

What is the condition of our shoreline?

The shoreline is an important transition area from land to water. Native vegetation such as mangroves and salt marsh provide valuable contributions to the food web and protect land from erosion. As shorelines are impacted by hardening, mangrove trimming and exotic plant infestations, these values diminish. Shoreline alterations reduce the availability and diversity of food to fish, affecting their growth rate and survival.

Shorelines

Removal of vegetation, filling the transition from land to water, and hardening with seawalls and riprap degrade habitat on which fish and wildlife rely.

Status and Trends

By 2005, native habitats were replaced by seawalls and riprap on 18.5% of our natural estuarine shoreline. Comparing the 2005 estimates to a 1995 statewide shoreline study indicates the amount had not changed significantly in the decade.



Hedged mangroves



Lifted mangroves

Mangroves are healthiest when they are not trimmed. However, “lifting” or “windowing” mangroves (shown on the right) is healthier and requires less maintenance than “hedging” mangroves (shown on the left). Trim as little as possible.

Answer: More than 18% of natural shoreline has been lost. Of urban mangroves, 52% are trimmed, which degrades them. Nonnative plants dominate 3% of shorelines.

Mangroves

Mangrove cutting is harmful to the estuarine environment, the mangrove trees themselves, and the animals that depend upon mangroves. Cutting a 16-foot fringing red mangrove forest to 5.5 feet reduces primary production by 83%, flowering by 95%, propagules (seedlings) by 73% and leaf crop by 71%.

Status and Trends

More than 4,000 urban lots were reviewed in 2007 and 2010. In 2010, 52% of the lots had mangroves, up 4% from 2007. Of lots with mangroves, 39% trimmed them, up 7% from 2007. Of trimmed mangroves, 38% were less than 6 feet in height, a violation of state standards, down 8% from 2007.

Exotics

Plants have been brought from elsewhere in the world to Florida. Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), Australian pine (*Casuarina* spp.) and others outcompete native plants, change water flows, reduce habitat for native wildlife and benefit nuisance exotic animals.

Status and Trends

As of 2005, Brazilian pepper dominated 2% of natural shorelines, mostly in natural tidal creeks. Australian pine dominated 1% of natural shoreline. Together, 3% of the shoreline has been degraded.

