

ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAMS



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CHARLOTTE HARBOR

Charlotte Harbor Estuary is located on Florida's west coast on the Gulf of Mexico where three large rivers meet to form Florida's second largest estuary. The economy is based on recreational and commercial fishing, agriculture, mining, tourism, the retirement community, and construction. The coastal population increases by more than 30 percent for several months each year because of seasonal business and vacationing tourists. The subtropical climate and barrier islands that stretch along the coastline make boating, fishing, shelling, walking, and birdwatching particularly enjoyable activities.

FACTS ABOUT THE ESTUARY

- Tourism expenditures exceeded \$1.1 billion in Sarasota, Charlotte and Lee counties in 1993.
- Currently, 1.4 million people live in the watershed, up from 500,000 in 1960. By 2020 the population is expected to reach 1,903,000.
- Natural resources provide \$1.8 billion a year in net value to recreation users and \$3.2 billion per year in income.
- One in three tourists fish while visiting. One in five residents fish, creating an economic impact to the region of more than \$1.1 billion annually.
- More than 250 fish, 275 shellfish, 316 birds, 44 mammals, and 55 reptile species live in the watershed.
- Five National Wildlife Refuges are located within the Charlotte Harbor watershed.

HEALTH OF THE ESTUARY

- There has been a 29 percent loss of seagrass coverage, impairing critical habitat for invertebrates and fish.
- Thirty percent of the Florida population uses on-site disposal systems that discharge an estimated 210 million gallons of waste daily into the estuary.
- Seventy-seven species of amphibians, birds, fish, invertebrates, mammals, and reptiles are considered to be endangered, threatened or of special concern in the State of Florida.
- Approximately one third of the area is approved for shellfish harvesting.
- Flow of the largest river, the Peace has been below the 70-year average for all but three months since 1998. (The year 2000 was the driest year on record since 1915.)
- Floridians on average use nearly twice as much water per day as average Americans, around 150 gallons—75 of which goes to lawn irrigation.
- Sinkholes, formed in 1999 near the Peace River, divert more than 7 million gallons of water from the river per day.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ESTUARY PROGRAM

- Identified how environmental problems are currently managed and how people have influenced the condition of the estuary.
- Defined monitoring programs for water quality, water flow, habitat, fish and wildlife populations, and air quality.
- Assessed the economic value of natural resources, both inland and on the coast.
- Funded 45 demonstration projects to restore wetlands, improve habitat, remove exotic species, improve the understanding of water quality and important seagrass habitat, coordinate conservation initiatives with large agricultural landowners, and enhance environmental education.
- Developed comprehensive education and outreach programs that included a technical symposium, public workshops, newsletters, and a directory of public education programs.
- Re-started the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program in Charlotte County to promote more efficient residential water use and the use of native plants.

Santa Rosa Shrimp

1-1/2 lbs raw Florida shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 tbl minced Florida garlic
1 tbl Florida lime juice
1 tsp ground thyme
1 tsp salt
1/2 tsp white pepper
Nonstick cooking spray
2 cups fresh Florida whole corn kernels
1 cup chopped Florida green bell peppers
1 cup chopped Florida red bell peppers
1/2 cup chopped Florida onions
1 large Florida tomato, cut in 8 pieces

Drain shrimp of all excess water.
In large mixing bowl combine shrimp, garlic, lime juice, thyme salt and white pepper; mix well.

Lightly oil large skillet with cooking spray and cook shrimp on medium high for 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove shrimp from skillet; set aside.

In same skillet add corn, bell peppers and onions; cook on medium until corn is tender. Add shrimp and tomatoes to skillet, heat thoroughly.

Serves six.