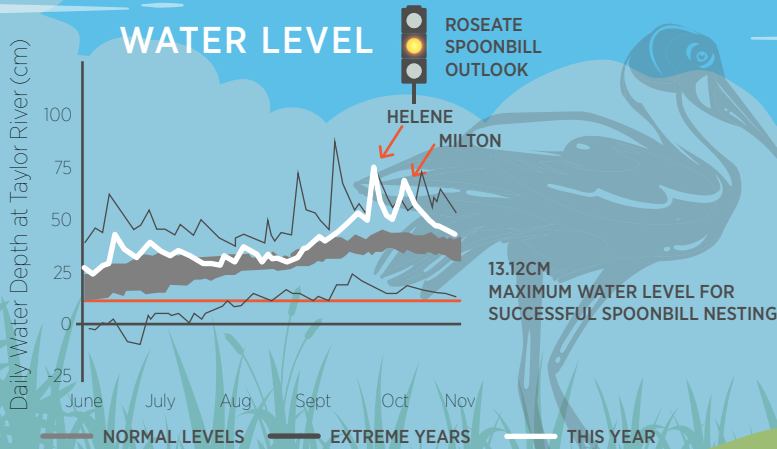


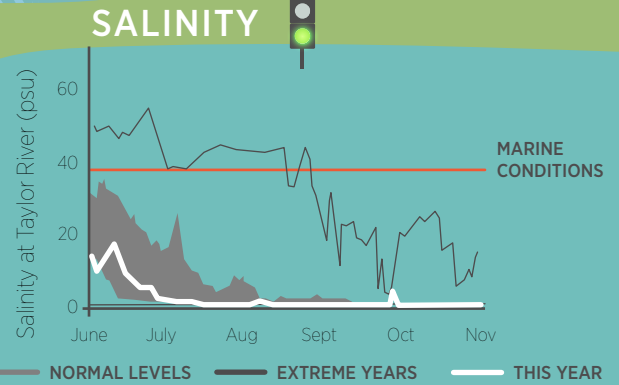
At the southern end of Everglades National Park, a series of sloughs convey fresh water to the Florida Bay estuary. Audubon researchers track these freshwater deliveries (or lack thereof) and their impacts on the ecology of Taylor Slough and the Bay.



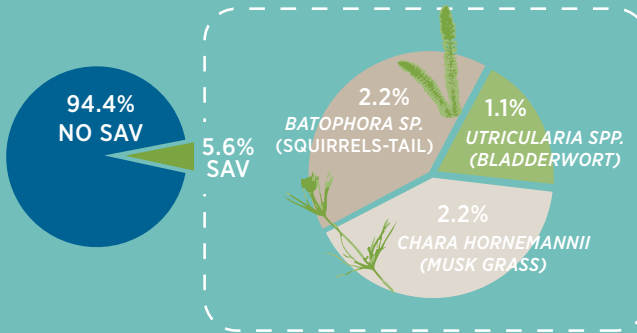
During the 2024-25 season, water levels in Taylor Slough started out high in June, then returned to average levels until September. Heavy rainfall from Hurricanes Helene and Milton briefly raised water levels again. We're hopeful that by the end of January, levels will fall below 13 cm, which is essential for Roseate Spoonbills. These birds rely on concentrated prey for successful feeding, which occurs when water levels are low.

Florida Bay used to receive four times more fresh water from the Everglades ecosystem than it does today. As a result, rainfall makes all the difference between a healthy Bay and a hypersaline one, which can kill seagrass and the species that depend on it. Audubon uses our science to accelerate Everglades restoration projects to deliver much-needed fresh water to Florida Bay.

Taylor Slough



### SUBMERGED AQUATIC VEGETATION (SAV) COVERAGE



Historically, Taylor Slough was a freshwater ecosystem. This water year, the Slough saw stable and consistent freshwater flow—a pattern that must continue in the coming years to help the system recover. While a pair of hurricanes with heavy rainfall may have played a role in the low salinity, this positive outcome seems to be partly due to restoration efforts that have increased freshwater flow from upstream sources.

During the 2024 wet season (June-November), plant coverage in this area averaged 5.6%—a slight increase from last year but still very low. Although freshwater flow has been steady this year, plant cover remains sparse. This is likely due to past years of fluctuating salinity, which may have diminished the seed supply in the soil. Consistent freshwater flow or low-salinity conditions over several years will be essential for future plant recovery.

### FISH SPECIES CAPTURED THIS YEAR AT TAYLOR SLOUGH



In June and September, Everglades Science Center staff collected 180 fish, of which 15 were freshwater species—8% of the total fish community. While having more than 5% freshwater fish is a positive sign that restoration efforts are working (a "yellow stoplight" on our scale), the area is still facing challenges. Unfortunately, 36% of the fish population is now made up of invasive Mayan cichlids, which prey on native species and disrupt the ecosystem.