



For Immediate Release
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Piney Point's Impact: Collaborative Effort Underway to Study Water Quality

ST. PETERSBURG, Fl. (Apr. 7, 2021) – The Florida Institute of Oceanography (FIO) is deploying its research vessel, the R/V Weatherbird II, to collect samples around the outflowing water released from Piney Point's former fertilizer processing plant. Scientists from the University of South Florida College of Marine Science (USF CMS) are working with FIO support to collect data that will ultimately help scientists understand the long-term impacts of the release.

"While the current circumstances in Tampa Bay are unfortunate, I am grateful that the State of Florida has invested in our research vessels and support personnel. FIO is always prepared to bring the best ocean scientists in the nation to the front lines of environmental issues," said Dr. William "Monty" Graham, Director of FIO.

A team of biologists, chemists, and environmental specialists will depart Wednesday out of Bayboro Harbor onboard the R/V Weatherbird II, a 118-foot research vessel that was instrumental in studying the impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Drs. Kristen Buck and Steve Murawski will lead USF's research efforts, measuring water quality and examining habitats on-site while collecting samples for laboratory analysis.

"Rapid deployments like this one provide us with an unprecedented opportunity to get out there and provide the science necessary to inform an effective response, as well as any necessary mitigation efforts, so that we can safeguard our vulnerable coastal resources," said Dr. Tom Frazer, dean of the USF CMS.

The data will be available to support the state's effort to address the environmental impacts of the Piney Point reservoir release. Samples will also be shared with researchers from the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, Eckerd College and Florida State University. The scientists are using this event as a means to understand natural ecological processes and how they respond to a sudden release of nutrients and to changes in water chemistry. The information will be used as a scientific basis for understanding long-term impacts of nutrient pollution on important issues like Harmful Algal Blooms.

The Florida Institute of Oceanography consists of 30 members including state universities. Established by the Florida Board of Governors and hosted by the University of South Florida,

FIO provides support and shares marine science resources between the state's universities and private, non-profit marine research entities. FIO operates the R/V Weatherbird II, R/V Hogarth and the Keys Marine Laboratory (KML) in Layton, Florida.

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