

2013 NATIONAL WETLANDS AWARDS NOMINATION FORM

I. CONTACT INFORMATION

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II. NOMINATION CATEGORY

Conservation and Restoration

III. NOMINATION QUESTIONS

1. Thomas Ries has been conducting habitat restoration and conservation for over 28 years. As the Executive Vice President and Principal Scientist of Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc. (Scheda), Tom specializes in landscape-level habitat restoration in Florida ecosystems. His experience includes conducting biological assessments, design development, and permitting and project implementation, which has resulted in the conservation of approximately 2500 acres of wetlands and produced some of the most complex wetland restoration projects in Florida. Tom's forte is his ability to bring a myriad of public and private partnerships together to produce innovative designs and cost saving construction methodologies which result in the acquisition of numerous federal and state restoration grants. He founded a non-profit company, Ecosphere Restoration Institute Inc. (ERI), specifically to facilitate and leverage match dollars for restoration. Tom consistently goes the extra mile and literally donates hundreds of hours of his time towards improving our environment through habitat restoration.

2. Throughout his career, Tom has gained experience in creating funding options for projects, developing multi-agency cooperative agreements, and prioritizing projects based upon potential project effectiveness, ecological contribution, management priorities and resource limitations. Tom's resume includes numerous large scale restoration projects in the Southwest Gulf Coast. Below are examples of notable projects under Tom's leadership and collaboration with partners from the various federal and state agencies:

Lost River Preserve:

Tom received funding in 2009 for the Lost River Preserve Fisheries Habitat Restoration Project in Ruskin, Florida within the Tampa Bay. This environmental restoration project was funded by NOAA through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act to restore and enhance fisheries habitat. It was selected out of 814 applications nationwide and one of three projects to be funded in Florida, and the only project awarded on the Gulf coast. Funds were used to design, permit and provide construction oversight for the transformation of an abandoned 43-acre aquaculture farm into a mosaic of estuarine and fresh water open water habitats, oligohaline marsh habitats, and upland tree preserves. The construction involved the preservation of desirable vegetation and tree transplanting (>300 trees), extensive excavation, detailed grading to produce a natural appearing and ecologically functioning site, and the utilization of existing stormwater while introducing tidal exchange for an increased range of habitats. This construction contract required extensive Construction Environmental Inspection (CEI) oversight provided by Tom. The project resulted in multiple field modifications in order to maximize both ecological and aesthetic aspects of the final product and avoid impacts to the adjacent Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, a designated Outstanding Florida Water ecosystem. This project was completed in 2011 and supported 13 full-time positions and 11 part-time positions for approximately one year. Restoration monitoring one month after its completion found the site highly successful in which: 21 species of fish were captured during the first sampling event, snook were found in 4 out of the 5 sites and abundant shrimp and blue crabs were all found in the saltwater lagoons and four species of freshwater fish were found in the newly created ponds.

Cockroach Bay Habitat Restoration Freshwater Marsh and Tidal Creek:

The Cockroach Bay Freshwater Marsh and Frog Ponds system was designed and constructed to offset wetland impacts resulting from the Tampa-Hillsborough County Expressway Authority (THCEA). Tom initiated a multi-agency partnership and promoted the design and construction of 26 acres of freshwater wetland mitigation on county-owned land. The critical aspect of this project was Tom's ability to persuade the THCEA to fund the design and implementation of an additional project, not included in the mitigation requirement. The THCEA agreed to fund the additional site known as the Braided Tidal Creek Habitat Creation which also served as a key accomplishment within the Cockroach Bay Master Plan. The Braided Tidal Creek was adjacent to the original mitigation site on county-owned land in

Cockroach Bay. Tom convinced the county to donate and fund the additional restoration in order to maximize ecological benefits for fish and wildlife, offset future development, and provide the community an opportunity to be involved in local conservation and take ownership of the project. For this site, Scheda designed 15 acres of complex estuarine habitat incorporating open water, intertidal and high marsh habitat into a braided tidal creek system. Scheda scientists designed, permitted and provided full time CEI services during the construction phase. The resultant project was subsequently planted by volunteers who installed 23,000 plants in two hours. Combined, these restoration projects, completed in 2011 resulted in a mosaic of habitats that are currently monitored by Tom and his team to ensure long-term success of this site.

Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration Project:

In 2006 as the Wetland Coordinator for the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP), Tom was tasked to lead the design for the Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration project, the largest habitat restoration project within the Sarasota Bay watershed. This regionally significant restoration project is situated on a 487-acre peninsula, formerly a privately-owned plant nursery, slated for high-density residential development. Manatee County purchased the tract and SBEP hired Tom to collaborate with local county managers to ensure the project addressed habitat restoration goals identified by the SBEP and Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Program, including the improvement of tidal circulation between upper Palma Sola Bay with both Perico Bayou and Tampa Bay. The project consisted of the creation of approximately 104.5 acres of wetland habitat including 55.0 acres of estuarine intertidal marsh (30.0 acres of low marsh, 25.0 acres of high marsh/salern), 35.0 acres of estuarine intertidal/subtidal open water habitat (including seagrass communities) and 14.5 acres palustrine marsh/open water habitats. An additional 38.0 acres of existing estuarine high marsh was restored through exotic removal and native planting. This restoration site established critical salinity gradients over a large habitat mosaic to improve fish nursery areas and avian habitats for the hundreds of species which utilize the area year-round and during annual migrations. Tom is an avid supporter in designating restoration projects that can be not only used by wildlife, but appreciated by the local community; as such, he incorporated various passive recreational opportunities into the site such as a 2.5-mile canoe trail system, numerous boardwalks, observation platforms, pedestrian trails and a fishing pier. Typical of Tom's work ethic, he went beyond the required scope of the project and created three freshwater ponds to filter stormwater run-off from the adjacent neighborhoods to improve water quality prior to water entering Palma Sola Bay. This project was completed in 2009.

The Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration Project won the "2009 Future of the Region Award First Place Environmental Award" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council for its unique ecological design, extensive wildlife use and numerous recreational opportunities for the public. Specifically, Tom designed a novel restoration technique (known as the "mushroom design") in which he created an artificial reef concept, namely cutting Australian pines into eight to ten foot tree stumps, turning them upside down, and "planting" them like mushrooms in the temporarily drained borrow pits. These stump structures were then surrounded by limestone to provide both underwater overhangs and encrusting substrate for epiphytic organisms. This innovative approach successfully attracted hundreds of wading birds, while dramatically increasing fish habitat below the water. In 2010 Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration Project was given State recognition by the Florida Institute of Consulting Engineers with the Engineering Excellence Grand Award; in 2011 it received the National Recognition for a Restoration Project from the American Council of Engineering Companies. Robinson Preserve receives 300,000+ visitors annually and continues to thrive due to community stewardship, as evident in the 4887 volunteer hours logged for 2012!

Shultz Park Nature Preserve Habitat Restoration Project:

In 2003 the SWIM program developed a series of projects throughout the Tampa Bay area focusing on intertidal and oligohaline habitat restoration/creation. Tom, along with colleagues, convinced Tampa Port Authority (TPA) to sell half of the property to the SWIM Program so it could be restored. Scheda scientists, under the direction of Tom as the Project Manager, designed the 120-acre Port Redwing site previously owned by TPA in west-central Hillsborough County. The objective of the project was to restore the man-made peninsula in Tampa Bay to a productive intertidal wetland and create a complimentary native upland ecosystem. The final product restored 55 acres of intertidal estuarine habitat and 45 acres of productive upland habitat to promote wildlife diversity and provide additional foraging habitat for wildlife. Tom created three isolated freshwater ponds (6 acres) to drive a salinity gradient in the estuarine systems, thus increasing the habitat diversity for fish and bird species. Adjacent uplands were created with native plant species to mimic natural ecosystems and support Florida wildlife. Tom's work with this restoration project was recognized by the National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials as the "2005 Top Project Nationally" because it was a highly visible public-private partnership between the Tampa Port Authority, SWIM and Hillsborough County. This project was completed in 2004; however, the TPA currently relies on Tom to identify future restoration opportunities on their properties.

MacDill Air Force Base Habitat Restoration-Phase 3:

In 2011 Tom and colleagues were selected to implement the MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) Phase III Habitat Restoration project. This ongoing project is the third in a series of cooperative restoration efforts between SWIM and the U.S. Air Force for ecosystem restoration and stormwater treatment on land included within MacDill AFB boundaries. The design focuses on property surrounding the MacDill AFB golf course, a drainage canal, borrow pit/stormwater ponds and preserve areas along the southeast and southern shore of MacDill AFB on the interbay peninsula within Tampa Bay. Ecosystem restoration of the MacDill AFB property includes subtidal, intertidal, transitional, freshwater wetland, and upland habitats. Tom's significant contribution to this project was two-fold: the creation of stormwater retrofits and the utilization of a "habitat mosaic" ecosystem approach. Various types of stormwater retrofits were designed to reduce pollutants which flowed through the wetlands into Tampa Bay. The "habitat mosaic" approach entailed creating various habitat types (e.g., high marsh, low marsh, freshwater, forested) within the project area to allow for greater diversity of flora and fauna. This project is currently ongoing.

Concurrent with this project, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) contracted Tom in 2011 to implement a pilot study at MacDill AFB known as the Longshore Bay Restoration Project. Under Tom's leadership, partners collaborated to design an innovative approach to

seagrass restoration involving the construction of four 100-foot long offshore bars. These structures were created to mimic the natural rock bars which historically existed in Tampa Bay. Constructed parallel to the shoreline, the bars were designed to simulate the longshore bar systems to reduce wave energy and promote the natural re-colonization of seagrass in the wave shadow of each bar. This is the first time this technology has been used in Florida for seagrass restoration and if successful, has the potential to restore hundreds of acres of seagrass that once existed in Tampa Bay.

Stewart Middle School “Living Shoreline” Restoration:

This project started in 2009 and involved the creation of a “living shoreline” to improve the existing conditions along the Hillsborough River shoreline adjacent to Stewart Middle School, located in downtown Tampa. The river shoreline was severely eroded, infested with exotic vegetation and unusable by the students. Tom decided to design an ecologically friendly shoreline protection project rather than the commonly used hardened shoreline profile, typical for high energy systems such as this. The living shoreline included removing exotic trees, salvaging native cabbage palms for replanting, sculpting the bank grade to a user-friendly slope, creating a small rock breakwater feature and using “geoweb” walls with native estuarine species. This re-design implemented a “living shoreline” concept that re-establish wetlands, protected the shoreline, provided native habitat, and allowed students to access the river for educational purposes. The students at the Stewart Middle school assisted in the exotic removal and planting of native species, which increased their sense of pride and ownership for the project and the shoreline adjacent to their school. This living shoreline was completed in 2010; however, the students continue to benefit by acting as land stewards for this property.

Newman Branch Fisheries Habitat Restoration

The Newman Branch Restoration project began in 2003 with the goal to restore critical low salinity habitats along the Newman Branch Creek in Apollo Beach, Florida. The design aimed to restore 12 acres of saltmarsh and mangrove forest in an area with little natural features remaining. Historical use of the Newman Branch property consisted of agricultural and aquacultural activities, and mosquito ditching, all which negatively altered the landscape by causing wetland and upland habitat loss/degradation, exotic plant species infestation, and adverse hydrological alterations. Tom created a project design which entailed exotic removal, the excavation of the tidal tributaries, the creation of estuarine and freshwater wetlands, the restoration of the meandering nature of focal creeks and the planting of native vegetation.

The Newman Branch Restoration project is another example of a public-private partnership Tom initiated between a non-profit (ERI), a private land owner (Tampa Electric Company) and a public entity (NOAA’s Restoration Center and the SWFWMD). The current land owner, Tampa Electric Company (TECO), agreed to Tom’s recommendation to create a Conservation Easement, critical for perpetual protection of the property once it was restored. Additionally, TECO granted public access to demonstrate the importance of native estuarine habitats as nursery grounds for fish populations and allow recreational opportunities. These two aspects of the project, both initiated from Tom’s encouragement, were critical requirements for the success of the restoration effort. This highly visible project has logged hundreds of volunteer hours installing 10,000+ native plants, saving thousands of dollars to the restoration cost, and providing public “ownership” and educational opportunities. Newman Branch was completed in the fall of 2012.

3. Within the restoration community Tom is known specifically for his: ability to bring public and private partners to the table; ingenuity in restoration design; dedication to wildlife resources and desire for community participation and stewardship. Whenever possible, Tom promotes public-private partnerships, recognizing the value of these relationships to the overall success and final product of project and the benefit for ensuring long-term conservation. His ingenuity has resulted in outstanding quality and sustainable restoration which often increases the original scope of work to include greater conservation. With every project Tom invests the time to determine the target species for a project before he considers his design; threatened and endangered species and native species are his highest priority when assessing the project. Tom’s restoration projects have created and improved habitat for literally dozens of fish and bird species, as well as federally and state listed species. Each of his habitat restoration projects include some type of educational component such as hands on activities like volunteer planting, exotic removal, land stewardship or informational signage. Providing public access through various types of recreation is also a priority. Tom understands the need for people to connect with nature and the environment in order to gain a sense of pride, ownership and stewardship.

To date, Tom and his team have been key partners in over 85 habitat restoration projects (Attachment 2). Most of these projects were conducted under his leadership as either the Project Manager or Principal in Charge; he has designed and implemented these habitat restoration projects, and pursued partners and funding opportunities to ensure the greatest project footprint and the most ecologically sound approach. Tom’s audience is simple, the environment and wildlife it supports and the local community. He has successfully partnered with federal, state and local agencies, private land owners, non-profit entities, biologists and other project consultants to obtain over 2.7 million dollars in funding for on the ground restoration and the conservation resources critical to protect fisheries, habitat, and public recreation and improve water quality. Tom is widely respected for expertise and collaborative approach, resulting in highly productive working relationships with regulatory and conservation management staff. His knowledge and leadership have resulted in hundreds of acres of restored wetlands, while his passion has brought visibility and appreciation for wetland conservation in the Gulf coast of Florida. He has made a significant contribution to the existing knowledge and approach of wetlands restoration in Florida and has influenced the way conservation organizations develop strategic plans, approach restoration, and manage wetland systems.

Tom’s vast experience in habitat restoration is evident in his comprehensive understanding of restoration issues unique to this region and novel approaches in restoration design; his ingenuity has provided assistance to other colleagues around the U.S. and his work has received numerous environmental awards of excellence including:

- 2000 Emerson Point Habitat Restoration Project, “First Place Award for Environmental Excellence” from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council - Future of the Region Awards Program.

- 2002 Durante Park: Future of the Region Award” from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council.
- 2002 Palmetto Estuary Preserve: “Future of the Region Award” from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council.
- 2003 Davis Tract Habitat Restoration Project: Community Design Award of Merit in Environmental Projects”
- 2004 Wolf Branch Creek Habitat Restoration Project: National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials, “2004 Environmental Award”
- 2005 Schultz Preserve Habitat Restoration Project: Schlutz Preserve Habitat Restoration Project, National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials, “2005 “Top Project Nationally”
- 2006 Lancaster Tract: *Lancaster Tract*, “*First Place* - Future of the Region Award” from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council
- 2008 Newman Branch Fisheries Habitat Restoration: Environmental Excellence Award from The Planning Commission. Cooperators: TECO, SWFWMD, and PEER

4. Thomas has extensive and long-standing working relationships; his professionalism and ability to complete projects in an efficient and ecologically sound manner has earned him the respect of colleagues working in habitat restoration. Tom’s successful work history, reputation and work ethic is reflected in the numerous organizations willing to collaborate on projects under Tom’s leadership and guidance. Below is an abbreviated list of individuals and their respective agencies that have previously collaborated with Tom.

Organization	Contact	Email	Project
US Army Corps of Engineers	Mark Peterson, Biologist	Mark.E.Peterson@usace.army.mil	SBEP Projects
Florida Department of Environmental Protection - Pollution Recovery Trust Funds	Judy Ashton, Environmental Scientist	judy.ashton@dep.state.fl.us	Robinson Preserve, Neal Preserve, FISH Preserve
Manatee County	Charlie Hunsicker, Natural Resources Dept Director for Manatee Co	Charlie.hunsicker@mymanatee.org	Robinson Preserve
Sarasota County	John Ryan, Natural Resources Dept Director for Sarasota Co	jrryan@scgov.net	North and South Lido
SWFWMD	Jeanette Seacrist, SWIM Program Manager	Jennette.seacrist@watermatters.org	SWIM Projects
Tampa Bay Estuary Program	Holly Greening, Director Tampa Bay NEP	hgreening@tbep.org	TBNEP Projects
Sarasota Bay Estuary Program	Mark Alderson, Director Sarasota Bay NEP	mark@sarasotabay.org	SBEP Projects
Charlotte Harbor Bay Estuary Program	Lisa Beever, Director Charlotte Harbor NEP	lbeever@swfrcp.org	CHNEP Projects
Tampa Bay Watch	Peter Clark, President Tampa Bay Watch	PClark@TampaBayWatch.Org	Tampa Bay Restoration Projects
MacDill Airforce Base	Jason Kirkpatrick, Environmental Contractor for Airforce	jason.kirkpatrick.2.ctr@us.af.mil	MacDill Air Force Base Habitat Restoration-Phase 3, Longshore Bar Restoration,
Tampa Electric’s Manatee Viewing Center	Wendy Anastasiou, Environmental Scientist	wfanastasiou@tecoenergy.com	Newman Branch Restoration-Phases 1-3
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	Marti McGuire, NOAA Restoration Center	Marti.McGuire@noaa.gov	Lost River Preserve, FISH Preserve
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Debbie DeVore, Gulf Coast Restoration Program Manager	Debbie_DeVore@fws.gov	Various Coastal Program Projects
Hillsborough Co Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department	J. Richard Sullivan, Manager of South Hillsborough Co Preserve	sullivanj@Hillsboroughcounty.org	Cockroach Bay, Newman Branch, Schults Preserve
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Cynthia Bohn, Coastal Program and CBRA Coordinator	Cynthia_Bohn@fws.gov	National Wetlands Inventory and Southeast Region Coastal Program

5. Tom receives a salary for his full time position as a Principle Scientist and Vice President of Scheda. However, Tom does draw a salary as the owner of his non-profit company, ERI, previously known as PEER, which he founded in 2003. ERI has been Tom’s conduit to facilitate and leverage match dollars for habitat restoration projects along the Gulf Coast of Florida. ERI has provided Tom the necessary leverage to acquire additional grant funding and partners for the benefit of the environment and the public at large. ERI has worked on several notable projects including the highly visible Newman Branch Restoration and Lost River Preserve. ERI recently received funding from the Service to restore Ulele Spring, a spring system, located in downtown Tampa and identified as a critical recovery action necessary for the endangered Florida manatee.

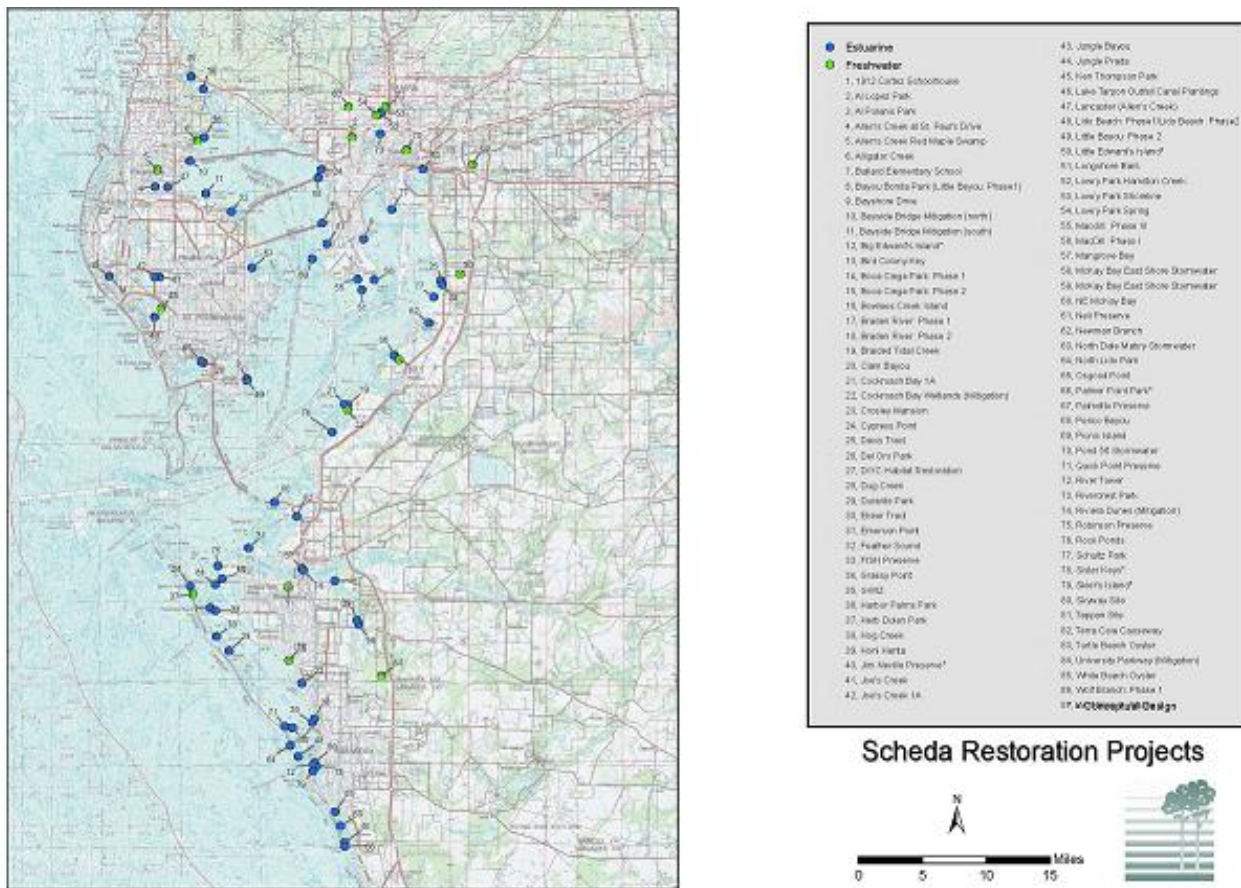
The majority of Tom’s projects have volunteer hours in which the public can acquire hands-on experience in native planting, exotic removal, access creation, educational tours and materials and land stewardship. He is always there to organize, coordinate and participate.. Tom serves on several volunteer advisory boards including the Hillsborough County Environmental Sensitive Lands Board that assists the County on deciding which tracts of land would make ecological and economic sense to purchase for conservation. Additional professional

affiliations in which Tom volunteers his time include: Tampa Bay Association of Environmental Professionals, Florida Association of Environmental Professionals, Estuarine Research Federation, ERIM International Conference Selection Committee, Technical Advisory Committee for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program, Chairman of COBRA Wetland Design Subcommittee, Session Chairman ERIM Thematic Remote Sensing Conference, Board of Directors (1997-1999) for the Tampa Bay Chapter of National Audubon Society, Conservation Chairman - Tampa Audubon Society (1998 – present), Hillsborough County Greenways Chair Environmental Affairs (2000), City of Tampa - Mayor’s Environmental Advisory Committee and the Seagrass and Habitat Restoration Technical Advisory Sub-Committees (TBEP).

6. As a Federal employee every year I receive numerous announcements regarding the National Wetlands Awards. During a recent Restore America’s Estuaries conference in Tampa, Florida a group of colleagues and I were discussing the amazing work Tom has done for all of us on various projects and how his ingenuity and dedication has shaped restoration activities both in and outside of Florida. Due to his significant contribution to the existing knowledge and approach of wetlands restoration in Florida, and the fact that he is highly respected among colleagues and conservation managers, we all agreed Tom’s work was worthy of recognition beyond what we could provide. It was then I suggested Tom be nominated for a National Wetlands Award, which was unanimously supported!

IV. ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Attachment 1: A map of restoration projects implemented by Scheda Ecological under Tom’s leadership.



Attachment 2: Highlighted Project Photos



Photo: Lost River Preserve pre-restoration: heavy exotics



Photo: Lost River Preserve post-restoration: estuarine and fresh water open water habitats, and oligohaline marsh habitats



Photo: Stewart Middle School "Living Shoreline" pre-restoration: heavy erosion and exotics, unusable shoreline



Photo: Robinson Preserve mid--restoration: "mushroom" design



Photo: Stewart Middle School "Living Shoreline" post-restoration: mosaic of estuarine plants, geoweb and rock



Photo: Robinson Preserve post-restoration: native vegetation



Photo: Stewart Middle School "Living Shoreline" post-restoration: mosaic of estuarine plants, geoweb and rock



Photo: Robinson Preserve post-restoration: recreational use of tidal creeks

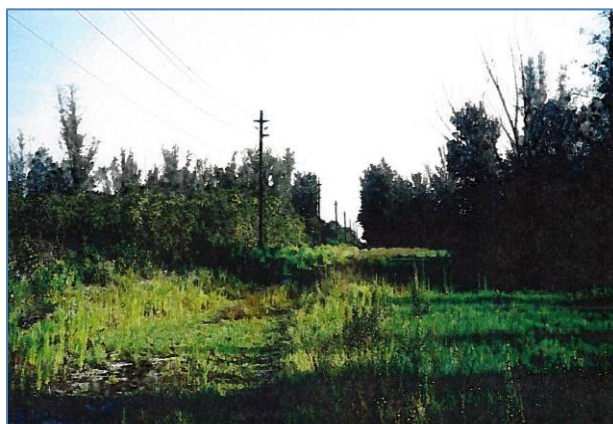


Photo: Robinson Preserve pre-restoration

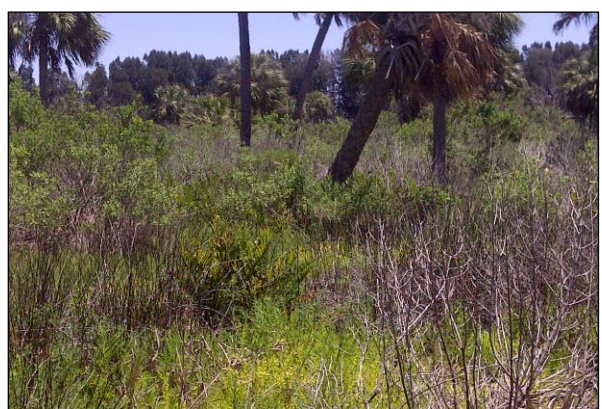


Photo: Newman Branch pre-restoration: heavy exotics present



Photo: Newman Branch pre-restoration: ditching on property



Photo: Newman Branch post-restoration: excavated tidal creek



Photo: Newman Branch pre-restoration: heavily infested exotics in tidal creeks



Photo: Newman Branch post-restoration: the creation of estuarine and freshwater wetland



Photo: Newman Branch mid-restoration: planting event, Tom assisting volunteers

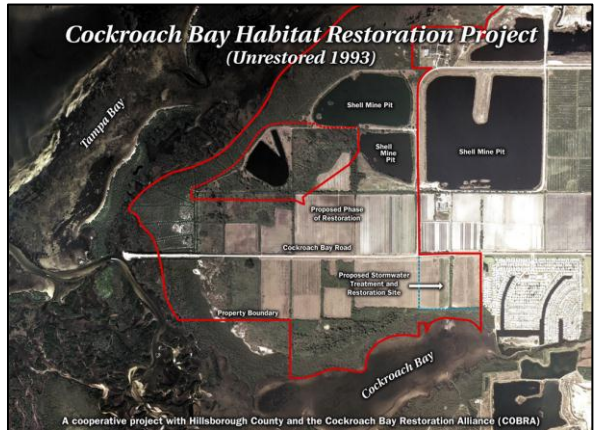


Photo: Cockroach Bay pre-restoration: aerial 1993



Photo: Newman Branch mid-restoration: planting event with dozens of volunteers

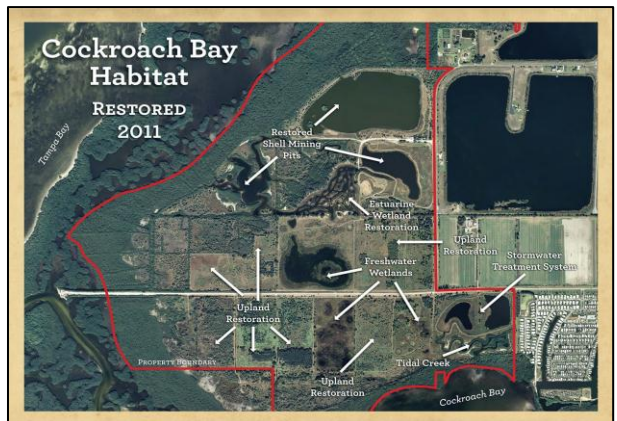


Photo: Cockroach Bay post-restoration: aerial 2011



Photo: Cockroach Bay mid-restoration



Photo: Cockroach Bay post-restoration: aerial



Photo: Cockroach Bay post-restoration: aerial 2011



Photo: Cockroach Bay post-restoration: aerial 2011



Photo: Cockroach Bay mid-restoration



Photo: Cockroach Bay mid-restoration



Photo: Cockroach Bay post-restoration: aerial 2011



Photo: Schultz Preserve (left side of photo): pre-restoration August 2003



Photo: Schultz Preserve (right side of photo): post-restoration March 2005



Photo: Schultz Preserve (right side of photo): post-restoration August 2006

Attachment 3: Relevant Project Articles

Grant provides \$750,000 for restoration of Cockroach Bay

Jessica Vander Velde can be reached at jvandervelde@sptimes.com or (813) 661-2443. Copyright 2009 Tampa Bay Times

RUSKIN — Years ago, a 43-acre piece of Cockroach Bay's shoreline was home to wetlands that filled at high tide. Now, it's overrun with invasive species and murky pits, dug decades ago for a tropical fish farm that closed in the '70s. But thanks to a \$750,000 grant announced last week, a local nonprofit can restore the land and provide a new habitat for local wildlife. Tampa's Ecosphere Restoration Institute beat out more than 800 applicants to win one of 50 grants funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA. The money is part of the national stimulus package. Only four groups in Florida won. "This is just huge for us," said company president Thomas Ries of Lutz. Now, shallow, mosquito-infested ponds from the former fish business and invasive plants such as the stubborn Brazilian pepper dot the land. The institute plans to hire contractors to remove the non-native species, transplant sabal palms in an upland hammock and recontour the land to create wetlands. The new design will provide a protective habitat for fish and frogs, which Ries hopes will draw birds. He plans to hire contractors who plan to transform the stagnant ponds into vibrant wetlands that respond to the tides. The county received the land several years ago through a donation to its Environmental Lands Acquisition Program. But the county and water district did not have the money to restore it because of tight budgets, Ries said. "It was either: I find the money, or it would stay like that," he said. So Ries started talking to county officials in late 2007. He got about \$250,000 from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the county and the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. The additional \$750,000 brings the total to the \$1 million Ries estimates the project will require. The land is next to hundreds of acres of Cockroach Bay that the water district has been restoring since the '90s. The two projects will work well together, Ries said, because after workers remove the invasive species, their seeds will no longer travel down the road and set back the other project. Ries is also the vice president of Scheda Ecological Associates, an environmental consulting firm. He started the nonprofit in 2003 so he could apply for grants to aid in a Palmetto restoration project. He has five projects on his plate now, which he works on in his spare time. Because the grants are part of the stimulus package, applicants had to prove that their plans would provide jobs. Ries says this restoration work will create 13 full-time jobs for a year. Marti McGuire, a marine habitat specialist with NOAA, said one reason the organization selected Ries' project was because it could start immediately. With surveying complete, Ries plans to apply for permits this month. He expects to start construction in the fall.

Florida wetlands restoration creates habitat and supports local jobs

April 16, 2011 http://www.noaa.gov/stories/2011/20110416_floridarestoration.html[11/15/2012 9:45:23 AM]

NOAA, the Ecosphere Restoration Institute, state and local partners celebrated the restoration of nearly 70 acres of wetlands that feed into Tampa Bay today in Ruskin, Fla. "This project restores fish and wildlife habitat lost in the 1950s when the wetlands were filled for development," said Dr. Larry Robinson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere for NOAA. "The restoration work has helped support jobs for the community and improve important nursery habitat for fish, which is so vital to local recreational and commercial fisheries." Ecosphere Restoration Institute hired local contractors to remove invasive tree species like Brazilian pepper, transform stagnant and abandoned ponds into thriving wetlands, and reconnect those wetlands to the waters of Tampa Bay. NOAA provided \$750,000 in American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funding to Ecosphere Restoration Institute for the project. Hillsborough County and the Southwest Florida Water Management District also contributed funding for the restoration. "Without the NOAA Recovery Act funding, this project would have taken many years to complete since it would have required piecemeal implementation as funding became available," said Thomas Ries, President, Ecosphere Restoration Institute. "Instead we've been able to construct it in a short amount of time and with significant cost savings." This project expands upon a 17-year restoration effort of the adjacent Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve, which is nearing its final stage of completion. The restored wetlands provide important nursery and foraging habitat for numerous fish, wading birds, and frogs. Through the Recovery Act, NOAA was provided \$167 million for marine and coastal habitat restoration. This project is one of four habitat restoration projects in Florida, out of 50 total projects selected by NOAA for this funding. Most of the 50 projects will be completed within the next year. These projects are supporting thousands of short- and long-term jobs. When Florida wetlands restoration creates habitat and supports local jobs complete, these projects will have restored 8,700 acres of habitat and opened access to 700 stream miles for fish passage that had been blocked by obsolete and unsafe dams. The projects also will remove more than 850 metric tons of abandoned fishing gear and other marine trash, rebuild oyster and other shellfish habitat, and reduce threats to 11,750 acres of coral reefs.

Many factors combine to create a diamond from the rough

Thursday, 22 July 2010, By MELODY JAMESON, mj@observernews.net

RUSKIN — Thanks to federal stimulus dollars, a highly competitive design, the good timing of a bad market and multiple agency cooperation, a South County ecological gem is being polished to sun-bright shine here. And, though still under construction, not yet open for public enjoyment, the Lost River Preserve Habitat Restoration Project already is being homesteaded, as intended, by ospreys and spoonbills, raccoons and reptiles, and marine life from tiny to frying size. The two-phase, 78-acre preserve, featuring sun-dappled walking trails under arching tree canopies meandering around free-flowing salt and fresh water lagoons, is tucked between the Little Manatee River's south shore and Little Cockroach Bay. It probably will be accessed only from Canal Street, west and north of Gulf City Road, according to Forest Turbiville, environmental manager in Hillsborough County's Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department. Hillsborough's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program (ELAPP) accepted most of the site as a donation and will assume maintenance responsibilities when the project is completed. Lost River Preserve mostly was a 50-year-old, long abandoned ornamental fish farm pockmarked with more than 200 overgrown pools when Tom Ries, an ecologist who operates the not-for-profit Ecosphere Restoration Institute, Inc., and Turbiville began informally tossing around design ideas in mid-2007. ELAPP had added the property to its conserved lands list but had no money for any improvements; no funds to restore the habitat properly, to enhance the adjacent natural fishery, to create passive recreation. Nonetheless, Ries came up with a plan that essentially opened up a dead end canal cut inland from Tampa Bay — originally to create waterfront residential home sites — and then linked the canal to two large, irregularly-shaped lagoons dug out among the old pools. The watery links, facilitated by a substantial new culvert under Canal Street, would produce both a salt water environment and a fresh water setting. The design also made use of old interior fish farm roadway, converting it to trails. The plan even converted a couple of still-sturdy, former Tampa Electric Company utility poles to osprey high rises with the help of new platforms. It all looked good on paper, but in the halls of a financially

strapped Hillsborough County government looking at massive personnel layoffs and staff furlough days, there was no funding to be found. And implementing the design would not be a small-ticket job, Ries figured. Cutting the culvert in under Canal Street, clearing the heavy overgrowth of nuisance exotics like Brazilian Pepper and Melaleuca, combining the old ponds with big digs all would run into considerable sums, he calculated. The Southwest Florida Water Management District's SWIM (Surface Water Improvement and Management) program saw merit in the proposed plan and was willing to kick in \$200,000. The Gulf of Mexico Foundation, headquartered in Texas, was in for \$65,000. Still significantly shy of the total needed, Ries was ready to make a start on the preserve with the combined quarter million dollars, seeing completion maybe five years ahead, he told The Observer recently. Then, without any anticipation of success, he also tossed the design into a pot of such plans being considered by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), applying through his non-profit for backing with federal stimulus money. More than 810 projects were reviewed by NOAA, with three Florida plans earmarked for funding, Ries said. Two of them are on the east coast and one located on the central Gulf Coast – a multi-faceted, multi-benefit design dubbed the Lost River Preserve. The NOAA grant totaled \$750,000. With more than \$1 million made available, Reis quickly swung into action on the preserve, taking bids for the major work components – and got another surprise. In a depressed economy, with far fewer jobs than contractors to do them, original cost estimates were radically reduced – in some instances cut in half, the ecologist said. The \$1 million could be stretched further than anyone had imagined. Consequently, Lost River Preserve's 43-acre Phase I, currently being settled by numerous wildlife families, is nearing completion. The exotic plants are gone and osprey circle over a new nest, a killdeer parent marshals her young on a lagoon shoreline that wanders southward, wading shore birds pursue their individual interests side by side in the newly created estuarine marsh. The last big job in Phase I is setting native plants across the acreage, joining the recently-planted 330 Sabal Palms – Florida's state tree that's expected to fill out the canopy. The Phase I work could be wrapped up in September, Ries said. Meanwhile, permitting is underway for two aspects of Phase II, a 26-acre section destined to become both wetland and upland environments, plus another nine acres requiring little work but positively affected by the planned improvements. Phase II could be finished by the end of the year, the ecologist estimated. It was the size of the NOAA grant that made Phase II possible, he added. Lost River Preserve represents environmental science's best efforts to "mimic Mother Nature" as closely as possible, restoring habitat even to the "frog ponds" or surface depressions that fill with water and attract the amphibians during the rainy season but later dry up, Ries noted. It also has generated jobs that otherwise would not have existed, should elevate property values in the surrounding area, will contribute to better water quality, and can serve as a passive recreation site offering fishing, birding, hiking, he added. Perhaps even more importantly, the new sheltering lagoons are expected to considerably recover and support the area's fishery. It is this latter consideration that Gus Muench, Hillsborough County native and a lifelong fisherman who lives in the vicinity, pointed to as he praised the project. This nursery effect, environments where young marine life can flourish and grow, nourished by the natural detritus, is essential to maintaining a healthy fishery, he asserted. "It's a great project," he added, "a really worthwhile project." Neither Ries nor Turbiville could pinpoint a specific opening date for the Last River Preserve. But, both indicated an opening observance is a distinct possibility. They really won't mind showing off the region's newest jewel.

Attachment 4: Letters of Support



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December 4, 2012

Nicole Adimey
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, FL 32256-7517

Dear Nicole:

This letter is in support of the nomination of Tom Reis for the 2013 National Wetlands Award. I have worked with Tom for eighteen years and can attest to his work in restoring wetland ecosystems in southwest Florida. His expertise and management skills have contributed to the creation of thirty ecological parks in Manatee and Sarasota counties including: Robinson Preserve, Durante Park, Neil Preserve, Grassy Pont Preserve, South/North Lido Parks and Emerson Point. Tom's work has contributed to a tapestry of ecological restoration extending from middle Tampa Bay to downtown Sarasota creating fish and wildlife habitats for future generations.

Tom's work in establishing the seagrass monitoring program at the Southwest Florida Water Management District has been invaluable in setting water quality standards throughout the region and in protecting critical habitats. The more recent work in restoring tidal creeks and living shorelines has been impressive.

Thank you for the opportunity to support this nomination.

Sincerely,



Mark Alderson
Executive Director

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

1875 Century Boulevard
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

NOV 30 2012

In Reply Refer To:
FWS/R4/ES

Environmental Law Institute
2000 L Street, NW, Suite 620
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Review Committee:

Thomas (Tom) Reis has a long and distinguished career supporting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) wetland resource efforts. Directly out of college in the mid 1980's, Tom was a contract employee for the National Wetlands Inventory providing scientific and technical rigor to the identification, delineation, and mapping of the nation's wetlands. For several years, Tom participated and led teams of scientists in field assessment and mapping of wetlands across the United States and provided technical expertise on the national status and trends wetland updates. From this early wetland foundation, Tom went on to develop many new and critical wetland restoration techniques and has been a valued partner for over 25 years.

Over the last decade, Tom has been instrumental in the wetland restoration efforts of the Service's Coastal Program in Tampa Bay, Florida. The Service has directly funded five projects with Tom since 2005 for wetland restoration in the Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay region, and has funded other partner organizations on dozens of projects in which Tom was selected as the Project Manager. Because of his extensive experience Tom is considered a resident scientific expert for various types of freshwater and marine restoration on Florida's west coast; Tom is also recognized as a champion for pulling private and public partners together to maximize resources and restoration benefits. Recently, Tom branched out into implementation of spring restoration to assist the Service with recovery efforts of the endangered Florida manatee.

Tom's career has been a testament to his contribution to conservation, restoration and the science of wetland resources. He is an essential partner in our efforts to protect, restore, and enhance these critical wetland habitats for the value of the American people. The Service supports the nomination of Tom Reis for the Environmental Law Institute's 2013 National Wetlands Award Restoration and Conservation category.

Sincerely yours,

Leopoldo Miranda
Assistant Regional Director
Ecological Services



Nicole Adimey
US Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, FL 32256-7517

Dear Ms. Adimey

November 19, 2012

I am writing to support the nomination of Thomas F. Ries for a 2013 National Wetlands Award in the Conservation and Restoration category. The Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) has been privileged to work with Mr. Ries throughout its 21-year history and have come to rely on him as one of the most valuable ecosystem practitioners and partners in the region.

Mr. Ries possesses many traits that make him an invaluable environmental scientist, ecosystem restoration designer, and project manager. First and foremost, Mr. Ries has decades of experience in various roles that allow him to excel in wetland restoration design, permitting, monitoring, and project management and facilitation. He has played an integral role in planning, permitting and constructing some of the most ambitious and successful restoration projects in southwest Florida. However, it is his warm personality, integrity, dedication, and creativity that make him such an asset and a worthy candidate of this award.

Mr. Ries has the ability to bring together diverse organizations and he has established lasting partnerships with entities from around the region that are built on trust and mutual respect, bringing resolution to difficult and complicated issues. One example is the public-private partnership (P3) he forged with the Tampa Electric Company to restore estuarine and freshwater wetlands at Newman Branch. This has become a model for future restoration projects, especially where available public land is scarce. He has also been involved with other projects that have furthered environmental protection in the Tampa Bay region. Projects such as Robinson Preserve and Lost River Preserve were ambitious in size and scope, but were successful because of his understanding of the local environment and his ability to partner effectively.

Mr. Ries is currently assisting the TBEP with four projects, all requiring unique skills and knowledge. The Feather Sound tidal wetland restoration project will restore more than 20 acres of coastal wetlands, including nearly 9 acres of salt barren- a priority habitat in Tampa Bay. He has also facilitated discussions with the nearby privately-owned golf course and the project team is hopeful that a P3 agreement can be developed. He has helped to coordinate permitting and monitoring of an experimental project to restore longshore bars in the bay to reduce wave energy and facilitate seagrass recovery. This project required extensive discussions with permitting agencies due to its experimental nature, as well as a rigorous monitoring plan. Mr. Ries is also assisting us with improving the effectiveness of compensatory freshwater wetland mitigation in the Tampa Bay region. This is a unique project that will require broad coordination with local government and permitting agencies to develop a strategy that will guide wetland mitigation towards projects that address identified needs within the watershed. There are very few consultants that

would be capable of facilitating this project, however, Mr. Ries possesses the technical knowledge and experience and the congenial personality required for this complex effort. The Estuary Program has come to rely on Mr. Ries as the "go-to guy" for nearly any restoration project.

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program enthusiastically supports the nomination of Mr. Thomas F. Ries for this award. Please contact me at lcross@tbep.org or (727) 893-2765 with any questions and thank you for the consideration.

Sincerely,

Lindsay M. Cross

Environmental Science and Policy Manager



MANATEE COUNTY FLORIDA

December 3, 2012

Ms. Nicole Adimey
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256-7517

RE: Letter of Support

Dear Ms. Adimey:

I am pleased to offer Manatee County's support for the nomination of Mr. Thomas Ries, Vice President of Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc. for a 2013 National Wetlands Award under the Conservation and Restoration Award category.

I have worked with Mr. Ries for over 20 years on a number of restoration projects beginning when he was the SWIM Project Manager for the Southwest Florida Water Management District and continuing until today. He has participated in the restoration of a number of our preserves (Leffis Key, Emerson Point, Neal, Robinson, and Perico), totaling over 1,100 acres of coastal wetland and upland habitats.

All of these preserves are located along the coast of the Manatee River, Palma Sola Bay, or the Intracoastal Waterway that connects the Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay Estuary programs. Each preserve had a unique quality that could not be seen until a formal restoration plan could be designed, and more importantly implemented. From acres of Australian pines to fallow farmland, one had to imagine the land restored to what may have been there in times past. Creative design and/or pushing through the bureaucratic time tables was needed. Mr. Ries and his staff could be counted upon to meet every task at hand, making those on-site last minute changes when necessary. Tom's willingness to be creative and his "can do" attitude has enabled Manatee County to create a view of what Native Florida should be.

Sincerely,

Charlie Hunsicker
Director, Natural Resources

Natural Resources Department
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1000, Bradenton, FL 34206-1000 * Street Address: 415 10th Street West, Bradenton, FL 34205
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Blake C. Gullory
Executive Director

December 6, 2012

Subject: Support of Thomas Ries for 2013 National Wetlands Award

Dear National Wetlands Award Committee:

Please let this letter serve as my support of Tom Ries to receive the 2013 National Wetlands Award (Conservation and Restoration category). Tom's dedication to understanding and restoring Florida's ecosystems is unsurpassed. My first introduction to Tom was when he volunteered to assist me with my Ph.D. fisheries field sampling at the University of South Florida during 1980-83. Since those early days, I have had the privilege of working with Tom for eight years as a co-worker in the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Program of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (a state-mandated program established by the SWIM Act of 1987). During that time, Tom and I co-managed a variety of ecosystem restoration projects for Tampa Bay. As a project manager, Tom always brought fresh and imaginative aspects to project designs and construction – valuable aspects still in use today. After Tom departed SWIM, I have been fortunate to be able to continue to work with him on a variety of additional ecosystem restoration projects for the bay, many of which have won environmental awards for excellence.

Tom's enthusiasm and energy to protect, restore, and manage our coastal systems are contagious and reflected in the huge number and quality of projects he has been involved with over the years. He has and is always trying to develop better, more complex, functional restoration projects, projects which will provide not only valuable habitats but often which will also improve water quality for the bay. His contributions to restoration ecology are renowned and highly respected. Of great significance is Tom's ability to promote partnerships among various entities to implement projects. Mostly recently, he has championed the development and implementation of public-private partnerships to perform restoration projects, an approach which could have significant benefits for the future of Tampa Bay and the public that use the resource. As an example of an exemplary public-private partnership, his "Newman Branch Fisheries Habitat Restoration Project" joined forces of the SWIM Program with the Tampa Electric Company, resulting in a project receiving the top Environmental Award from the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission.

I have seen the first-hand success, passion, and dedication that Tom brings to his environmental work for Florida and feel that Tom is worthy of being recognized with the National Wetlands Award. Tom's commitment is unparalleled for the restoration and management of our Florida ecosystem. Only through vision and long term commitments to our ecosystem can the ultimate restoration and preservation of our coastal habitats be successful. Tom Ries has and will continue to provide both that vision and commitment.

If you have questions concerning my support of Tom or are in need of any other information, please contact me at the above Tampa address, email Brandt.Henningsen@swfwmd.state.fl.us, or at 813-985-7481 ext. 2202.

Sincerely,

Brandt F. Henningsen, Ph.D.
Chief Environmental Scientist
Surface Water Improvement and
Management (SWIM) Program

bfh

cc: Jennette Seachrist, Manager, SWIM Section, SWFWMD
W312 General Habitat Restoration



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President and CEO
Restore America's
Estuaries

December 6, 2012

Nicole Adimey

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Coastal Program
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite #200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256

Dear Nicole,

This letter is in strong support of Tom Ries' nomination for the 2013 National Wetlands Award under the Conservation and Restoration category. Tom has been a stalwart supporter of wetlands conservation and restoration throughout his career. Moreover, he has shown through his actions his passion not only for the resource itself but also for bringing people together to ensure their long-term health and continuation.

We have gotten to know Tom over the years through our biennial conferences, five of which he has participated in. He combines his unique insight with practical experience and shares this information in a very accessible, technically accurate, and personable way. He also has shown the ability to bring a broad diversity of people together for the betterment of our nation's wetlands. He was instrumental in a variety of aspects for our recent conference in Tampa, Florida. He led an effort, in conjunction with a number of public counterparts, to craft a field session highlighting the Cockroach Bay Ecosystem Restoration Project. Doing so allowed experts from around the country to see and learn from the successful efforts to restore an estuarine system. In turn, those people can then take that knowledge back "home" to make advancements in their local communities.

Similarly, he was a critical voice on our program committee in helping us shape the program such that it was as meaningful and broadly applicable as possible. He has the fantastic ability to offer insights while bringing people together. He has also been a consistently excellent program participant, offering his years of experience so that others from around the world may learn

His efforts through our conference, which is the primary way we have interacted with him, truly only offer a glimpse of the full range of talents and dedication Tom has to our nation's wetlands. His passion and decades-long career highlight his commitment to conserving and restoration this essential habitat. Tom's devotion, enthusiasm, and perseverance to America's wetlands shine through all that he does. I highly recommend him for this honor.

Sincerely,

Jeff Benoit
President and CEO

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2020 North 14th Street, Suite 210
Arlington, VA 22201
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December 6, 2012

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Nicole Adimey
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256-7517

RE: Letter of Reference for Thomas F. Ries in Nomination for the Environmental Law Institute's 2013 National Wetlands Award (Conservation and Restoration Category)

Dear Ms. Adimey:

I submit this letter in support of Mr. Thomas Ries' nomination for the prestigious Environmental Law Institute's 2013 National Wetlands Award (Conservation and Restoration Category). I have had the good fortune to work with Tom on numerous projects, in his role as Vice President and Chief Scientist of Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc. Through these projects, I have been an eyewitness to Tom's ability to bring numerous partners, both public and private, to the table and I have seen firsthand Tom's willingness to go beyond expectations to provide our clients and the general public with an exceptional results.

I do not exaggerate in stating that we have gone out of our way to find ways to work with Tom and Scheda based on Taylor Engineering's high opinion about the quality of work we have come to depend on from them. In fact, we recently signed a contract to help provide the City of Dunedin with permits to improve stormwater conveyance and eventually provide wetland habitat improvements in several of the city's natural water bodies that have deteriorated following years of misuse, because of Tom and Scheda.

To win the City of Dunedin job, our team spent four times the normal effort, including comprehensive site visits, extensive data collection, and on Tom's part detailed documentation of the natural resources within and the extent of impacts on the natural water bodies in question. During our kickoff and planning meetings, when over 20 stakeholders have taken time during weekday working hours to provide input on the project, I am continuously reminded that Tom's hard work and skills brought us to that point. Better yet, I am given the confidence that Tom's expertise in regional wetland restoration and stakeholder management will help carry us to a successful conclusion for the environment, the citizens of the City of Dunedin, and the many regulatory agencies involved.

I have that confidence because I have seen Tom in action in even more challenging situations. In fact, just last week I had the privilege of sending the final U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) permit to our client, the City of Port Richey, for a project that was four previous consulting firms and over a decade of failure by others in the hole when the Taylor Engineering team took on this challenge.

Since that time, Taylor Engineering and Scheda have provided a wide range of services related to maintenance dredging of 24 canals within Port Richey. These services include preparation of dredged material management plans; design of dredged material management facilities; sediment quality assessments; environmental characterization of dredging and dredged material management areas; coordination with the USACE, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and other federal, state, and municipal agencies; and other dredging and navigation related tasks.

While Taylor Engineering always provides high quality professional advice and deliverables and our staff has extensive knowledge of dredging engineering, Tom's successful tackling of the project's environmental issues made this project an amazing accomplishment. Tom's technical expertise and excellent professional relationships with various regulatory and commenting agencies has greatly

facilitated implementation of the Port Richey's projects. During this project, Tom has performed all of his assigned tasks in a timely and professional manner and his team has proven financially responsible and competitive when negotiating cost proposals.

Tom helped direct the city away from nearly a dozen acres of impacts to very high-quality seagrass habitat and calmed citizens angered by what they saw as an attempt by a "few" greedy homeowners to spend the monies of the "many" city's citizens that would not have access to the channels. With Tom at the helm of our team, the city went from a financially costly project with an even costlier divide among stakeholders to a project with roughly 0.1 acre of impacts to marginal seagrass beds and improvements to two high-use city parks, which in turn helped, secure the buy-in of most stakeholders.

A quick look at Tom's resume and it is evidently clear that the two examples I just provided are only a sliver of a lifetime of working to balance innovative approaches to restoring wetland ecosystem, tried-and-true conservation methods, and the human element to protect regionally significant wetland areas.

I hope this letter documents my and Taylor Engineering's high opinion about the quality of Mr. Tom Ries' and Scheda's work, while chronicling the overall value of that work to the ecological restoration community. In brief, I strongly support Tom's nomination for the 2013 National Wetlands Award (Conservation and Restoration) Category.

Please contact me if you need any further information regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Joe Wagner, P.E.
Senior Engineer, Waterfront Group
Taylor Engineering, Inc.



3000 Pinellas Bayway South
Tierra Verde, FL 33715

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Whit Webster

December 7, 2012

Re: Thomas F. Ries, 2013 National Wetlands Award Nomination

Dear National Wetlands Award Nomination committee:

I am writing on behalf of Thomas F. Ries, for the nomination of the 2013 National Wetlands Award for the Conservation and Restoration category. It has been my great pleasure to know Mr. Ries and his work over the past eight years as Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc.'s Vice President and Principal Scientist. Mr. Ries is passionate, enthusiastic, and loyal to his work for the Tampa Bay community and environment.

Mr. Ries stands head and shoulders over most in his demonstrated initiative, intelligence, and creativity for utilizing restoration techniques that have greatly impacted methods used for restoration projects. Anywhere you go in the Bay, his projects stand alone and his print can easily be seen. For example, his project design for the Robinson Preserve in Sarasota, Florida, he created an artificial reef out of an Australian pine stump to encourage fish habitat. It is his ability to utilize what is available that set him apart.

In working with Mr. Ries in past projects, he has demonstrated the ability to bring many groups to the table in the interest of the projects at hand. Working with the private sector to increase restoration acreage and habitats has been popularized by him due to his successful efforts with past projects like the Newman Branch project with Tampa Electric and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. I have recently had the pleasure to work with him on a recent project, and I have watched how his leadership skills have impacted the success of his projects. The project at Feather Sound in Clearwater, Florida, has struggled to get off the ground, but it is his optimism that that have kept this project moving forward.

Mr. Ries' intellect is matched by his ability to communicate clearly, and to project an open, friendly persona to others regardless of their level of expertise. He is approachable and his passion for the unique environments in Tampa Bay have kept his focus steady in the field of on-the-ground restoration and conservation methods on public and private lands

I believe Mr. Ries to be an excellent candidate for the 2013 National Wetlands Award for the Conservation and Restoration category. Mr. Ries' passion for restoration activities in Tampa Bay has demonstrated his tenacity and dedication to any project he is a part of. It is why I highly recommend Mr. Ries without reservation for this award. I sincerely hope that you will choose him for your 2013 recipient of the National Wetlands Award.

Sincerely,

Martha B. Gruber
Environmental Scientist
Tampa Bay Watch, Inc.
(727) 867-8166 x 230
mgruber@tampabaywatch.org



ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLY



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

December 7, 2012

Nicole Adimey
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
7915 Baymeadows Way, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32256-7517

Dear Nicole,

I am honored to submit this letter of support for the nomination of Mr. Thomas Ries as a recipient of the Conservation and Restoration category award of the 2012 National Wetlands Awards. As a Marine Habitat Resource Specialist with the NOAA Restoration Center, I have worked with Tom for the past 6 years through multiple partnerships, projects and restoration initiatives. I can tell you, without hesitation, that Tom is a truly deserving recipient of this distinguished award.

Tom Ries has dedicated over 20 years to wetland restoration and has implemented numerous award winning coastal habitat restoration projects along Florida's Gulf coast. I believe that Tom is the face and vision of wetland restoration in southwest Florida. Tom has led the identification, prioritization, design, and implementation of projects and initiatives that have restored thousands of acres of critical wetland habitat around Tampa Bay. Tom's extensive technical knowledge combined with his willingness to put in the extra hours to collaborate with other restoration practitioners, lend his expertise to a variety of partners, and engage and educate the local community has made Tom a true leader in the field of habitat restoration.

Over the years, Tom and I have partnered together on a range of fisheries habitat restoration efforts. In partnership with our program, he has led multiple collaborative and innovative coastal restoration projects. More recently, Tom successfully led the implementation of a \$1M American Recovery and Reinvestment Act project called Lost River Preserve Restoration Project in Cockroach Bay along the southeastern portion of Tampa Bay. Due to Tom's leadership and outstanding ability to leverage public-private partnerships, this project excelled far beyond its original goals. This 70-acre project restored a mosaic of coastal habitat types that were lost to dredge and fill activities in the 1950s and it also served as a significant milestone in the final phase of a 19-year collaboration of state and local partners to restore over 700 acres of the Cockroach Bay peninsula.

Tom is the most deserving recipient of this distinguished award. It is a privilege to work with him and I am honored to support his nomination. I hope you are able to carefully consider Mr. Thomas Ries as a candidate for this prestigious award.

Sincerely,

Marti McGuire
Assistant Program Manager
NOAA Restoration Center, SE Region

cc: Julia Royster, NOAA Restoration Center



Attachment 5: Tomas Ries CV



THOMAS F. RIES
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Science, Biology/Geology (Minor), 1983
University of South Florida

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Habitat Restoration • Seagrass Mapping • Biological Sampling/Analysis • Mitigation Design • Botanical Identification • Vegetative Mapping • Wildlife Surveys • Management Plans

SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE

As a scientist for more than 28 years, Mr. Ries has extensive experience in managing and restoring natural resources and has formulated regional land management plans. Mr. Ries has been involved with ecosystem restoration for the past 20+ years and has been involved with over 80 habitat restoration and stormwater retrofit projects; many of which have won awards of environmental excellence. In addition, while employed by the SWFWMD SWIM program, Mr. Ries developed and managed the Seagrass Mapping Program and oversaw the seagrass trend analysis data from 1988 to 1997 for the entire west central Florida coastline. Other experience includes NWI mapping, biotic sampling/analysis, environmental permitting, permit compliance monitoring, and environmental construction oversight. Mr. Ries has also managed all phases of construction contracts and consultant services for habitat restoration and stormwater retrofit projects. Mr. Ries' knowledge extends to technical abilities that include delineation of both freshwater and estuarine wetlands in accordance with Federal, State, regional, and local definitions.

As Director of Marketing and Executive V.P. of Scheda Ecological Associates, Inc., Mr. Ries oversees and develops habitat restoration, seagrass research, and land management initiatives for the company. Mr. Ries is extremely proficient in the preparation and monitoring of project and consultant budgets and invoices, reviewing all phases of projects and studies, tracking project schedules, and assigning staff resources. In addition, he has organized and conducted public workshops, public hearings, and technical advisory committee meetings. He also has been selected as mediator and technical advisor for numerous government advisory committees and has worked with neighborhood groups and concerned citizens to achieve consensus for a myriad of environmental topics.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Tampa Bay Association of Environmental Professionals
- Florida Association of Environmental Professionals
- Estuarine Research Federation
- ERIM International Conference Selection Committee
- Technical Advisory Committee for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, as well as the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program
- Chairman of COBRA Wetland Design Subcommittee
- Session Chairman ERIM Thematic Remote Sensing Conference
- Board of Directors (1997-1999), Tampa Bay Chapter of National Audubon Society
- Conservation Chairman - Tampa Audubon Society (1998 – present)
- Hillsborough County Greenways, Chair Environmental Affairs (2000)
- City of Tampa - Mayor's Environmental Advisory Committee
- Seagrass & Habitat Restoration Technical Advisory Sub-Committees (TBEP)

NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS

Project Manager, Rock Creek Ponds Ecosystem Restoration Project, Hillsborough County, Florida. As project manager, Mr. Ries worked closely with the SWFWMD staff to formulate the ecosystem restoration plans and permit applications of the 2,572-acre Rock Creek Pond parcel, which is the largest habitat restoration endeavor ever undertaken by the SWFWMD. The resultant project design included enhancement of the former rock ponds, restoration of the saltern communities, restoration of the upland communities, and the creation of approximately 800 acres of coastal habitat.

Project Manager/Principal Scientist, MacDill AFB Phase III Habitat Restoration Project, Hillsborough County, Florida. Scheda Ecological Associates was selected to implement the MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) Phase III Habitat Restoration project. This project is the third in a series of cooperative restoration efforts between SWIM and the U.S. Air Force for ecosystem restoration and stormwater treatment on AFB land. Mr. Ries will focus the restoration design on the AFB golf course, a major drainage canal, and preserve areas along the southeast and southern shore of MacDill AFB, inclusive of estuarine and freshwater wetlands as well as upland habitats. The project 100% design has recently been approved and Scheda staff is currently performing the construction CEI.

Project Manager, Balm Boyette - Stallion Hammock Streambed Restoration Project, Hillsborough County, Florida. This SWFWMD led project will restore former mined lands and re-establish a 1,000 foot section of the Stallion Hammock streambed. This publically owned 4,916-acre parcel was purchased by the Hillsborough County in 1992. A major feature within the preserve is that approximately 90 acres of the site had historically been mined for phosphate and never reclaimed. The overall objective is to restore the site and replace the creek which once bisected the site. This restoration plan also included the recreation of a riparian stream and hardwood bottom land community, and will ultimately restore 28.3 acres of former mined land within Hillsborough County, Florida.

Project Manager/Principal Scientist, Palmetto Estuary Preserve Habitat Restoration Project, Manatee County, Florida. This award-winning restoration project was made possible by Mr. Ries' offer to obtain a grant to purchase coastal lands for the City of Palmetto. Once purchased, Mr. Ries solicited assistance from SWFWMD's SWIM program, thus orchestrating this first public-private partnership to implement a habitat restoration project. Mr. Ries also designed, permitted, and provided construction management of the project. This cooperative project resulted in the creation of seven acres of intertidal estuarine habitat and the enhancement of 24 acres of mangrove forest along the Manatee River. Mr. Ries obtained grants and coordinated the volunteer planting of the site, ranked as one of the largest volunteer planting projects in Manatee County. *This project won First Place in the 2002 Future of the Region Award in the Environmental category.*

Tampa Port Authority, Longshore Bars Seagrass Restoration Pilot Project, Hillsborough County, Florida - Mr. Ries is currently working the Malcolm Pirnie Engineers, the Port Authority, and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program to, assist with the regulatory agency coordination and to oversee the scientific monitoring for the experimental Longshore Bars project. Four different treatments are being studied to evaluate which is best to promote the natural colonization of seagrass communities.

Technical Manager/Principal Scientist, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program (SBEP), Wetlands Coordinator, Sarasota Bay, Florida. Since 1997, Mr. Ries has been the project technical manager for this ongoing contract with the estuary program. As part of this project, two 5-Year planning documents were formulated to identify and evaluate potential habitat restoration and stormwater retrofit projects for the region. In total, 45 potential coastal restoration sites were evaluated; and twenty have been constructed. Mr. Ries coordinated the restoration design, permitting, and assisted in the construction oversight of all twenty sites ranging in size from 1-487 acres. *Durante Park won the 2002 Future of the Region Award from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council and the Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration Project, won the 2009 Future of the Region Award from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council.*

Project Manager, Clam Bayou Habitat Restoration Project, Pinellas County, Florida. This SWFWMD-SWIM led restoration project proposes to restore four estuarine habitats and implement major two stormwater retrofit projects within the landward extent of Clam Bayou, part of the Pinellas County Aquatic Preserve. The project will result in a total creation of 5.4 acres of intertidal habitat, 1.1 acres of freshwater wetland and 22.4 acres of open water. The project is a cooperative venture with the Cities of St. Petersburg and Gulfport, the SWFWMD. Once completed, this multi-phased effort will restore the majority of the bayou's ecosystem and treat over 1,000 acres of stormwater draining from the surrounding watershed.

Project Manager, Lancaster Tract Habitat Restoration, Pinellas County, Florida. This 14-acre restoration site is located along Allen Creek, a tributary to the Tampa Bay estuary system. Mr. Ries designed a comprehensive restoration plan which included the enhance of 8 acres of upland and restoration 6 acres of wetland communities. The project provides critical oligohaline habitat to a highly impacted wetland system in the local watershed and has won numerous awards of environmental excellence. The increased wildlife habitat and additional water quality treatment contribute to the goals and objectives of the Allen's Creek Watershed Management Plan, Pinellas County Comprehensive Management Plan, SWFWMD's SWIM Program and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP). This project won the 2006 Future of the Region award.

Project Manager, Ekker Tract Habitat Restoration Project, Hillsborough County, Florida. Mr. Ries designed and permitted this freshwater marsh project for the SWIM program at SWFWMD. This project resulted in the restoration and enhancement of 22 acres of freshwater marsh, and includes approximately 60 acres of upland enhancement. The project involves re-contouring and hydro-logically connecting pre-existing aquacultural fishponds to create a functional freshwater pond and isolated frog ponds to provide critical wildlife habitat with over flow to Bull Frog Creek and ultimately to the Tampa Bay Estuary.

Program Manager, Wolf Branch Creek Habitat Restoration Project, Hillsborough County, Florida. This 1000-acre tract was purchased by the ELAPP Program of Hillsborough County for \$1.8 million in 1993 for the sole purpose of restoring the existing on-site habitats. Mr. Ries recently designed, permitted and oversaw the construction of five freshwater ponds

Project Manager, Braden River Habitat Restoration Project, Manatee County, Florida. Mr. Ries oversaw the design, permitting, and construction of this coastal island restoration project. The resultant project provided a meandering tidal creek, intertidal marsh platforms, and open water lagoons to a previously degraded habitat.

Project Manager/Environmental Scientist, Little Bayou Habitat Restoration Project. City of St. Petersburg, Pinellas County, Florida. Mr. Ries coordinated the design and construction management activities for this tidal creek restoration project. This was the first SWIM project with the City of St. Petersburg and also the first project built utilizing the SWFWMD construction crews to lower the overall costs.

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS-ABBREVIATED

Ries, T. F., Red-Tape: Regulatory Obstacles to Habitat Restoration – Science-Policy Connections Panel Discussion, Sarasota Bay Watershed Symposium, February 2012.

Rosensweig, D. & Ries, T. F. Sarasota Bay Estuary Program's Five-Year Habitat Restoration Plan – Overview, Sarasota Bay Watershed Symposium, February 2012.

Ries, T. F., MacDIII AFB Habitat Restoration Project (Phase III) – Overview Presentation, Society of Military Engineers Meeting, February 2012.

Ries, T. F. & Rosensweig, D., Cattle Dock Point Mitigation Project – Assessment, Charlotte Harbor Watershed Summit, March 2011.

Ries, T. F., Applications of Living Shorelines in the Southeastern US, *Living Shoreline Case Studies*, FDEP & SJRWMD, March, 2011.

Ries, T. F., *Coastal Habitat Restoration Lessons Learned the Hard Way- Future Strategies to Achieve Habitat Restoration Goals*, Florida Association of Environmental Professionals annual meeting, November, 2010.

Ries, T. F., McGuire, M., *Implementing ARRA-Funded Habitat Restoration: Finding Solutions at Lost River Preserve*, Restore America's Estuaries Conference, Galveston, TX., November, 2010.

Ries, T. F., *Restored Habitats: Lessons Learned and the Importance of Management*, Tampa BASIS 5, October 2009.

Ries, T. F., *Littoral Shelf and Wetland Restoration at Cattle Dock Point*. Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program – Science Forum. April 2009.

Ries, T. F., Anastasiou, W.V., Henningsen B. F., *Restoration on Privately Owned Lands Using Public Dollars – An Innovative Approach to Achieving Habitat Restoration*. Restore Americas Estuaries Conference, Providence, RI. November, 2008.

Ries, T. F. and Henningsen B. F., *Multi-Party Partnerships for Habitat Restoration*. Hillsborough Community College - Annual Conference on Ecosystem Restoration & Creation, Tampa, Florida. October, 2008.

Ries, T. F., *Restoring Tidal Hydrology, Breaking Down Barriers, NOAA Workshop, 2008*.
Presenter/Facilitator, Charleston, South Carolina, January 2008.

Ries, T. F., Miselis, P. *Cattle Dock Point Phase II – Lessons Learned*. Hillsborough Community College, Annual Conference on Ecosystem Restoration & Creation, Tampa, Florida. May 2005.

Ries, T.F., *Five-Year Habitat Restoration Plan for Sarasota Bay* Sarasota Bay National Estuarine Program (SBNEP) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) presentation, 2003.

Ries, T.F., *Wetland Mitigation: Does it Work?* Sarasota Bay National Estuarine Program (NEP) Technical advisory committee presentation, 2001.

Ries, T.F., and Kurz, R. *Seagrass in Tampa Bay: Historic Trends and Future Expectations*. American Society for the Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing - Resource Technology Institute International Conference, 1998

Ries, T.F. Status and Trends of Seagrass Distribution in Charlotte Harbor. 1997 Charlotte Harbor National Estuarine Program (NEP) Conference, 1997.

Tomasko, D. A., and Ries, T. F. *Responses of Tampa and Sarasota Bay Seagrass Meadows to Nitrogen Load Reductions*. Estuarine Research Federation, 1997.

Ries, T. F., and Johanson, J. O.R. *Seagrass in Tampa Bay: Historic Trends and Future Expectations*. Tampa BASIS 3, 1996.

Henningsen, B.F., Ingold, S.P., Ries, T.F., Robison, D.E., and Whitman, R.L. *Habitat Restoration Projects for Tampa Bay: Past, Present and Future*. Tampa BASIS 3, 1996.

Ries, T.F.. Status and Trends of Seagrass in Charlotte Harbor. Workshop on Developing Resource-Based Pollutant Load Reduction Goals for Seagrass in Charlotte Harbor. 1995,

Ries, T. F.. *Trend Analysis of Seagrass in Tampa Bay, Florida*. Hillsborough Community College, Annual Conference on Ecosystem Restoration & Creation, Tampa, Florida. May 1994.

Ries, T. F., *Habitat Restoration in Tampa Bay, Florida*. Field Trip: International Exchange Conference, 1994.

Ries, T. F., *Seagrass Mapping and Assessment: The Tampa Bay Experience. Proceedings and Conclusions of Workshops on: Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Initiative and Photo-synthetically Active Radiation*, 1993.

Ries, T.F.. Seagrass Monitoring and Research in the Gulf of Mexico. National Biological Survey, 1992.

PROJECT AWARDS

- 2011 Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration Project, ACEC Engineering Excellence Award from the National ACEC. Cooperators: Manatee County, SWFWMD, NOAA, FDEP, and PBS&J.
- 2009 Robinson Preserve Habitat Restoration Project, *First Place* - Future of the Region Award from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Cooperators: Manatee County, SWFWMD, NOAA, and FDEP.
- 2008 Newman Branch Fisheries Habitat Restoration Project, Environmental Excellence Award from The Planning Commission. Cooperators: TECO, SWFWMD, and PEER.
- 2006 Lancaster Tract, "First Place - Future of the Region Award" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Cooperators: SWIM, City of Clearwater and Pinellas County
- 2005 Schlutz Preserve Habitat Restoration Project, National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials, "2005 "Top Project Nationally". Cooperators: ELAPP, SWIM.
- 2004 Wolf Branch Creek Habitat Restoration Project, National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials, "2004 Environmental Award". Cooperators: ELAPP, SWIM.
- 2003 Davis Tract Restoration Project, Hillsborough County Planning Commission "Community Design Award of Merit in Environmental Projects". Cooperators: ELAPP, SWIM.
- 2002 Palmetto Estuary Preserve, "First Place - Future of the Region Award" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Cooperators: Riviera Dunes Resort, SWIM, City of Palmetto
- 2002 Joan M. Durante Community Park, "Future of the Region Award" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Cooperators: FDEP, SBNEP, Town of Longboat Key
- 2002 Ed Radice Park, "Future of the Region Award" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council. Cooperator: Hillsborough County
- 2001 Ed Radice Park, "Environmental Project of the Year" from the American Public Works Association. Cooperators: Hillsborough County
- 2000 Emerson Point Habitat Restoration Project, "First Place Award for Environmental Excellence" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council - Future of the Region Awards Program. Cooperators: Manatee County, SWFWMD, and FDEP.
- 1998 Allen's Creek Oligohaline Habitat Restoration Project, "Meritorious Award" from the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council - Future of the Region Awards Program. Cooperators: Pinellas County, FDEP, and SWFWMD.
- 1998 Cockroach Bay Habitat Restoration Project, Coastal America Program's 'Partnership Award.'
- 1997 Allen's Creek 'Red Maple Swamp' Stormwater Retrofit Project, "Presidents Environmental Award" from the US-EPA (Region IV).
- 1997 Emerson Point Habitat Restoration Project, "NOAA Excellence Award for Coastal Restoration" from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.
- 1996 Picnic Island, "Award for Environmental Excellence for Habitat Restoration/Enhancement" from the Tampa Bay Association of Environmental Professionals. Cooperator: City of Tampa.
- 1996 Alligator Creek Channel 'H' Detention and Treatment Pond, "Award for Environmental Excellence for Enhancement of Environmental Quality" by Environmental Excellence Foundation. Cooperator: Pinellas County.
- 1996 Al Lopez Park South Pond Rehabilitation, Hillsborough County Planning Commission Community Design Awards for "Recreation/Outdoor Space" by Hillsborough County Regional Planning Commission. Cooperator: City of Tampa
- 1996 Harbor Palms Park, "Environmental Excellence Award for Habitat Restoration" from the Environmental Excellence Foundation. Cooperator: City of Oldsmar.
- 1996 Emerson Point Habitat Restoration Project "Award for Environmental Excellence for Habitat Restoration and Enhancement" from the Tampa Bay Association of Environment Professionals. Cooperators: Manatee County, SWFWMD, and FDEP.