

New Boating Guides Free To Public

By YVETTE C. HAMMETT

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Owner Bill Robinson, right, looks through the new boater guides delivered to Gandy Bait and Tackle by Colleen Gray, left, a member of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program.

For those who've always wondered why there are No Trespassing signs on numerous islands in Tampa Bay, the answer is printed in a new boaters' guide targeting Hillsborough Bay boaters.

Another guide, for the Boca Ciega area in the Gulf of Mexico, highlights restoration projects under way in the region.

Both guides, printed by Audubon of Florida in conjunction with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and numerous other environmental agencies, are now available free to the public.

They can be picked up at most bait-and-tackle shops and marinas in the area.

"We've been putting out guides since 2002. This time, we printed 12,000 copies of the Hillsborough Bay guide and 15,000 copies of the Boca Ciega guide," said Ann Paul, regional coordinator for Audubon of Florida.

Both guides have maps and a multitude of tidbits on what can be found in the region, along with tips on safe boating and ethical fishing practices.

The estuary program also has a guide for all of Tampa Bay, with hundreds already available for pickup.

"There are a lot of boaters that use Hillsborough Bay and Boca Ciega Bay, and so much of our activity is focused around those areas," Paul said. Hillsborough Bay hosts about half of all the colonial water birds that nest in Tampa Bay, she said. And Audubon monitors those nesting sites to keep them safe from predators and intruders.

Paul said the guides' sponsors, including Friends of Tampa Bay Wildlife Refuge and the Pinellas County Environmental Fund, represent the broad support in this area for getting key environmental education and boating information out to the community.

"As a community, we all support safety on the water and increasing our understanding of the need to protect our valuable and beautiful resources," she said.

The Tampa Bay boaters' guide is available in the same locations as the Audubon guides.

"We've already had a phenomenal response to them," said Colleen Gray, public outreach specialist for the estuary program.

"I am working at going once a week to shops and dropping off more of the boater guides," Gray said. "We also have Ethical Angler Wallet Cards available in both English and Spanish."

TAKE THE SURVEY

Anyone willing to take a few minutes to complete a safe boater survey can receive a free boater kit. Contact Colleen Gray at the Tampa Bay Estuary Program to answer the survey questions, and she will customize a boater kit specifically for your area, complete with a tape measure, fishing guidelines and a boat repair book. Gray can be reached at (727) 893-2765 or colleen@tbep.org.