

The Case for Restoration of Midnight Pass

A History

Circa 1993

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Midnight Pass was bulldozed closed in December 1983. There exists no better example of the folly of fooling with the forces of nature than the plugging of Midnight Pass. A decade ago, the fate of this inlet was a burning issue. Should the authorities allow two homeowners to relocate the inlet to protect their property? Should the property owners -- Pasco Carter and internationally acclaimed artist Syd Solomon -- should they have been more wary as to where they built their houses? Or should the authorities themselves have taken control of the situation?

Daily, people flocked to the narrow, fast-moving Pass to monitor its movement as it relentlessly nibbled at the pool deck of Carter's house, Sarasota County commissioners voted to allow the two homeowners to close Midnight Pass and to relocate it away from their homes. State Officials hastily, blessed the plan - no environmental impact studies, no baseline data, no water monitoring, no administrative hearing, and no engineering review to improve chances the plan would succeed. It didn't, ten years later, Midnight Pass remains closed.

This senseless act has all but destroyed the historic environment, the ecosystem that once was Little Sarasota Bay. Damming this natural inlet eliminated one of just four of Sarasota County's vital Gulf-to-Bay links- lifelines essential to the survival of nearly all marine creatures. Pollutants, those associated with "progress," and the freshwater from summer rains, are now trapped in Little Sarasota Bay, left to accumulate in a massive, man-made null zone. Vast and vibrant seagrass beds once teeming with life have been, devastated, breaking the chain of life that existed here for as long as we know. The numbers and diversity of fish have been severely reduced, and all the clams have been killed. Changes in the Gulf shoreline are a classic example of "borrowing from Peter to pay Paul;" north Casey Key now enjoys additional beach, but clearly at the expense of the beaches of south Siesta Key! People, too, have been hurt.

It's no longer the pretty place to go, to boat, to fish, to swim or just sit back and enjoy. If you can find a fish to catch, you're afraid to eat it- and you enter the waters at your own peril! Barrier island residents relied on Midnight Pass to act as a "safety valve" to lessen the chance that a storm would carve another inlet through a developed area.

Coastal engineers pretty much agree that, if man does not restore Midnight Pass, Mother Nature will. Imagine the mayhem that will create! Today, fully 10 years since Midnight Pass was plugged, elected officials and those paid to protect our environment still refuse to take the necessary steps to save Little Sarasota Bay. Recent environmental studies have borne out what Midnight Pass Society members have been shouting all along: Midnight Pass must be restored for marine life in the area to flourish.

The "Framework for Action" report by the Sarasota Bay Program states that "Little Sarasota Bay has much poorer water quality... than both Roberts Bay and Blackburn Bay, even though Roberts Bay and Blackburn Bay receive considerably greater nitrogen loads than little Sarasota Bay." The "Framework" continues, "If water quality in Little Sarasota Bay were to improve the values typically found in Roberts Bay, seagrasses would grow to one more foot of water depth. In Little Sarasota Bay, that would result in ... a possible increase in seagrass habitat of 448 acres (equal to 45 percent of existing habitat)."

But the science of the Bay must not overshadow our historical perspective. Man closed Midnight Pass.

Man has a responsibility, an obligation, to recognize the errors of the past and to do whatever can reasonably be done to restore Midnight Pass and the historic marine community that once thrived in the area.

This essay is offered to remind us of what Midnight Pass once was, the integral environmental role that it played, how this natural treasure was destroyed and the resulting damage that has been done. Our aim is to instill in you the resolve to right this wrong. We owe it to our environment, to future generations and to ourselves.

Midnight Pass – Let It Flow !

Midnight Pass has been left closed since December 1983. The Midnight Pass Society dedicates these photo's below to all the critters that once called Little Sarasota Bay their home. It is our hope, our fondest wish, that the authorities finally recognize the damage that has been done and take steps to develop and implement an aggressive action plan to this little corner of our world to the balanced and healthy, bounteous and beautiful ecosystem it once was.

Jim Herbert, Executive Director

Midnight Pass Society

They don't live here anymore'

Oysters

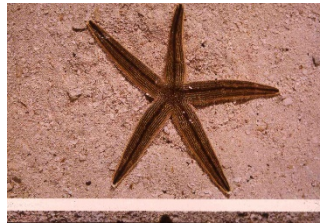
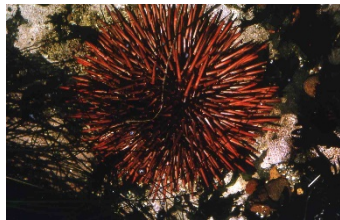
Bay Scallops



Starfish



Sea Urchins



Whelks

Sunray Venus Clams



Angel Wings

Shark Eye Snails



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Sand Dollar

