2000. TBEP Technical Report #0400.

# Progress Towards Meeting Regulatory Goals

An initiative of the Tampa Bay Nitrogen Management Consortium to Maintain and Restore the Bay's Resources



## FDEP Criteria Met:

|      | OTB   | HB    | MTB   | LTB   |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1975 | red   | red   | red   | green |
| 1976 | red   | red   | red   | green |
| 1977 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1978 | red   | red   | red   | green |
| 1979 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1980 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1981 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1982 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1983 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1984 | green | green | red   | green |
| 1985 | red   | red   | red   | green |
| 1986 | red   | red   | green | green |
| 1987 | red   | green | red   | green |
| 1988 | green | green | green | green |
| 1989 | red   | green | green | green |
| 1990 | red   | green | green | green |
| 1991 | green | green | green | green |
| 1992 | green | green | green | green |
| 1993 | green | green | green | green |
| 1994 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1995 | red   | red   | red   | green |
| 1996 | green | green | green | green |
| 1997 | green | green | green | green |
| 1998 | red   | red   | red   | red   |
| 1999 | green | green | green | green |
| 2000 | green | green | green | green |
| 2001 | green | green | green | green |
| 2002 | green | green | green | green |
| 2003 | red   | green | green | green |
| 2004 | red   | green | green | green |
| 2005 | green | green | green | red   |
| 2006 | green | green | green | green |
| 2007 | green | green | green | green |
| 2008 | green | green | green | green |
| 2009 | red   | green | green | green |
| 2010 | green | green | green | green |
| 2011 | red   | green | green | green |
| 2012 | green | green | green | green |
| 2013 | green | green | green | green |
| 2014 | green | green | green | green |
| 2015 | red   | green | green | green |
| 2016 | green | green | green | green |
| 2017 | red   | green | green | green |
| 2018 | green | green | green | green |
| 2019 | red   | green | green | green |

## Maintaining Reasonable Assurance & TMDL compliance

In November 2017, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) accepted the 2017 Reasonable Assurance Update (2017 RA Update) as submitted by TBEP in partnership with the Tampa Bay Nitrogen Management Consortium. FDEP concluded that the RA Update demonstrated both attainment of seagrass targets and total nitrogen numeric criteria for 2012-2016. During 2019, all bay segments, excluding Old Tampa Bay, were in compliance with the FDEP regulatory criteria for chlorophyll-a concentrations (Figure 5). The second compliance report for the 2017-2021 period was submitted March 2019.

## 2019 Chl-a Monthly Variation Compared to 1974-2018

Chlorophyll-a concentrations were evaluated within the bay on a monthly basis during 'r maxyr' and compared to prior years' levels (Figure 6). Elevated concentrations in Old Tampa Bay and Lower Tampa Bay were primarily due to *Pyrodinium bahamense* and *Karenia brevis* blooms, respectively. Hillsborough Bay also showed elevated concentrations during two months in 2018 - the fall event coincided with blooms of the nonharmful alga, *Tripos hircus*.

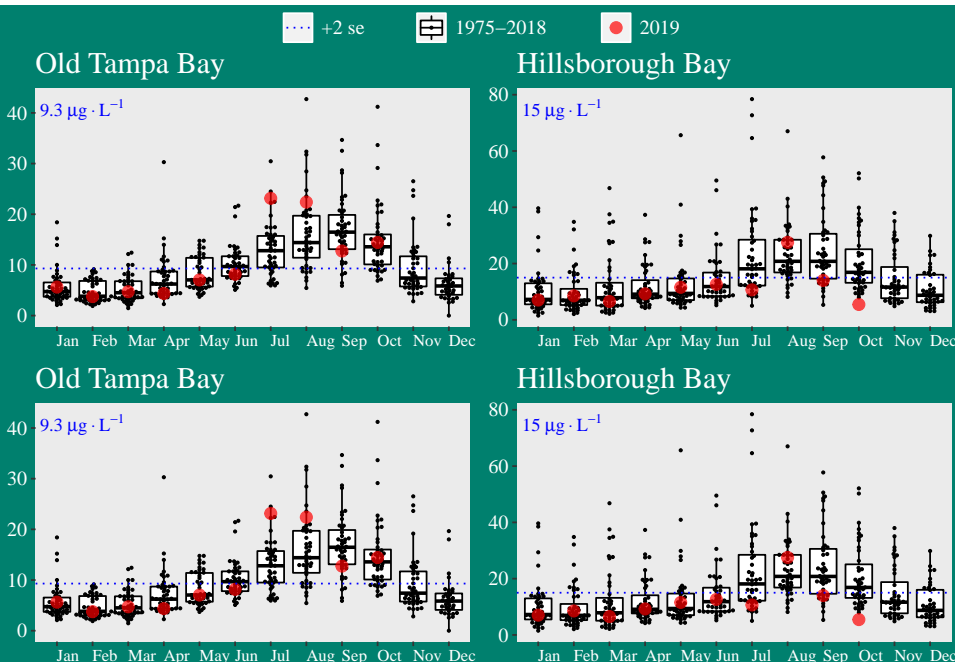


Figure 6: Chlorophyll-a monthly averages from 1975-2018 for the four bay segments. The monthly averages for 2019 are shown in red. Historic chlorophyll-a annual averages for the four bay segments.

## Tampa Bay Seagrass Recovery

Tampa Bay's total seagrass coverage remains above the recovery goal, though a slight decrease was observed from 2016 to 2018. The 2018 baywide coverage was estimated at 40,618 acres (Figure 7). As in 2016, coverage remains above both the target (38,000 acres) and the estimated historic coverage of the 1950s (40,420 acres). The next SWFWMD coverage estimates will be developed from aerial photographs acquired over the winter 2019-20 period, following the extensive red tide event observed throughout 2018 (note: the 2018 coverage estimate was developed prior to this event). More information can be found in TBEP Technical Publication #0816.

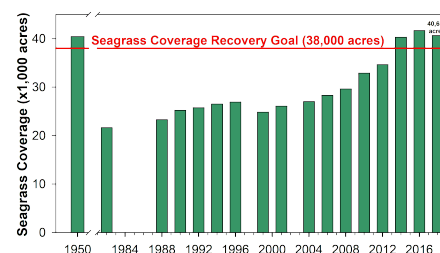


Figure 7: Historic seagrass acreage estimates for Tampa Bay from 1950-2018 (Source: TBEP & SWFWMD)