

Scenic Watch



News -
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"Tampa's tree canopy at 26-year low, report finds"



Photo: 2016 Tampa City of Tampa Tree Canopy and Urban Forest Analysis

"Carley Morgan and her husband picked their South Tampa home, in part, because of the trees on the property.

'They make a difference on our energy cost and it makes the landscaping look so much nicer to have the big trees," Morgan said, 'so it was a big factor...'

'As houses are being knocked down in our area,' she said, 'it feels like the very first thing that happens is all of the trees are taken off the lot before they build a new one.'

A new five-year analysis found the city's tree canopy is the smallest it's been in 26 years. Development and older trees dying are two reasons why.

Between 2016 and 2021, South Tampa's tree coverage had the biggest decrease of six percent...

'There are a million benefits to trees, but as Floridians we really need to consider the right tree in the right place,' City Councilwoman Lynn Hurtak said. 'Planting more shade trees instead of palm trees.'

In addition to helping residents cool off during hot summer months, trees can reduce air pollutants and help absorb water during storms.

'Trees suck up a lot of water and for us that's critical, especially because a lot of our city is in the coastal high hazard area,' Hurtak said.

Morgan said they planted a new tree on their front lawn two and half years ago after losing one of their larger oak trees.

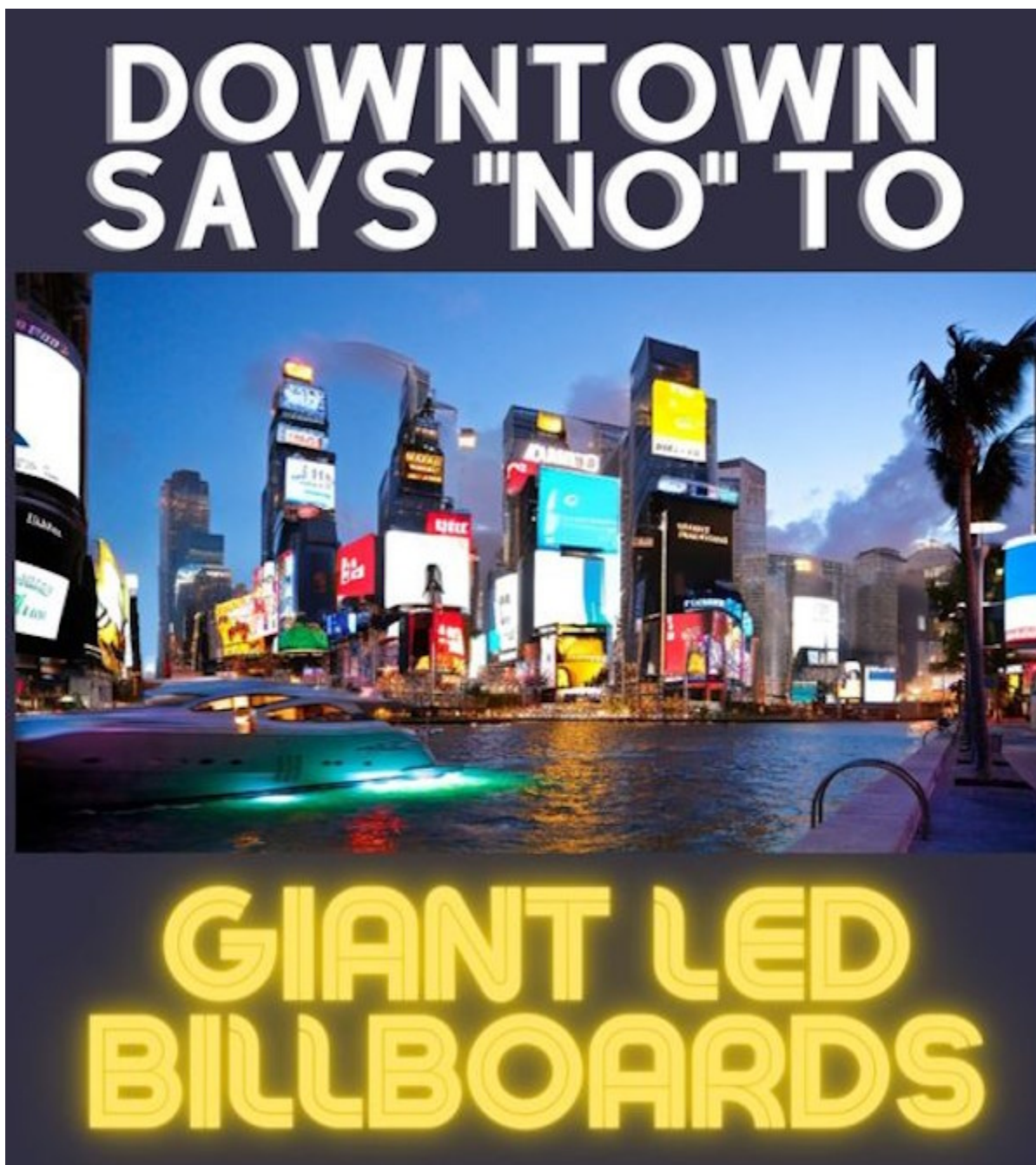
'You know those trees were planted when the houses were put in, but now they're getting older so they're dying, and if we don't replace them, we're in really bad shape,' Morgan said. "So we were so sad when we lost that tree."

-- Justin Schecker, Channel 8 News WFLA

[Read entire article](#)

[Read 2016 analysis here](#)

Vote is tomorrow! What happens in Miami doesn't STAY in Miami



Graphic: DNA

"The Mayor of Miami thinks it's OK to disregard downtowners' opinion..."

Yesterday, we [Downtown Neighbors Alliance in Miami] received word from the Mayor's office that he has no intention of pulling the ordinance he's sponsoring to

fill downtown with giant LED billboards...

There are currently several multi-million dollar billboard companies working behind the scenes to turn our neighborhood into a mini-Times Square. With millions of dollars at stake, they have worked with select Miami politicians to change the City Code, in a way that would allow dozens of ultra-bright, 10,000-square-foot LED billboards to pop up overnight in downtown.

This would be a disaster for residents' quality of life. Those who live here are already being affected negatively by much smaller LED signs.

DNA won a big victory getting an unanimous negative recommendation against this ordinance at the zoning board level.

Now it goes to the Miami City Commission for a vote this Thursday, July 27 at 9 a.m.

The Downtown Neighbors Alliance Board of Directors is asking you to [SIGN THIS PETITION](#) and show up at Miami City Hall next Thursday, July 27 at 9 a.m."



Photo: *Miami DNA President James Torres showed up at Miami City Hall with receipts. Using data and info that even the City didn't have, he convinced the Zoning Board to reject an awful LED billboard proposal - DNA*

"Why this matters?"

The proposed ordinance change will allow an excessive number of LED billboards to saturate our beautiful downtown. While there may be potential monetary benefits to our City budget, these gains pale in comparison to the negative effects on our City's aesthetic appeal and reputation.

Miami cannot succumb to the overwhelming presence of billboards; we are not Times Square in New York, Piccadilly Circus in London, or the Shinjuku District in Tokyo.

The proposed illumination standards would allow HUGE 10,000-square-foot billboards to glow with an abusively high brightness of up to 5,000 nits. That would be twice as big (and nearly as bright) as the LED video display boards found in

many Major League Baseball stadiums. An apartment across the street and directly facing the billboard would never have to turn on the lights again – the illumination from the billboard shining through the windows would make the inside of that apartment about 20,000 lux, or TWENTY TIMES as bright as the sunlight reaching the inside of an apartment on a clear day. Even blocks away, apartments facing the billboard would be unable to open their blinds or shutters without having the interior of their homes immediately illuminated as if all the lights were on...

Additionally, the proposed legislation would allow LED billboards to remain anchored to buildings during hurricanes, posing a significant safety hazard that cannot be justified.

This is a terrible ordinance, and we need our city leaders to scrap it, with community involvement at every step."

-- James Torres, President of the DNA

Organizations across the state are in support of DNA efforts including Scenic Miami, Venetian Way Neighborhood Alliance, Scenic Florida and others.

[Visit DNA's change.org petition here](#)

Eckerd College Designates 9 New Wildlife Habitats



Photo: Gabber

"Soon, signs like these — provided by the National Wildlife Federation to gardens that provide food, water, shelter, and breeding grounds to local wildlife — will be installed at nine new wildlife habitats on the campus of Eckerd College. The certification process is open to grounds of any size, from college campuses to backyard gardens.

When an Eckerd College student approached Grounds Manager Darla Ostenson about collaborating on a project to improve wildlife habitats for snakes on campus, she had a strong reaction.

She recalls: 'I thought, snake habitat?! And then I thought: Yes! Somebody pinch me!'

For Ostenson, a landscape manager with a degree in conservation biology, this was indeed a dream project. And further evidence that she'd landed in a place where animals, plants, and people could come together in ways that were not only sustainable, but educational.

New Wildlife Habitats

This spring, another eco-friendly landscaping project came to fruition: Eckerd designated nine areas across its campus as wildlife habitat, certified by the National Wildlife Federation.

Certification requires applicants to demonstrate that their habitat supplies food, water, cover, and breeding grounds for animals such as birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. It also calls for sustainable practices, such as using native plants or organic methods of pest management, for the habitat. The National Wildlife Federation states that 22,513 'wildlife gardens' have been created through its certification process, which is open to all kinds of sites from Eckerd's 188-acre campus to backyard gardens.

According to Ostenson, the process was simple. After surveying prospective habitats and gaining approval from Eckerd's Environmental Affairs Committee, she was able to input the information directly to the National Wildlife Federation's website. Eckerd's student government and Office of Sustainability covered the certification fees, which defrays the cost of a stylish sign you can place in your habitat.

In spring 2023, a pair of Great Horned owls nested in a pine tree on Eckerd College's campus, helping to inspire the idea of habitat certification for this and other areas of campus.

Eckerd's newly certified habitats span a range of types, from meadow-like native flower gardens, to ponds fringed with aquatic plants, to pine groves. Some high-profile visitors have recently put one of the new habitats on the map: a pair of nesting great horned owls..."

-- Amanda Hagood, The Gabber

[Read entire article](#)

"This Florida city gets the state's first 'dark sky' certification"



Photo: Steven Miller Photography in Tampa Bay Times

"Groveland's work over the last three years to replace light fixtures will allow the night sky to shine clearer and brighter than it has in decades.

About 30 miles west of Orlando sits Groveland, a rural town of about 23,000 people that is seeing shipping giants like Amazon and Kroger bring jobs inside its city limits.

While the community welcomed the job growth, the lights on the warehouse rooftops were turning Groveland's night sky into a hazy orange that made seeing stars at night challenging.

When residents and students pushed for a local ordinance protecting views of the night sky from harsh city lights in 2017, local officials were on board.

Six years later, Groveland has been recognized as the first Florida city to meet the criteria set by the international organization DarkSky to reduce the artificial brightness that drowns out the night sky.

Andrew Landis, Groveland conservation and special planning manager, spearheaded efforts to reduce light pollution in his fast-growing home city...

Steven Miller of Orlando is the southeast U.S. regional delegate for DarkSky, which is dedicated to reducing light pollution across the world. In 2020, the city of Groveland asked Miller what it would take to become the 41st city to meet DarkSky's accreditation requirements.

Groveland's recognition came after three years of public outreach and policy work...

About 12 volunteers now work as 'citizen scientists' in Groveland. The city supplies them with \$150 light pollution testing devices, which resemble garage door remotes. From there, they are tasked with driving around the 54-square-mile city and pointing the machines at the clear night sky. Groveland is mostly rural and it takes about 30 minutes to get from one end to the other, Landis said...

Groveland is currently retrofitting old streetlamps with dark-sky-friendly lights, which are shielded downward with a low color temperature. City staff hope to replace every light fixture by 2027. But the night sky city ordinance applies immediately to new buildings, and explaining this to developers is sometimes tricky, Landis said.

'Most people are receptive to it, but if they're not, they learned quickly that we're pretty serious,' he said...

Groveland still has a long way to go before it reaps the rewards of the new city ordinance, Miller said. Installing new lights around the city and helping local businesses follow suit will take time and even more community outreach.

Some communities already see Groveland as a shining example of responsible city lighting.

Miller said the city of Okeechobee has reached out to him about adopting a city plan like Groveland's ordinance.

'I really believe that, yes, it will take off,' Miller said. 'I do think it's going to take a little bit of time...'"

-- Jack Prator, Tampa Bay Times

[Read entire article](#)

State awards \$1.8 million to Rainbow River Restoration Project



Photo: Sean Arnold, Riverland News

"A pilot project to remove muck and invasive plants in the lower Rainbow River was awarded a \$1.8 million grant in the latest Florida budget signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis on June 15.

The Rainbow River Restoration Project was launched by Art Jones and his nonprofit, One Rake at a Time, Inc., to vacuum and scoop large mats of algae and invasive hydrilla and plant native eelgrass in the hopes that the eelgrass beds can outcompete the hydrilla and eliminate the need to deploy herbicides.

Jones said the grant will fund the completion of a survey to determine the scope of the muck in the lower 25 acres of the river. It will also contribute to the design of a work plan to remove the muck and debris and the water testing process. He said the survey is 80 percent finished and is due to be completed within the next month. The survey is required for additional government assistance in the five-year project...

Jones said the river has been declining since at least the time when phosphate mining descended into the area. 'People have just taken from the river, leaving whatever mess they made for others to clean up,' he said. 'It's time to give back.'

Springs watch dogs such as the Florida Springs Council report that most of the river's deterioration is due to increased nitrate concentration from agricultural runoff. Jones said even if the sources of the problem were fixed tomorrow, the muck would remain. 'Those things will help in the future and are in process now, but it will take years to accomplish,' he said. 'We need to start cleaning up the river now, at the same time - a two-prong approach. This grant, while not a magic wand, is at least a start.'

Jones hosts monthly meetings on the Rainbow River Restoration Project at Holy Faith Episcopal in Dunnellon.

Visit OneRakeataTime.org to learn more about the restoration project and volunteering opportunities."

-- Sean Arnold, Riverland News

[Read entire article](#)

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