

What Can We Expect from the Red Tide Task Force?

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[Florida red tide](#) is one of the major ecological threats facing Florida. Because of the seriousness of the threat, in mid-2019 Governor DeSantis announced the appointments of 11 expert researchers and leading scientists to a reconstituted task force within Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). This article will discuss the history of that task force, which is referred to currently as either the Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Task Force, or more frequently as the Red Tide Task Force. This article will also discuss the mission of the task force and its progress to date. We will also provide our assessment of the task force and we will speculate on what we can expect them to accomplish.

What is the History of the Red Tide Task Force?

In 1997, the precursor to the current Red Tide Task Force was created to address the issues of health, environment, and economic impacts from HABs in Florida. At that time, it was referred to as Florida's Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force (HABTF) and it was coordinated by Florida's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI). Membership in that task force included more than 50 representatives from a wide range of public and private organizations. Under the direction of the HABTF, a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was appointed to review and report back on HAB issues in Florida with the goal of identifying priority areas that needed to be addressed.

In 1999, the TAG released a report that provided background information, identified research needs, and suggested recommendations relative to six major HAB concerns in Florida, including red tide and blue-green algae. The report was submitted to the Florida legislature and, as a result, the legislature charged the task force with making recommendations to FWRI as to which projects they should implement in areas such as research, monitoring, detection, control, and mitigation.

FWRI appropriated \$3 million for projects between 1998 and 2001. Funded projects included investigating human, animal, and environmental health threats; economic impacts; and monitoring and detection methods. Studies were prioritized by the major areas of concern identified in the TAG report. Roughly half of the funding went to study *Karenia brevis*, the source of Florida red tide.

Before being reactivated by Governor DeSantis in mid-2019, the last official meeting of the HABTF was April 2002. See [more](#).

What is the Focus of the Current Red Tide Task Force?

As discussed [here](#), the Red Tide Task Force has identified long-term focal areas within which it will evaluate existing approaches and knowledge and it will pinpoint gaps in the existing efforts and understanding. The task force intends to build a portfolio of strategies and tactics to fill those gaps and to assess their attractiveness and feasibility. It is expected that the task force will recommend:

- Actions to reduce excess loads of nutrients entering Florida's freshwater and coastal systems.
- Improvements to current policies and procedures that mitigate the impacts of harmful algal blooms on public health, ecosystem sustainability, and Florida's economic viability.
- Enhancements to communication, coordination, cooperation, and collaboration among stakeholders.
- Strategic research into topics such as the biology and ecology of species creating harmful algal blooms; the detection, tracking, modeling, and prediction of blooms; the impacts of blooms on valued facets of society; and the control and mitigation of blooms.

Who is on the Red Tide Task Force?

The Blue Green Algae Task Force is chaired by Florida's Chief Science Officer, Dr. Tom Frazer, and it is comprised of 5 scientists, most of whom are faculty members at a Florida university. In contrast, there are 11 members of the Red Tide Task Force. While one member of the Red Tide Task Force is a faculty member at

the University of Florida, the rest come from a wide range of organizations, including the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, the Saint John's River Water Management District, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). See [more](#).

What Progress has the Task Force Made to Date?

To date the committee has held [two meetings](#), one in September and the other in December. There are two additional meetings scheduled, one on January 13 and the other on March 19. Unlike the Blue Green Algae Task Force, which held its meetings in several cities, all meetings of the Red Tide Task Force are being held in St. Petersburg, Florida. In further contrast to how the Blue Green Algae Task Force operated, the meetings of the Red Tide Task Force are not broadcast, and so it is not possible for the public to attend the meetings remotely.

The first meeting it held can best be described as familiarizing the Red Tide Task Force members with one another, their charter, and some relevant background information. The meeting was largely based on presentations that covered a range of introductory topics including:

- [HAB Task Force Governance and Guidance](#)
- [History of the Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force](#)
- [Overview of Florida's Marine HABs](#)
- [Florida Harmful Algal Bloom State of the Science Symposium](#)

For more on the first meeting, see [here](#).

The second meeting featured detailed discussions on several topics directly related to red tide, including a discussion of the:

- [Florida Red Tide Mitigation and Technology Development Initiative](#). The initiative will provide \$18 million over six years to the Mote Marine Laboratory so that Mote can develop prevention, control, and mitigation technologies and approaches to address the impacts of red tide on coastal environments and communities in Florida.
- [Recommendations of the Blue-Green Algae Task Force](#).
- [Perceptions of Water Quality & Harmful Algal Blooms in Florida: Causes and Management Opportunities from an Engaged Community](#).
- Needs that were identified in the Florida Harmful Algal Bloom State of the Science Symposium presentation that was made at the first meeting.

For more on the second meeting, see [here](#).

What is our Assessment and Expectation for the Task Force

Our enthusiasm for the potential good work that the task force will do is dampened by the realization that a very similar effort began more than 20 years ago, and it faded away somewhat quickly. All of us need to be diligent in encouraging both the governor and the Florida legislature to continue to aggressively support the current task force.

The most likely outcome of the Red Tide Task Force is a series of recommendations similar to what was produced by the Blue-Green Algae Task Force. Ideally, some of these recommendations will be made in time so that they can influence the current Florida legislative session.

We have already communicated to the task force our desire for them to broadcast their meetings so that the public can attend remotely. We will communicate to them our interest in their evaluating the viability of significantly increasing the funding for red tide research with the hope of decreasing the time it takes to identify potential solutions. We will also recommend to them, as we did with the Blue-Green Algae Task Force, that they formally request that the governor create a separate task force that focuses on the economics of harmful algal blooms. The output of this task force can be used to shape the investments that the state

makes in combatting the existential threat that algal blooms present to Florida's environment and hence, to its economy.

In Case You Missed It: [Red Tide is gone and there is little blue-green algae in our water bodies.](#)