



ECO SUMMIT + EXPO

2-6 DECEMBER, 2023
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

Impact Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Science and Environment Council produced the EcoSummit + Expo December 2–6, 2023 in Sarasota, Florida—the largest environmental event of its kind ever produced on the Suncoast. Events included a film screening, 2-day Green Living tradeshow, 2-day Summit, and an evening of Florida Stories with Carl Hiaasen, Craig Pittman, and Randy Wells.

The Green Living Expo (December 2–3, 2023 at the City of Sarasota's Municipal Auditorium) was a 2-day Green Living tradeshow. Thirty-five (35) green businesses and non-profit organizations showcased ideas, demos, and products about how to reduce our environmental impacts. The event was attended by 570 people.

The EcoSummit (December 5–6 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall) was two days of big ideas and solutions. The EcoSummit kicked off the evening of December 4 with a free public screening of "2040" with Australian film director and Summit keynote Damon Gameau. His feature documentary explored what the future would look like by the year 2040 if we embraced the best solutions already available to us to improve our environment. Fifty-four (54) international, national, state, and regional experts shared insights and innovations for recharging our environment and reducing our impacts. Sessions focused on priority issues, including Growth and Balance; Land, Legacy, and Special Places; Making a Place for Nature; Billion Dollar Bays; Clean Water; and Personal Pollution. Storytellers explored our environmental heritage as a touchstone for a resilient future. It was a lively and entertaining solutions-oriented experience with lectures, panel discussions, storytelling, film, live music, and a mermaid! A total of 530 people registered for the daytime sessions.

An Evening of Florida Stories with Carl Hiaasen entertained 1,182 community members with stories of natural and unnatural Florida. Hiaasen was joined by author and journalist Craig Pittman, local dolphin whisperer Dr. Randy Wells, and award-winning Americana songwriter Karen Jonas and her band, who also played throughout both days.

Events were attended by 196 organizations and businesses, with 41.3% of attendees identifying as community members, 30.7% as professionals, and 26.9% as researchers, managers, or educators. We are grateful to our many volunteers and 54 sponsoring partners, especially The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Elizabeth Moore, City of Sarasota, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and FPL.

BY THE NUMBERS

2,282 Registered Attendees at 3 main events:

570 Green Living Expo

530 EcoSummit

1,182 Florida Stories

54 Speakers and Storytellers

196 Attending Organizations and Businesses

54 Sponsoring Partners

30 Organizing Partners

Across all planning, marketing, and events, we articulated and advanced the simple, but elegant paradigm that to preserve quality of life, we must find a new balance with nature. We must counter the increasing impacts from development, population growth, and climate change with solutions that recharge our environment and reduce our footprint.

In addition, events were designed to catalyze environmental leadership, build consensus for priority issues, build capacity for the regional environmental community of practice, increase public environmental literacy and engagement, and kickoff a signature environmental event series that builds the brand and reputation of the Sarasota-Manatee region as a state and national environmental thought and solutions leader.

STRATEGIC APPROACH & DESIGN

Our quality of life depends on a healthy, resilient natural environment. Nature cleans our air and water, supports fish and wildlife, promotes public health, and drives our economy. As our community has grown, we've degraded or lost many of the natural habitats and systems that underly these vital environmental services. Recent high-visibility environmental imbalances like habitat loss, harmful algal blooms, and loss of fish and wildlife — compounded by ongoing local impacts of global climate change — have provided clear warning to leaders across all sectors of our community that we need to grow our environment as we grow our community.

The 2023 EcoSummit was designed around multiple objectives and values.

UNIFYING PARADIGM

The EcoSummit was organized around the paradigm that we must grow our environment and reduce our impacts as we grow our community. Practically, this means increasing the integrity, function, services, connectivity, and resilience of our natural environment to keep up with impacts from population growth, development, and climate. Throughout planning and execution of

the EcoSummit and Expo, we aimed to normalize and advance this paradigm through dialogue, engagement, and action.



STORYTELLING

We used storytelling to bathe the proceedings in local culture and human connections to nature. Storytellers explored relationships with our natural world touching on humor, perseverance, loss, beauty, divinity, politics, and culture.

RAISING MINDS, HEARTS & HANDS

Environmental growth takes broad community support and participation. This requires the community to be

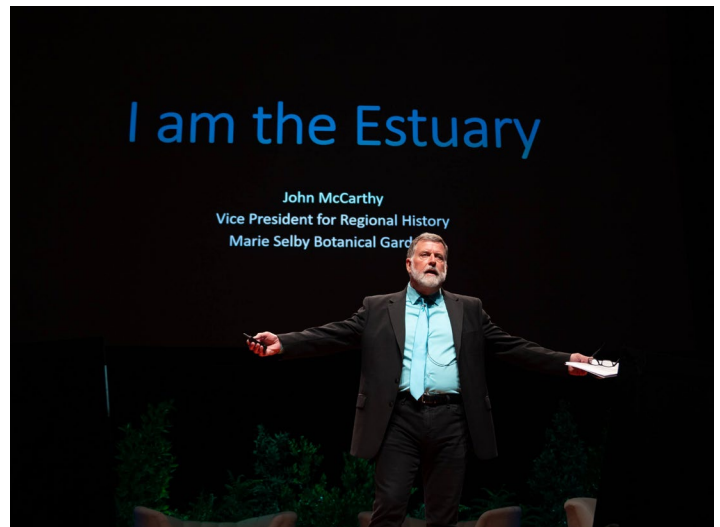
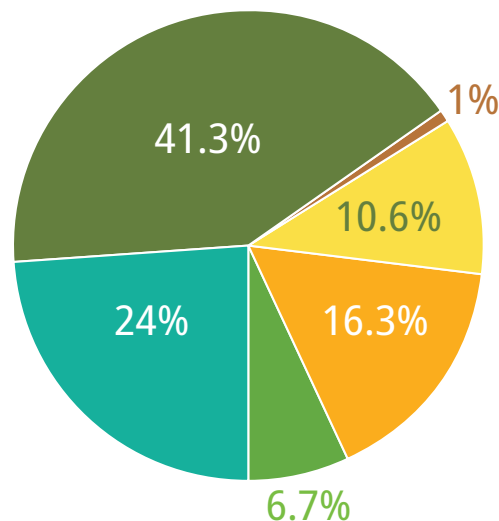
- *Knowledgeable* of priority environmental issues and understands potential solutions on a personal, neighborhood, and regional scale;
- *Connected* culturally, spiritually, and physically with the opportunity to live in a healthy, resilient environment; and
- *Motivated* to make better choices at home and support responsible local and regional environmental stewardship and investment.

We designed the EcoSummit program to be engaging to a broad audience and to advance community knowledge, connection, and motivation.

We reached the broader community through significant promotion and press, including downtown Sarasota street banners, newspaper ads and articles, radio, television, Van Wezel website and email blasts, newsletters, YouTube videos, flyers, posters, kiosks, social media including Facebook, X, and Instagram, and social media posts from SEC organizations.

Preaching Beyond ►

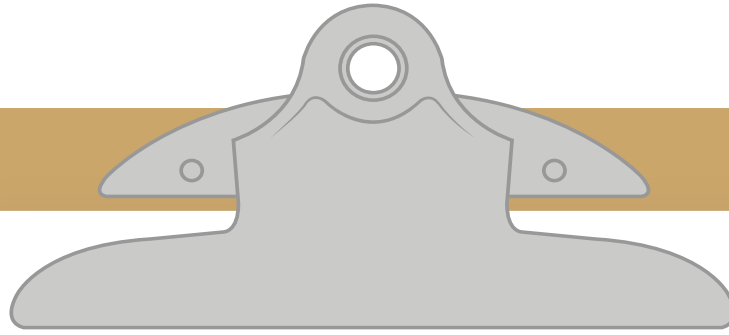
the Choir: *The EcoSummit's messaging reached a diverse audience, with a remarkable 41.3% of attendees identifying as community members. The EcoSummit's broad reach was also reflected in the attendance of representatives from 196 organizations and businesses in the region.*



We sprinkled well-known and newly discovered storytellers throughout the program, which boosted emotional and entertainment value. The Evening of Florida Stories with Carl Hiaasen, Craig Pittman, and Randy Wells was especially effective in raising awareness for the EcoSummit and drawing people to the event. We used innovative production and lighting, including a series of giant LED panels, which allowed us to transform the stage into a theatrical space with local environmental scenery. We also featured award-winning Americana songwriter Karen Jonas and her band onstage throughout the day—keeping energy and spirits high.

LEADERSHIP, NETWORK & CONSENSUS

Throughout scoping, planning, and producing the EcoSummit, we worked to catalyze environmental leadership, build consensus for priority issues, and build capacity for the regional environmental community of practice.



SURVEY

103 EcoSummit attendees responded to a survey emailed to them after the event

98% Said they will likely or definitely **TAKE ACTION** based on networking and learning at the EcoSummit.

94% Said the EcoSummit met or exceeded their expectations for **NETWORKING**.

100% Said the EcoSummit met or exceeded their expectations for **LEARNING ABOUT ISSUES**.

87% Said the EcoSummit met or exceeded their expectations for **FINDING PROJECT COLLABORATIONS**.

98% Said the EcoSummit met or exceeded their expectations for **GETTING ENERGIZED FOR ACTION**.

SIGNATURE REGIONAL EVENT

We designed The EcoSummit to be a signature regional event to help advance our area's environmental culture and reputation for innovative environmental thought and solutions. Activities included a free outdoor film screening

of "2040" with director and keynote Damon Gameau, two-day Green Living tradeshow, two-day Summit, and an evening of Florida Stories with Carl Hiaasen. Two receptions and food trucks kept people well-fed, and free events during the week at The Bay park kept families and children entertained and engaged.

The EcoSummit demonstrated to the community, especially to the many organizations in attendance, best practices for sustainable events, including:

- Triple offsetting all the energy use of the event and our travelling guests through renewable energy credits.
- Providing Summit-branded reusable Tervis Tumblers to all attendees to eliminate disposable cups.
- Eliminating single-use plastics in food services.
- Composting all food waste and recycling all we could.

MAIN EVENTS

A total of 2,282 guests registered for the three main events: The EcoSummit, Florida Stories, and the Green Living Expo.

ECOSUMMIT

December 4–6 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall and The Bay park, Sarasota Florida

The EcoSummit kicked off the evening of December 4 with a free public film screening of “2040” at The Bay park’s outdoor theater with the film’s director, Damon Gameau. In the film, he explored what the future would look like by the year 2040 if we embraced the best solutions already available to us to improve our environment.

Fifty four (54) international, national, state, and regional experts inspired a crowd of 530 registered attendees with insights and innovations for recharging our environment and reducing our impacts. It was a lively and entertaining solutions-oriented experience with lectures, panel discussions, storytelling, film, live music, and a mermaid! Expert-led sessions explored big ideas and solutions for priority issues. Throughout the event, local storytellers delighted the audience with stories of our environmental heritage and how it remains an important touchstone and north star for a resilient future. Award-winning Americana songwriter Karen Jonas and her band energized the moments between big ideas and stories with song. Experts from 24 organizations were available at the Solutions Salon to engage with attendees on issues and solutions.

- Using caterers that source local and organic produce and ingredients when possible.
- Reusing name badges.
- Printing using paper made from certified sustainable forests.
- Partnering with businesses that offer electric transport.

The EcoSummit also demonstrated that the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, the Municipal Auditorium, and The Bay park make outstanding venues for hosting important community conversations and for showcasing the environmental leadership of our region.



Session 1: Growth and Balance explored how we can grow the environment as we grow our communities.

Keynote: Jon Thaxton (Sarasota native and three term Sarasota County Commissioner); Moderator: Paul Owens (President, 1000 Friends of Florida); Panelists: Dr Van Linkous, PhD (Associate professor, USF), Juliette Desfeux (Sustainability Advisor, Spinnaker Group); Case Studies: Jennifer Rominiecki (CEO and President, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens); Bill Waddill (COO, The Bay); Timothee Sallin (President, Cherry Lake Tree Farm).

Session 2: Land, Legacy & Special Places examined what lands we have saved and what's left to protect. It explored how managed conservation and agricultural lands can protect habitat connectivity, biodiversity, water quality and flow, soil health, and local food systems. Panelists discussed protection of natural lands through acquisition of public lands and easements on private lands.

Panelists: Alik Moncrief, JD (Executive Director, Florida Conservation Voters), Christine Johnson (President, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast), Charlie Hunsicker (Director, Manatee County Natural Resources), Jim Strickland (Owner, Strickland Ranch); Storytellers: Sabrina Cummings (Youth Education Manager, Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast), Dr Uzi Baram, PhD (Director of Public Archaeology, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens), Tony Clements (Division Manager, Sarasota County Natural Areas and Trails).

Session 3: Making a Place for Nature explored safely regenerating and recharging natural systems in our own backyards, neighborhood parks, and regional recreation areas to protect and restore water quality and wildlife.

Keynote & Moderator: Dr Mark Hostetler, PhD (Professor, University of Florida); Panelists: Dr John Keifer, PhD (Principal Engineer, Black and Veatch), Jeanne Dubi (President, Sarasota Audubon Society), Aedan Stockdale (Education and Volunteer Division Manager, Manatee County Natural Resources); Storytellers: Jono Miller (Author and Natural Historian), Dr Emily Hall, PhD (Senior Scientist, Mote Marine Laboratory), Dr Randy Wells, PhD (Director, Sarasota Dolphin Research Program).

Session 4: Billion Dollar Bays focused on the status of conservation and restoration of our region's three Estuaries of National Significance, including status and trends of water quality, red tide and macroalgal blooms, fish and wildlife, and impacts from population growth and climate change.

Keynote & Moderator: Craig Pittman (Florida environmental author and journalist, Florida Phoenix); Panelists: Ed Sherwood (Director, Tampa Bay Estuary Program), Dr Dave Tomasko, PhD (Director, Sarasota Bay Estuary Program), Jennifer Hecker (Director, Coastal & Heartland National Estuary Partnership); Case studies: Dr Nate Brennan, PhD (Staff Scientist, Mote Marine Laboratory), Damon Moore (President, Oyster River Ecology), Dr Katie McHugh, PhD (Staff Scientist, Sarasota Dolphin Research Program), Ronda Ryan



(Executive Director, Sarasota Bay Watch), Howard Hochhalter (Director, Suncoast Stargazers), Kylie Wilson (Shorebird Coordinator, Florida Audubon); Storytellers: Joe Bonasia (Chair/SWFL Regional Director, Florida Rights of Nature Network), Rabbi Ed Rosenthal (Executive Director (Repair the Sea), John McCarthy (VP for Regional History, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens).

Session 5: It's All About Clean Water

examined the cyclical nature of water and smart ways to keep us and our waterways healthy

Keynote & Moderator: Erica Gies (Author, Journalist, and National Geographic Explorer); Panelists: Maya Burke (Assistant Director, Tampa Bay National Estuary Program), Amanda Boone (Project Engineer, Woodward & Curran), Jaclyn Lopez, JD (Assistant Professor, Stetson College of Law); Case studies: Sandy Gilbert (Chair, START), Dr Richard Moore, PhD (Board Director, Suncoast Waterkeeper), Bob Bunting (CEO, Climate Adaptation Center).

Session 6: When Pollution is Personal

focused on reducing energy use and waste by refusing, reducing, reusing, repurposing, and recycling.

Waste Keynote & Moderator: Sarah Dearman (CIO, The Recycling Partnership); Panelists: Donn Githens (President, Goodwill Manasota), Mike

Kelcourse (CEO, Compost Jax), Emily Grant (Florida Program Manager, MEANS Database), Zack Rasmussen (Manager, Gamble Creek Farms);

Energy Keynote & Moderator: Susan Glickman (Energy Consultants); Panelists: Bill Johnson (President, Brilliant Harvest), Lee Hayes Byron (Director, UF/IFAS Sarasota Extension & Sustainability), Duanne Andrade (Executive Director, Solar & Energy Loan Fund), Dr Amber Whittle, PhD (Executive Director, Southface Sarasota). [Visit **www.ecosummit.org**](http://www.ecosummit.org) to browse the full program, speaker bios, session summaries, and video highlights.

An Evening of Florida Stories with Carl

Hiaasen enlightened and entertained 1,182 community members with stories of natural and



unnatural Florida. Hiaasen was joined onstage by environmental author and journalist Craig Pittman, local dolphin whisperer Dr Randy Wells, PhD, and award-winning Americana songwriter Karen Jonas and her band. The Florida Stories event helped raise environmental awareness and funding for the EcoSummit.

GREEN LIVING EXPO

December 2–3 at the Municipal Auditorium, Sarasota Florida

The free, two-day Green Living Expo invited the community to learn about environmental solutions to “go green”. Visitors were treated to demos and opportunities to purchase sustainable products and services from select vendors and non-profit organizations. Opportunities to volunteer or participate in efforts to solve local environmental issues were also on offer as were giveaways, raffle prizes, and a silent Solutions Cinema where participants could don a pair of headphones to watch curated videos about how to reduce impacts on the environment. Over the two days, 35 green businesses and non-profit organizations showcased ideas, demos, and products to 570 members of the public. [Visit **www.ecosummit.org**](http://www.ecosummit.org) to browse the full program, speaker bios, session summaries, and video highlights.

PARTNERS

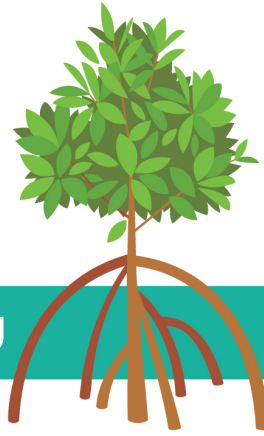
We received broad community support for the 2023 EcoSummit, including 54 sponsoring partners. Lead partners included The Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, Elizabeth Moore, City of Sarasota, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and FPL. [Visit **www.eco-summit.org**](http://www.eco-summit.org) to view a complete list of sponsoring partners.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Events received excellent local media coverage, including from Sarasota Magazine, Scene Magazine, WSLR Our Changing Times, SRQ Magazine, Sarasota Herald Tribune, Sun Media, WUSF, WEDU, Sarasota News Leader, Anna Maria Island Sun, ABC7, and the Observer. [Visit the footer section of **www.eco-summit.org**](http://www.eco-summit.org) to view the Media Kit with links to Media Coverage.



CHARLES & MARGERY
BARANCIK
FOUNDATION



ELIZABETH MOORE

THANK YOU

SPONSORS!

**GULF COAST
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**



TERVIS



**MOTE SCIENTIFIC
FOUNDATION**



**Pauline
Wamsler**



STRICKLAND RANCH
FAMILY-OWNED • ESTABLISHED 1938



**Robert A.
Richardson**



**Jean
Blackburn**

Estuary
Escapes LLC

John & Susan
Darovec

Innovative
Dining

Oyster River
Ecology

Seagrape
Wines

Venice Area
Audubon Society



**west coast
WOMAN**

