

Project Summary

Guardians of the Gulf engages 6th to 8th grade youth from Levy County, Florida in place-based learning on marine animal conservation. Students will actively tackle local socio-environmental challenges to contribute to a safer, more resilient, and sustainable environment for Florida's Nature Coast and its community members. Each year, youth capture community photographs, conduct a marine mammal survey at Manatee Springs State Park, and analyze historical coastal changes and local strandings data, guided by partner marine scientists. At a research symposium hosted by the University of Florida, students present their findings to the scientific community, collaborating with content experts to deepen their understanding of marine conservation, further empowering them as Guardians of their place and Florida's Nature Coast.

The curriculum empowers youth to take ownership in addressing local challenges collaboratively. Students explore issues like marine animal strandings, resource availability, and ecosystem health, devising conservation solutions showcased in a community gallery at their schools, receiving feedback from professionals and community members, with each classroom implementing their most viable conservation idea. High-quality professional development ensures science teachers will successfully implement and sustain these initiatives.

By aligning with state and national science education standards and leveraging local ecological knowledge, the Guardians of the Gulf curriculum fosters deep connection with the environment, enhances environmental literacy, and empowers youth as stewards of local marine ecosystems. Through collaborative, real-world experiences steeped in science and engineering practices, youth gain essential knowledge and skills, preparing them to address local socio-environmental issues and contribute to marine conservation efforts effectively.