Assessing Large-Scale Spatial Distribution of Seagrasses in the Loxahatchee River

David Sabin & Albrey Arrington
Wildpine Ecological Laboratory
Loxahatchee River District
Why Assess Seagrass?

- Seagrass is:
  - an essential fish habitat, because they are necessary to ensure healthy fisheries;
  - a valued ecosystem component, because they are a dominant, habitat forming community;
  - excellent indicators.
Prior Seagrass Mapping Results

Seagrass mapping is a valuable approach to assess the spatial extent, distribution, and composition of existing seagrass beds.

**Prior Efforts:**
- 1980 USGS
- 1985 PBC Health Dept. (Gain)
- 1990 Jupiter Inlet District (Loss)
- 1996 Jupiter Inlet District (Loss)
- 1998 Jupiter Inlet District (Gain)
- 2000 Jupiter Inlet District (Gain)
- 2003 Avineon (Gain)
- 2007 Loxahatchee River District (Gain)
We wanted more precise data than photo interpretation could provide.

Sometimes you time the tide right and sometimes you’re close.
Only 91 acres were found during 2003.
Our Quadzilla Approach

Folded Up

Open with Human Scale

Our Quadzilla Approach
Kayak

Bouys

GPS

Additional Equipment

Data sheets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPS File#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Date     | Score 0.9
| Sand     | 
| Hwri     | 
| Hjon     | 
| Sfil     | 
| Ttes     | 
| Hdec     | 
| Heng     | 
| Rmar     | 
| SCHEME order | 
| % Algae  |
1. 9m² quadrat was deployed using a random stratified design.
2. Each species was scored according to the number of 1m² cells in which it was present, and bare substrate was scored as the total number of 1m² cells in which no seagrass was present.
3. Spatial coordinates and ancillary data were recorded.

Example

- Shoal grass (HWRI)
- Turtle grass (Ttes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>GPS File#</th>
<th>Depth m</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Score 0-9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>DS</td>
<td>8/7/07</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Sand</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Hwri</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Hjon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Sfil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Ttes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Hdec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Heng</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Rmar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Approximately 1100 sites were assessed during the summer of 2007
• River was segmented to make sure we had full coverage
• Historical data and thorough knowledge of river helped in looking in right areas
Seagrass Distribution: All Samples

- No grass: 20%
- Johnson's: 70%
- Shoal: 50%
- Paddle: 10%
- Manatee: 5%
- Turtle: 5%

Star grass not found in 2007

n = 1085 Samples
Spatial Analysis

- ArcGIS 9.2 with Spatial Analysis extension was used.
- Inverse Distance Weighted (IDW) was used to analyze the whole area based on our actual samples.
- IDW estimates cell values by averaging the values of the data points (samples) in the neighborhood of each cell being estimated. The closer a point is to the center of the cell being estimated, the more influence, or weight, it has in the averaging process.

Example:

The figure to the right shows actual samples (small points) and IDW estimates (color gradients) for an actual segment of our study area.
Grass - 496 Acres
Methodological Issues

• Lack of equipment slows process down

• Bias when laying down quadrat under water

• Poor water clarity makes work difficult

• Physically demanding during strong current and at deep sites

• Approach evolved through time to be more efficient and thorough

• ArcGIS Analysis issues

• Whenever GPS had problems points had to be re-sampled.
Conclusion

• 2007 study vs 2003 showed seagrass gain
  – True gain plus gain from new technique
• Learned a lot more by looking at the whole river unlike pervious years, when we only assessed certain areas.
• We need to generate dock coverage and clip docks from area analyzed so we don’t overestimate occurrence of seagrass (i.e., under docks).
• Spatial extent of seagrass likely will be overestimated if bare (sand) areas are not sufficiently assessed.
We did have some bad Days!!

Acknowledgements

- Staff and volunteers who helped sure know the river.
- A lot of work so we are seeking volunteers for 2010 work.