
Mangroves in the Urban Forest

What are mangrove forests?

Mangrove forests are a rare ecological community within North America. Because of their sensitivity to sub-freezing temperatures the distribution of mangrove forests in the continental United States is limited to the southeast, including the coasts of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. These forests make up approximately 50 percent of the total number of trees in Tampa's urban forest.

Are there different types of mangrove trees?

The mangrove forest of Tampa includes three tree species that are collectively called mangroves; red (*Rhizophora mangle*), black (*Avicennia germinans*) and white (*Laguncularia racemosa*) mangrove. These three types are found in distinct but overlapping ecological zones along the coastline and coastal strands. Red mangroves are the most common (84%) followed by black (11%) and white (5%) (Figure 1).

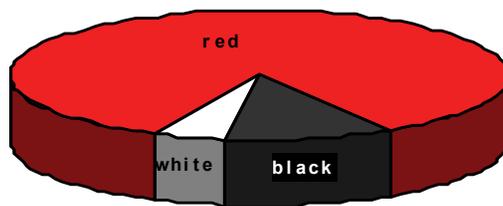


Figure 6: Relative portion of mangrove species in Tampa.

Why are mangrove forests important?

The mangrove forest is valued for its ability to filter out pollution, stabilize sediments and protect the shoreline from erosion. Mangrove forests are an integral part of the ecological functionality of the Tampa Bay estuary because they provide food, nesting and nursery areas for a great variety of fish, shellfish, birds and other wildlife. The mangrove forests also provide habitat for many of Florida's threatened and endangered species of plants and animals.

What is the value of these mangrove forests?

The mangrove forest contributes a total of \$221 million to the structural value of Tampa's urban forest. This does not account for the economic value related to sport and commercial fisheries industries or the value of the ecological services mangroves provide such as nutrient cycling, erosion control, habitat, etc. Mangrove forests also help protect the inland areas from storm surges during strong tropical storms and hurricanes.

Are there regulations involving mangroves?

Mangrove trimming and alteration are regulated through the Florida 'Mangrove Trimming and Preservation Act' as amended by the 1999 Florida Legislature. The intent of the legislature is to protect and preserve mangrove resources valuable to our environment and economy from unregulated removal, defoliation and destruction. This legislation ensures that the mangrove forests are managed in a scientific manner while protecting the rights of property owners.