

San Antonio Bay Partnership



2024 ANNUAL REPORT



The San Antonio Bay Partnership (SABP) is a regional, non-profit, stakeholder-driven planning and management program for the San Antonio Bay/Guadalupe Estuary. The purpose of the San Antonio Bay Partnership is to create and sustain a working partnership of committed stakeholders who *protect, restore, and enhance* the natural resources of the San Antonio Bay System for the benefit of the ecosystem and its human uses.

The San Antonio Bay System on the central Texas coast is one of 7 major estuaries on the Texas coast, each of which is a critical nursery. This 10,000 square mile estuary supports significant economic activities (fisheries, ecotourism, boating) and unique biodiversity. Fed by the San Antonio and Guadalupe Rivers, it connects to Matagorda and Aransas-Copano Bays and the Gulf of Mexico.

This estuarine complex is exceptional. Its wetlands are essential wintering grounds for the last wild flock of endangered Whooping Cranes, a testament to the system's high biodiversity. San Antonio Bay System also sustains vital commercial fisheries (oysters, shrimp, crabs) and numerous bird species, all benefiting from the healthy wetlands that provide water quality and nursery habitats.

Founded in 2010, SABP was inspired by the need for conservation of the San Antonio Bay System. These bays and estuarine habitats are vital to marine biodiversity, supporting over 90% of the Gulf's commercially and recreationally important fish and shellfish. SABP welcomes all participants. Its diverse stakeholders—representing environmental, recreational, and economic interests—come from both the immediate bay area and the broader San Antonio and Guadalupe River watersheds, which are crucial for the estuary's freshwater inflows. This wide-ranging stakeholder involvement is fundamental to SABP's watershed approach, driving its efforts to protect, restore, and enhance the San Antonio Bay/Guadalupe Estuary System. SABP relies on these stakeholders for vital input, technical assistance, and financial support.

SAN ANTONIO BAY PARTNERSHIP'S PROGRAMS

Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program

Shorelines Cleanup

Mid-Coast Sea Turtle Rescue

Mid-Coast Estuary Education Initiative

Restoration of Habitat

Public Access / Paddling Trails

Letter From the Chair:

Dear Partners and Friends,

As I reflect on the SABP Program’s achievements in 2024, I find myself increasingly proud and grateful for the support of our volunteers and partners. For 14 years, we have worked together to protect our Bays and estuaries.

The San Antonio Bay System, and the Texas Mid-Coast, is an exceptional place. The Bay’s productivity provides a living for many, recreation and relaxation for more. Our efforts to remove awful trash from its shorelines, reduce ghost fishing from abandoned traps, rescue awesome turtles from cold waters, and educate our students on how the estuary works are essential. The Bay is healthier and more productive because of our work! Thanks to all the Bay R.A.T.’s who have participated.

Significant challenges confront our Bays. Rapid population growth and industrial development are intensifying pressures, including demand for limited freshwater vital to estuary health. The environment also faces a shifting climate, rising sea levels, and increased storm activity. Despite this, our mission endures: to conserve, protect, and restore coastal ecosystems. We will enhance organizational capacity for efficient and effective restoration, partnering to safeguard our bays' beauty and vitality. There is no question that ‘progress’ is coming. It’s up to us to decide how we mitigate its most environmentally harmful impacts – and how we individually modify our personal habits and actions to protect the bay. I am inspired by Aldo Leopold's 'A Sand County Almanac,' I find his conservation principles profoundly relevant to our Bay home.

“Like winds and sunsets, wild things are taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher ‘standard of living’ is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free. For us in the minority, the opportunity to see geese in the wild is more important than television.”

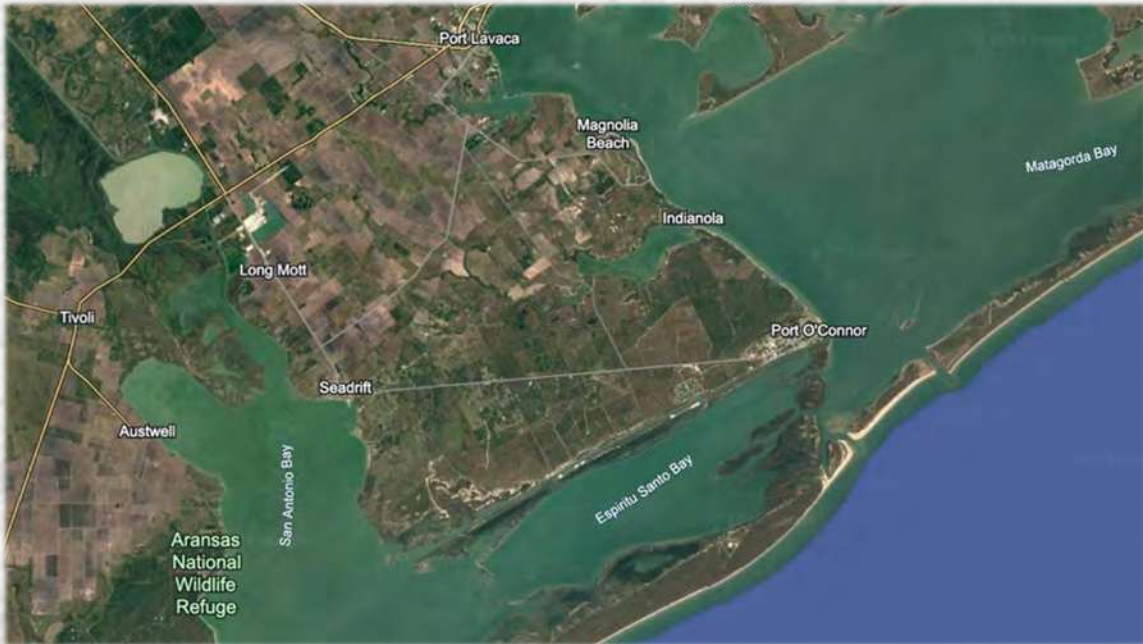
This report invites you on a journey of our projects and to share the ever-evolving beauty of our ecosystems. The Bay is a treasure that calls out to be explored, cherished, and protected for generations to come. To our incredible volunteers, staff, partners, and supporters, thank you. Your unwavering dedication, collaborative spirit, and tireless commitment to the SABP mission are making a profound and lasting difference. I look forward to building on this success together in the year ahead.

Thank you for your continued support,

Allan Berger



Protecting a Treasure: San Antonio Bay's Biodiversity Pressures



Bridging the Gap: Cultivating Conservation Stewardship for the San Antonio Bay-Guadalupe Estuary System

The SABP fosters conservation awareness, which is paramount for the health of our natural resources. The SABP addresses this need directly, empowering individuals to become active stewards of the San Antonio Bay-Guadalupe Estuary System. Our mission centers on:

- **Safeguarding Biodiversity:** Protecting the estuary's rich biodiversity through tangible actions such as removing plastic pollution, derelict crab traps, and deadly fishing lines.
- **Engaging Communities:** Inspiring public participation by creating accessible and impactful volunteer opportunities in nature.
- **Leveraging Data for Impact:** Employing advanced technology to gather robust scientific and citizen science data.
- **Encouraging Behavioral Change:** Utilizing collected data to identify critical issues, develop effective solutions, and ultimately influence positive behavioral shifts within the community.

SABP confronts the challenges facing our coast by empowering the public with knowledge, fostering a community of protectors who are dedicated to conserving the San Antonio Bay System.

ABANDONED CRAB TRAP REMOVAL PROGRAM

Combating Ghost Fishing: A Collaborative Effort

Each February, volunteers with the San Antonio Bay Partnership (SABP) remove abandoned traps from Texas bays during Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's (TPWD) 10-day crab trap closure. The 2024 Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Project was largely funded by grants from Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (via TPWD) and Restore America's Estuaries, enabling operations across the Aransas, San Antonio, and Matagorda/Lavaca Bay estuarine systems. Project success stemmed from a broad coalition of stakeholders and participants, including SABP, Matagorda Bay Foundation, Lavaca Bay Foundation, Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve, and partners like Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, Lavaca Navidad River Authority, Dallas Zoo, Mid-Coast Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Conservation Alliance, USFWS, TPWD, and local CCA chapters. Special thanks go to all individual volunteers for their dedicated time, boats, and efforts.

Mitigating "Ghost Fishing" Impacts

Our expanded and strategic effort continues to locate and remove derelict crab traps across the Texas Mid-Coast. Volunteers collect standardized data with each trap to better assess causes of dereliction. These abandoned traps pose serious ecological and economic threats, perpetually "ghost fishing" and killing valuable marine organisms, many of which are NOAA Trust Resources. This ongoing mortality diminishes commercial and recreational harvests, creating significant economic losses which are difficult to quantify. The replacement costs for the abandoned traps is approximately \$45,000.

Trends and Insights: Understanding Dereliction

Understanding complex trends are paramount. Our data reveals that while increased communication may be potentially reducing open-water trap abandonment by commercial crabbers, derelict marsh traps remain problematic. Often set during high spring tides, these traps become inaccessible during lower winter tides, posing a significant ecological threat and highlighting a need for targeted outreach. Furthermore, windstorms are the primary cause of trap dereliction, stranding traps ashore beyond the reach of crabbing vessels. Current regulations limit alternative retrieval strategies outside the closure period.

2024 Cleanup: Fewer Traps, Smarter Solutions

In February 2024, our dedicated volunteers, aboard **64 boats** and totaling **204 participants**, retrieved **900 derelict crab traps** and an additional **543 loose trap floats** from Mid-Coast bays during a 10-day closure. Crucial data gathered on each trap's location, owner, and contents offers vital insights. We're seeing improvements in open-water trap retrieval by some commercial crabbers. However, shoreline traps, primarily windstorm-driven, continue to account for over half of those removed, underscoring their inaccessibility by boat. Similarly, traps in shallow marsh areas remain challenging to retrieve due to lower winter tides. These findings are directly informing our strategies to further reduce dereliction and protect our bays.



A Promising Trend: Fewer Ghost Traps Haunting Our Bays

The Texas Mid-Coast is making tangible progress in protecting its bays from the silent threat of derelict crab traps. Over the past five years, our sustained retrieval efforts have yielded a consistent and encouraging decline in abandoned gear, however trends are complex, and many factors can impact these numbers.

A TESTAMENT TO OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

- **2020:** 1,632 traps removed
- **2021:** 1,207 traps removed
- **2022:** 1,047 traps removed
- **2023:** 977 traps removed
- **2024:** 900 traps removed





Statistics for Texas Mid-Coast 2024 Abandoned Crab Trap Removal



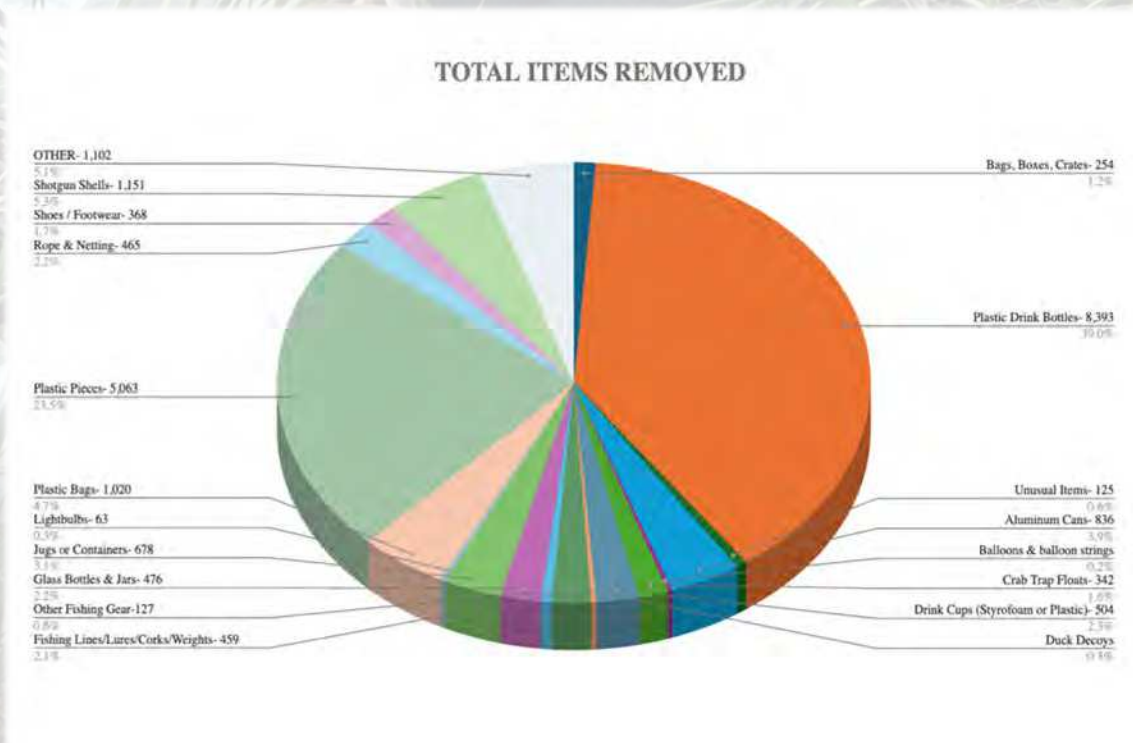
SHORELINES CLEANUP

Combating Coastal Pollution: A Volunteer Effort

Since fall 2020, SABP has organized shoreline cleanups around Port O'Connor, mirroring our Abandoned Crab Trap Cleanup efforts. Volunteers in boats and kayaks target small island shorelines across Matagorda, Espiritu Santo, and San Antonio Bays, removing trash often hidden within cordgrass and mangroves. practices for responsible waste management and disposal. Volunteers participated in our 4 events during the week of September 23-28, 2024, participating in Port O'Connor, Seadrift, Matagorda Island WMA Gulf Beach, Powderhorn State Park, Rockport, and Port Lavaca.

Equipped with gloves and bags, our volunteers diligently logged collected items, particularly those preventable by changes in bay user behavior. Over five years, **plastic bottles** (18,019 removed) have been identified as the most prevalent preventable litter, followed by aluminum cans, plastic bags, plastic jugs, and drink cups. Also retrieved are lost fishing lures, shotgun shells, and crab trap floats.

Our dedicated volunteers consistently make a significant impact in reducing this pervasive pollution. Successfully restoring the ecological health of our shoreline through meticulous debris removal, concurrently fostering heightened community awareness and promoting best practices.



MID-COAST SEA TURTLE RESCUE PROGRAM

Vital Volunteer Response to Cold-Stunning: Rescuing Stranded Sea Turtles

Initiated in response to the devastating cold-stunning event during Winter Storm Uri in February 2021, which resulted in over 550 sea turtle mortalities in the San Antonio Bay region. The Mid-Coast Sea Turtle Rescue (MCSTR) program provides crucial search and rescue efforts for cold-stunned and stranded sea turtles. Developed collaboratively by Texas Master Naturalist, Brigid Berger, and TPWD in Port O'Connor, the program was adopted by SABP in December 2022.

With over 80 dedicated volunteers, the program mobilizes private boats and ground transportation to rescue cold-stunned or stranded sea turtles, delivering them to the Amos Rehabilitation Keep (ARK). Cold-stunning occurs when water temperatures drop to 46.4°F or below for 24 hours, incapacitating turtles and leaving them vulnerable to drowning, boat strikes, or predation. As a protected species, all volunteers handling or transporting sea turtles undergo annual federal permitting and specialized training.

During the winter of 2024, MCSTR responded to a single cold-stunning event, handling 218 turtles. In addition, they handled 11 strandings from other causes. The Mid-Coast Sea Turtle Rescue Program responds to cold-stunning events and reports of stranded turtles via the 866-Turtle5 Hotline (866-887-8535, option 3).



MID-COAST ESTUARY EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Texas Floating Classroom: Cultivating Future Coastal Stewards

SABP proudly partners with the Texas Floating Classroom (TFC), a non-profit established in 2014 dedicated to fostering the next generation of environmental stewards. TFC sparks interest in Texas's coastal waters and delivers immersive marine science education to K-12 students and community members across the San Antonio, Matagorda, and Aransas Bay systems and their watersheds. Education is provided through:

- **Archimedes Floating Classroom:** A 34 passenger USCG-certified research vessel offering hands-on interaction with marine life and alignment with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum.
- **Onshore Activities:** Complementary lessons that enhance the boat trips.
- **Traveling Bay Teach Tank:** A mobile exhibit bringing bay biodiversity directly to schools and community events, engaging all ages.



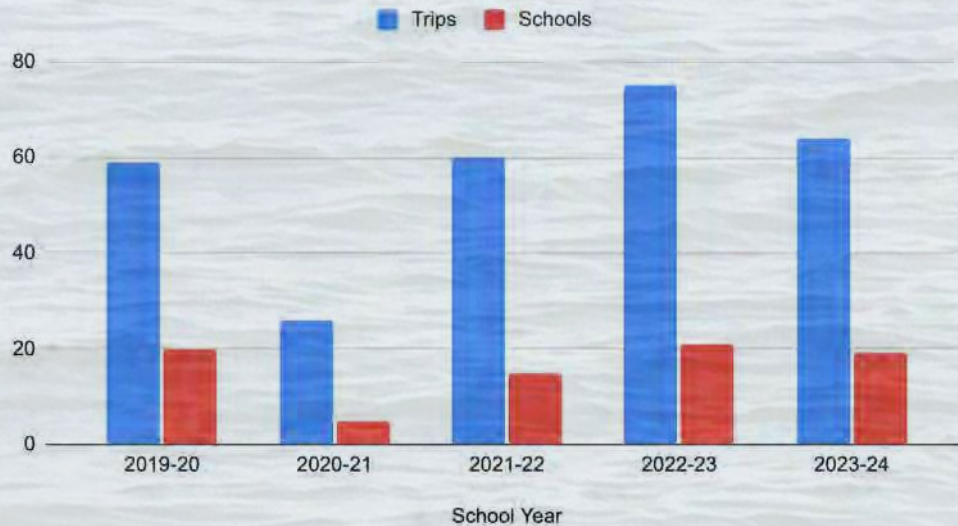
Texas Coastal Classroom: Broadening Horizons

Reaching students across Aransas, Refugio, Calhoun, Jackson, and Matagorda Counties via convenient docking in Rockport, Seadrift, Port Lavaca, and Palacios, this program's reach extends to watershed communities including Victoria, Goliad, Kenedy, Karnes, and Bexar Counties through the Traveling Bay. In the 2023-2024 school year, the Traveling Bay engaged 4,294 students in 34 schools. SABP underscores its vital commitment with a \$23,000 contribution, empowering TFC participants to appreciate Texas's rich coastal diversity and embrace conservation.

Texas Floating Classroom Program Reach: A Five-Year Overview

The Texas Floating Classroom (TFC) operates through two primary platforms: the Archimedes Floating Classroom for on-water experiences and the Traveling Bay touch tank for in-school and event outreach. The data below illustrates the program's consistent impact on students and communities across the Texas Mid-Coast and its watersheds.

Floating Classroom Outreach - 5,591 Students since 2019



Traveling Bay Outreach - 19,980 Students since 2019



To foster a profound appreciation for our coastal ecosystems and the critical challenges they face, TFC provides enriching hands-on educational experiences on the water and in the classroom.

RESTORATION OF HABITAT

Guardians of the Bay: Protecting Coastal Habitat

In collaboration with the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, the San Antonio Bay Partnership previously published the *Habitat Conservation and Coastal Public Access Plan for the San Antonio Bay System*. This report identified 67 potential wetland project sites for protection, restoration, and enhancement. Current initiatives advancing these goals include:

- Elevating a reef in Espiritu Santo to restore its function as an American Oystercatcher nesting site, accomplished with volunteer-bagged and transported Calhoun County oyster shell.
- Seeking an MBMT grant to advance the engineering and design of a bird rookery island in San Antonio Bay–Little Bird Island.
- Participating in the TGLO initiative to implement a permitted bird rookery off Seadrift.

Fresh Trails, Open Waters: Powderhorn Paddling is Here

Development of the Public Access Paddling Trail system advanced significantly in 2024 with the establishment of the new Powderhorn Paddling Trails. This new addition features four distinct segments, totaling 26 trail miles: the Boggy Bayou Trail (from Calhoun County's Boggy Nature Park, Port O'Connor), the Matagorda Shoreline Trail (between Port O'Connor and Indianola), the Powderhorn Lake Loop, and the Coloma Creek Trail (at the FM 1289 bridge). The complete trail system is scheduled for its official public opening in Spring 2025.



Paddling Trail Maintenance

San Antonio Bay Partnership regularly monitors and maintains the signage along two current Texas Parks & Wildlife Paddling Trails (the Port O'Connor Trail and the Seadrift Trail) in the San Antonio Bay / Guadalupe Estuary System. Trail markers and signage fade from salt and sun, get lost from wind and tidal movement, get dirtied by birds, and shot by hunters. The Coastal Paddling Trails can be found on the [Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#).

COASTAL PADDLING TRAILS

TEXAN by NATURE CONSERVATION WRANGLER

Conservation Wrangler: Accelerating Texas's Natural Legacy

Publicly announced in April of last year, San Antonio Bay Partnership was selected as a 2024 Conservation Wrangler.



[Conservation Wrangler](#)

is an accelerator program that catalyzes the very best Texan-led conservation projects occurring in the state. Selected projects are science-based and demonstrate a positive Return on Conservation for people, prosperity, and natural resources.

prosperity, and natural resources. TxN partners deeply with conservation groups and business, acting as an accelerator for conservation groups and a strategic partner for business.

Founded by Mrs. Laura Bush in 2011, Texan by Nature (TxN) exists to advance conservation that is beneficial to people,

During each program cycle, TxN selects up to six Conservation Wrangler projects to support with 18-months of program management, strategic planning, marketing messaging, metrics capture and analysis, professional content production, and partnership development – whatever is needed to accelerate the project. Conservation Wranglers are highlighted at Texan by Nature’s annual [Conservation Summit](#). San Antonio Bay Partnership’s [Conservation Wrangler video](#) was premiered at the 2024 Conservation Summit, along with Alan Berger participating in the [“Generating Change” panel](#).



INSTITUTIONAL DESCRIPTION

The Heart of Texas Mid-Coast Conservation, An indispensable Resource

The SABP cultivates transformative partnerships with federal and state agencies, local governments, communities, NGOs, and the scientific community, delivering tangible results for our natural resources. Commitment to fiscal responsibility means minimal overhead, ensuring that every dollar invested directly amplifies our impact across critical program areas.

A dynamic team, a diverse assembly of recognized experts, volunteers, and independent contractors, forms the backbone of SABP's success. SABP considers government agencies crucial allies in advancing its mission, and is deeply embedded in local communities, collaborating actively with organizations and institutions. This collaborative spirit drives SABP to initiate impactful projects and contribute profoundly to conservation through direct support, influential thought leadership via public outreach and awareness, and pioneering research that shapes the future.

BOARD

SABP is a non-profit organization, incorporated in Texas as The [San Antonio Bay Partnership](#), Inc. (SABP, Inc.) and is recognized by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization (EIN 45-4023668). SABP's Board of Directors consists of members with diverse backgrounds from across the Texas Mid-coast.

SABP 2024 Board members are:

- Allan Berger, Jr, Chair (Port O'Connor)
- Steve Marwitz, Vice Chair (Port Lavaca)
- Steven Fotiades, Secretary (Victoria)
- Jerry Pearce, Treasurer (Victoria)
- Vickie Grove (Houston/Seadrift)
- Charles Gremminger (Seadrift)
- Ashley Reese (Spring/Port O'Connor)
- Bill Burge (Lamar)
- Bobby Garner (Inez)