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Naples Bay restoration plan returns

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By Bryan Anderson, Collier County Reporter - [email](#)

NAPLES, FL - Naples Bay is in desperate need of restoration. Decades of development have destroyed 70 percent of its mangroves and 80 percent of its oyster beds. One plan that was dismissed earlier this year is back on the table.

Check out the side by side picture attached to this story. The left (black and white) was taken back in 1950 shows a healthy waterway. Fast forward to 2000 (right picture in color) is a stark difference. The majority of mangroves and oyster beds are gone.

"We're so developed in the bay that it's lost a lot of its natural functions," said City of Naples Natural Resources Manager Dr. Michael Bauer.

In 2008, city officials first came up with the idea of so-called habitat islands, 1.5 acre manmade plots to help restore Naples Bay.

"We're really on the leading edge of technology. Nobody's built one of these before," said Naples Mayor John Sorey.

Naples City Council eventually considered creating one with mud from Port Royal dredging, but Sorey said that option turned out to be around a million dollars too expensive, so the council threw out the plan earlier this year.

"I look at every dollar that we have like it's my own. If it was my project, it just didn't make economic sense," Sorey said.

To keep the habitat island afloat, officials applied for a permit modification with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. DEP gave the OK last month. That makes the island a separate phase of the dredge project and allows city officials to use sand instead of mud, a potentially cheaper option.

"This is an opportunity to go back and recreate what we once had, create more fish, more birds, more life in the bay," Bauer said.

The city still needs \$1.5 million, money it's depending on from the RESTORE Act along with approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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