

# Living Shorelines Workshop

By Kelly G. Robertson

If you had been in Panama City for the Living Shoreline Workshop on June 13, you would have learned about the many projects built, scheduled or under way in the Florida panhandle that provide an eco-friendly alternative to hardened protective structures - structures that fight against erosion along our beaches and waterways such as Project Greenshores, along Bayfront Parkway in downtown Pensacola, a showcase example of "soft" shoreline protection.

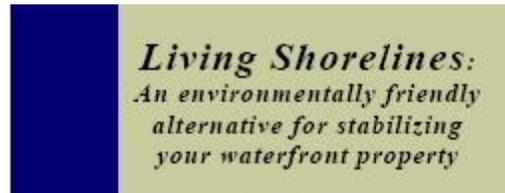
The seminar, sponsored by Sea Grant Florida and the University of Florida IFAS Extension, attracted about 150 participants from around Florida and the adjacent states. The attendance was well mixed between federal, state, and local government representatives, educators, living shoreline contractors, non-profit organizations, and even a few individual homeowners.

Presenters at the workshop included Melody Ray-Culp from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Dr. Chris Boyd of the Miss. State University and Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, Capt. Robert Turpin from the Escambia County Marine Resources Division and Dr. Debbie Miller from the University of Florida, Milton Campus.

So what did we learn? 80% of Florida's population lives within 10 miles of the coastline, and 45-50% of that coast has armored protection. And yet, viable alternatives for seawalls and hardscape to protect our eroding shorelines are readily available to those that take the time and initiative to research and plan their soft shoreline protection effort.

Seawalls, bulkheads and other hardened structures tend to alter or create a loss of natural habitat. They affect water circulation patterns and increase suspended solids creating turbid conditions that prevent light penetration in the water column. They also create erosion and decrease the quantity of organic matter and biological organisms needed for the maintenance of wetlands. What are the alternatives?

- ▶ Do nothing, or put another way, do not exacerbate the problem.
- ▶ Plant eco-friendly, stabilizing vegetation, such as smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*), saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*) and sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*) or saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). See the table below showing ideal zones for planting these species.



A yellow-crowned night heron feeds in the restored Project Greenshores emergent grass. The project near downtown Pensacola restored historic oyster reef and saltmarsh, an effort of DEP's Ecosystem Restoration Lab, the city and other partners. (Courtesy

- ▶ Create soft, not structural stabilization .
- ▶ Create offshore breakwaters to slow erosion contributing wave energy.
- ▶ Look for hybrid-structures to protect the shorelines from the loss of sandy beach.

In summary, property owners and developers need to make better decisions about the type of erosional structures they build on their property. Not only can living shorelines save money, they provide direct waterfront access, are habitat friendly and are aesthetically pleasing. Living shorelines also promote land creation, and having a larger shoreline protection plan possibly can prevent more unintentional erosion in neighboring sites.

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