

About This Guide

This guide includes a map of Tampa Bay that depicts main channels, seagrasses, artificial reefs, aquatic preserves, marinas, and boat ramps open to the public. Also featured is information on habitats and animals, popular sport fish, boating safety and protocol, and a resource directory.

The Boating and Angling to Tampa Bay was produced by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. We welcome your comments and inquiries. Please address any comments to, or request additional copies of this guide from:

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St. Petersburg, FL 33701
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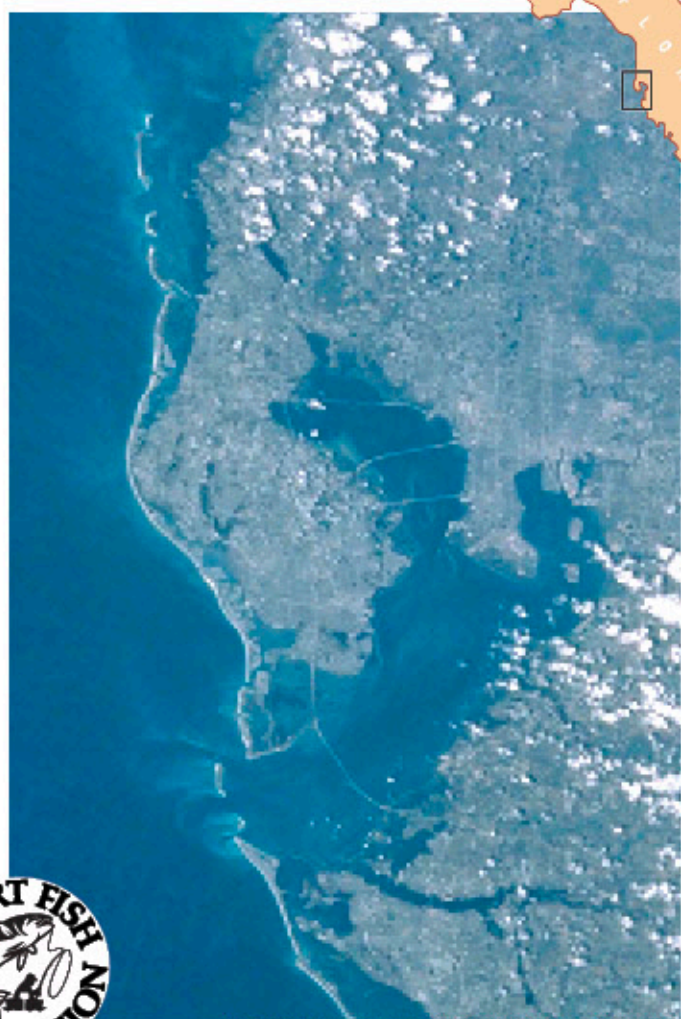
Map designed and produced by Chris Anderson, Kathleen O'Keefe, and Henry Norris, FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. Project managed by Nanette O'Hara, Tampa Bay Estuary Program. Funding provided by the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Fund. The Sport Fish Restoration Program collects money from taxes on fishing equipment and boat fuel and distributes the funds to projects that improve fishing and boating opportunities. The FWC and Tampa Bay Estuary Program are not responsible for omissions, misrepresentations, or factual errors. This guide should not be used for navigation.

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NOT FOR RESALE

2011

A Boating and Angling Guide to Tampa Bay



Tampa Bay and Surrounding Bay from the International Space Station, NASA

Resource Directory

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Wildlife Alert Hotline Cell Phones To report oil spills marine violations, boating accidents, and marine mammal injuries or strandings.	1-888-404-FWCC (3922) *FWC (863) 648-3200 (727) 896-8626
FWC Southwest Regional Office (Lakeland) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (St. Petersburg) For information on Florida's fish and wildlife research	(863) 648-3200 (727) 896-8626
Marine Fish Kill Hotline To report a fish kill or red tide event in your area	1-800-636-0511
U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Station (24 hr. emergency service) Marine Safety Office National Response Center To report oil spills and maritime emergencies	VHF channel 16 727-824-7534 1-800-424-8802
Edward Collaps Search and Rescue For search and rescue and other boating assistance	727-864-8286
Boat U.S. Foundation Hotline For information on boating skills and safety courses offered locally	1-800-326-BOAT (206-2628)
NOAA Weather Service Broadcast For up-to-the-minute information on currents, tides, and winds	913-645-2506 162.55 KHz/VHF radio
PORTS (Physical Oceanographic Real-Time System) For up-to-the-minute information on currents, tides, and winds	1-866-TPORTS
Aquatic Preserves (Pinellas County, Boca Ciega Bay, Terra Ceia, Cockroach Bay) For more information about Florida's protected coastal waters	941-721-2068
National Wildlife Refugees (Pinellas, Egmont Key, Passage Key) For information about National Wildlife Refuges in Tampa Bay	352-563-2088
NOAA Fisheries Southwest Regional Office For information about marine fisheries in federal waters	727-824-9301
Save Our Seabirds For assistance with injured seabirds	941-388-3010
Tampa Bay Estuary Program Government partnership implementing long-range master plan for bay restoration and management	727-893-2765
Tampa Bay Watch To participate in bay stewardship activities	727-867-8166
Anderson of Florida Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries For more information about birds and their habitat	813-623-6826

Welcome to

Tampa Bay

At high tide, Florida's largest open-water estuary stretches 398 square miles. Popular for sport and recreation, the bay also supports one of the world's most productive natural systems. Estuaries like Tampa Bay, where salt water from the sea meets and mixes with fresh water from rivers and uplands, are nurseries for young fish, shrimp, and crabs. More than 70 percent of all fish, shellfish, and crustaceans spend some critical stage of their development in these nearshore waters, protected from larger predators that swim the open sea.

Wildlife abounds along the shores of Tampa Bay. As many as 40,000 pairs of birds – from the familiar brown pelican to the colorful roseate spoonbill – nest in Tampa Bay every year. Others, including sandpipers and white pelicans, are seasonal visitors.

By boating safely and with greater awareness of the natural environment, you can help protect Tampa Bay and the wildlife that depends on these waters for survival.

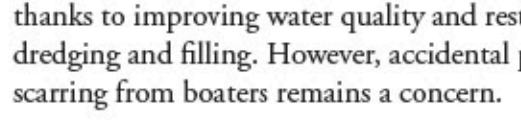
Native Habitats

Tampa Bay is a rich mosaic of fish and wildlife habitats that form life-sustaining links in an ecosystem as biologically productive as some of the world's most celebrated rain forests. From coastal mangroves and marshes to underwater meadows of seagrass, from the open bay to the salty opening to the Gulf of Mexico, each interdependent habitat plays a vital role in this "estuarine machine."

Seagrasses and mangroves contribute significantly to a dynamic food chain that draws nutrients from the bay floor. As seagrass and mangrove leaves decay, they provide food for small creatures that are ultimately consumed by fish and larger predators in an endless circle of life.

Seagrasses are flowering underwater plants found at shallow depths in bays and lagoons and in nearshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico. As a nursery environment, seagrasses support small fish, shrimp, and crabs that hide among the blades and feast on decaying leaves. Seagrasses also help stabilize shifting sands on the bottom of the bay and improve water clarity by trapping fine sediments and particles.

After decades of declines, more than 6,000 acres of seagrasses have been restored in Tampa Bay since 1985, thanks to improving water quality and restrictions on dredging and filling. However, accidental propeller scarring from boaters remains a concern.



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Mangroves
Mangroves are tropical trees that thrive in salty environments along the water's edge. Like seagrasses, they provide food and cover for a vast array of small fish and animals. Their roots anchor shorelines, and their branches serve as nesting sites for a wide variety of birds.

Three species of mangroves are common in Tampa Bay. Red mangroves, typically located closest to the water, are easily distinguished by their tangled reddish roots that branch out over the water. Black mangroves feature numerous finger-like projections, called pneumatophores, that surround the base of the tree. The leaves of the white mangrove are yellow-green.

Nearly half of the mangrove swamps that once ringed Tampa Bay have been replaced by development and seawalls. Loss of this important habitat has contributed to a decline in fisheries throughout the bay. In order to protect mangroves, local and state regulations restrict pruning and removal.

Salt Marshes and Mud Flats
Like seagrasses, marshes provide food and cover for a vast array of small fish and wildlife. These



marshes, which periodically become submerged, nourish and protect many fish and birds. Marsh areas also buffer upland areas from storms and help filter pollutants from water that runs off the land.

Mud flats throughout the Tampa Bay system may be completely exposed at low tide. Although these flats are barren of visible vegetation, they are teeming with life. Small crabs, clams, and worms, which burrow in the mud, supply a feast for birds wading at low tide.



Lindsay Cross

Oyster Bars

Oysters are immobile shellfish that filter water as they feed. Their gray-white shells are irregular in shape. Live oysters and dead oyster shells form in mounds on the bay floor, creating bars or reefs. More prevalent near river mouths and in sections of the bay that receive a steady diet of fresh water, oyster bars attract adult sheepshead and red drum, making these structures popular fishing spots.

Shellfish harvesting is prohibited in most areas of Tampa Bay. For information about shellfish harvesting, visit the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at www.floridaaquaculture.com. For information about shellfish harvesting regulations, visit FWC Division of Marine Fisheries Management at www.MyFWC.com/marine.

Popular Sport Fish

(Fish images © Diane Rome Prebles)



GULF FLOUNDER: Inshore within bays near or within grass flats during spring and summer; in the Gulf beginning in the fall with the onset of colder weather.



RED DRUM (Redfish): Inshore near grass beds, oyster bars, and docks and pilings; deeper channels during the warmest and coolest months.



SNOOK: Canals, tidal creeks, and other deep warm waters in cool months; near tidal passes and mangrove fringe at high tide.



SPOTTED SEATROUT (Speckled seatrout): Inshore over grass beds, sand, and sandy/mud bottoms; deeper water during warmest and coolest months.



TARPON: Commonly found mostly inshore near bridges, pilings, rock walls, harbors, around structures, and on flats.



SPANISH MACKEREL: Inshore, nearshore, and offshore over grass beds and reefs.

In most cases, a license is required for saltwater fishing in Florida waters. Visit MyFWC.com/RECREATION/Saltwater_index.htm for up-to-date information about license requirements, bag limits and seasonal closures.

Practice Safe Boating

- Plan your route in advance. Use the appropriate nautical charts to reference depth, bridge clearance, and other natural and man-made features before you leave.
- File a float plan and leave it with a reliable person at a marina or elsewhere. Include a description of the vessel, radio and safety equipment on board, planned stops, names of passengers, and an estimated time of returning from voyage. Ask that person to notify the Coast Guard or other local authority if you do not return as scheduled.
- Wear a personal flotation device (PFD). Per the United States Coast Guard boating safety guidelines, a boat must have a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, III, or V life jacket for each person aboard. Boats 16 feet and over must have at least one Type IV throwable device as well. Adult-sized life jackets will not work for children. Special life jackets are available. To work correctly, a life jacket must be worn, fit snugly, and not allow the child's chin or ears to slip through. Life jackets should be tested for wear and buoyancy at least once each year. Waterlogged, faded, or leaky jackets should be discarded.
- Observe and obey posted speed limits. When in doubt, slow down.
- Watch your wake. Remember, you are responsible for damage caused by your vessel's wake. Large wakes can overturn smaller vessels and damage boats which are moored at the dock.
- Know your navigational rules. Use the boating rules of the road to avoid accidents.
- Don't drink alcohol and operate a boat.
- Be sure that your boat is visible at night and in poor weather conditions.
- Make sure your craft has the required safety equipment on board.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary offers a free boat inspection to advise boaters of state and federal safety requirements. Violations found during these courtesy exams will not be reported to authorities.

Share the Nautical Road

Pleasure boats share bay waters with modern ships that haul cargo from all over the world. While quite large in terms of the square miles it covers, the bay is also very shallow, which restricts navigation for larger vessels. The average ship that calls on Tampa Bay is longer than two football fields. A ship this size has limited ability to maneuver and stop in the narrow confines of Tampa Bay's shipping channels. Most require a mile or more to come to a complete stop. The Tampa Bay Pilots Association needs your cooperation to keep everyone safe:

- Stay clear of the main ship channel when large ships are approaching. Views from large ships may be obstructed up to three-fourths of a mile away.
- In case of emergency, use VHF Channel 13 for bridge-to-bridge communication with commercial ships. Keep transmissions short and simple, and never tie up the frequency.
- Exercise caution when boating around ships or tugs involved in docking. Their prop-wash can easily capsize small vessels or send them into the path of oncoming traffic.
- Be sure that your boat is visible at night and in poor weather conditions.

Security and Safety Zones

The U. S. Coast Guard has established security and safety zones around commercial vessels and facilities in Tampa Bay. This includes all tank vessels that handle or transport hazardous cargo, passenger vessels and terminals, Naval vessels, Coast Guard vessels and bases, and the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. Failure to comply with these zones could lead to a \$250,000 fine, six years in prison, and the loss of your boat. For additional information about the security and safety zones within Tampa Bay, visit <http://homeport.uscg.mil/stpetersburg>.

Birds of the Bay

Despite the environmental pressures from growth and development in the region, Tampa Bay continues to attract a remarkable variety and number of birds. However, maintaining these bird populations in growing metropolitan areas is challenging. Many species are declining, and some have virtually disappeared due to loss and disruption of habitat.

Islands, beaches, and some inland causeways provide nesting areas for many species of birds including those classified as imperiled. Mud flats and seagrass meadows in shallow sections of the bay provide a bountiful feeding ground for resident, migrant, and wintering shorebirds. Open waters are a habitat for loons, grebes, and ducks. Ospreys and bald eagles can be found throughout Tampa Bay.

YOU CAN HELP:

- Observe posted signs that identify nesting colonies and try to keep a distance of 500 feet.
- Please keep pets leashed and away from posted nesting areas.
- If you happen upon a concentration of birds, you may be near a nesting colony. Carefully pick up your belongings and leave. Choose a spot 500 feet away from the birds and enjoy the view.
- If a bird becomes entangled in fishing gear, carefully remove the hook and monofilament line. Or while walking along the beach, pick up any stray fishing line and dispose of it properly. Birds and other animals that ingest or become entangled in fishing line may die.
- Stay clear of areas that may harbor nesting colonies and avoid areas where feeding birds are visible. Please do not operate a personal watercraft or aircraft near the shore except to idle or to reach a destination point. Noise and prop wash from those vessels disturb wildlife and may disrupt nesting and feeding.

Manatees

Manatees are year-round residents of Tampa Bay. In the summer, they are widely scattered throughout the bay, commonly in shallow waters less than six feet deep that harbor the seagrasses on which they feed. In the winter they gather near warm water power plant outfalls to stay warm.

Many manatee injuries and deaths occur as a result of blunt trauma with watercraft. Boaters can reduce the chance of harming manatees by practicing responsible boating.

YOU CAN HELP:

- Observe and follow all speed zone signs.
- Slow down. Reducing speed allows boaters to avoid manatees.
- Use marked channels whenever possible. Channel depth reduces the likelihood of pinning or crushing manatees.
- Wear polarized glasses. Polarized lenses make it much easier to see objects beneath the surface and the "swirling" that occurs when a manatee dives.
- Designate a person on board to look out for wildlife, other boaters, swimmers, or obstructions when the vessel is underway.
- Stow trash and properly discard monofilament fishing line. Manatees may swallow or become trapped in lines and other plastic debris.
- Obey state and federal laws that make it illegal to harass, capture, hunt, or kill a manatee. To report violations, distressed, or dead manatees, call FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline at 1-888-404-FWCC (3922).



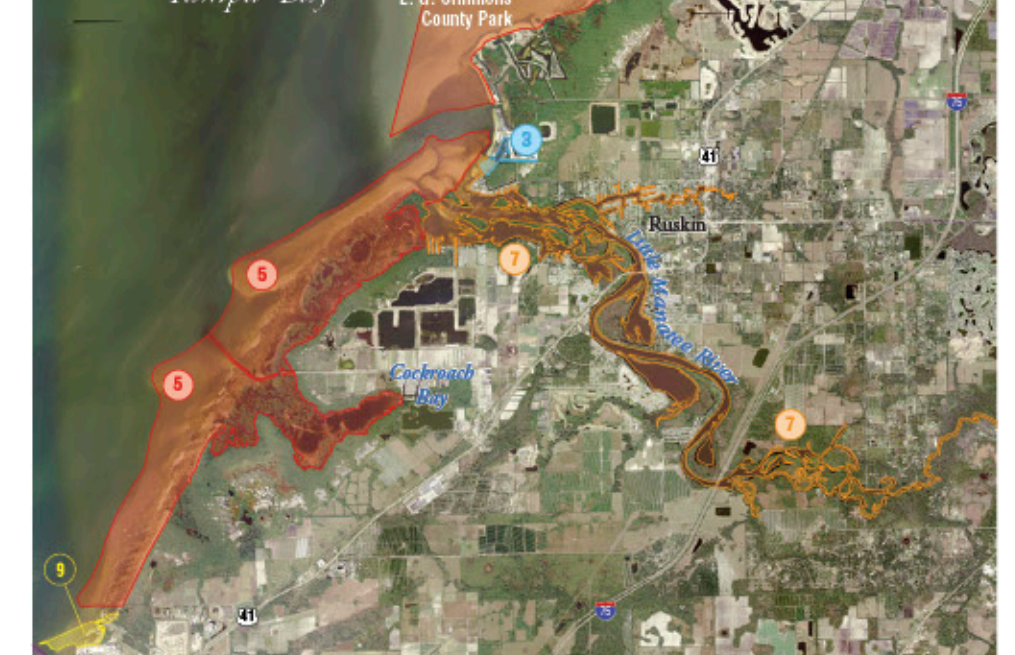
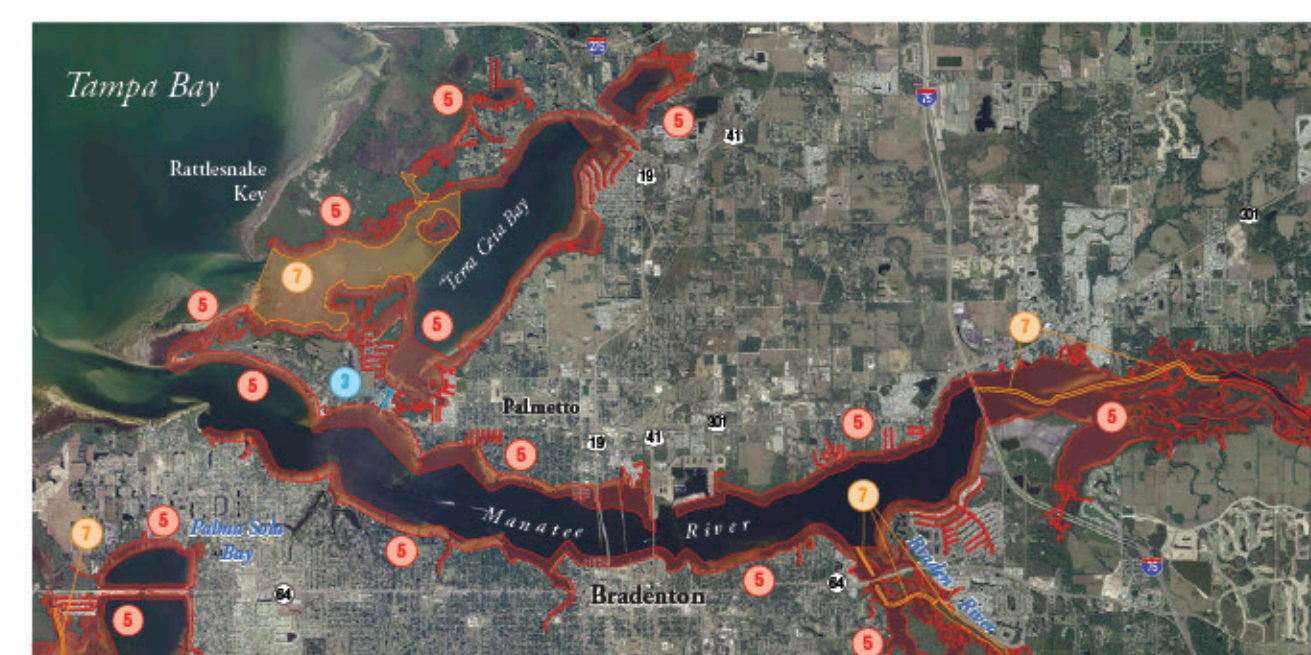
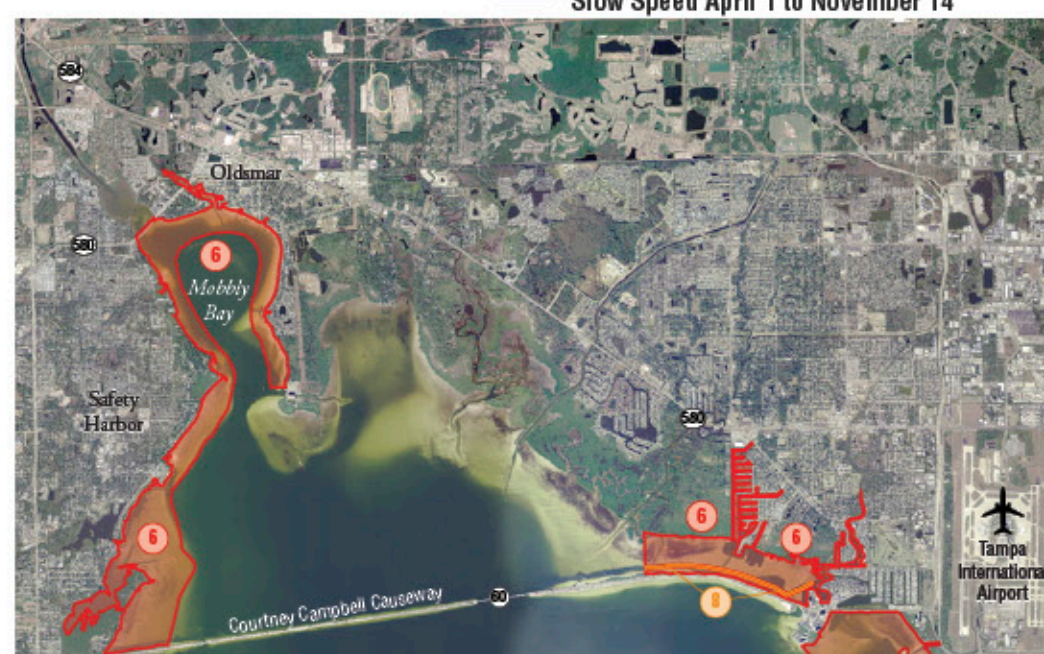
Legend (for all maps)

- No Entry
- All Year
- November 15 to March 31
- Idle Speed
- All Year
- November 15 to March 31
- Slow Speed
- All Year
- April 1 to November 15
- Other Posted Zone*
- All Year
- In Marked Channel
- Combustion Engine Exclusion
- All Year
- November 15 to March 31, Slow Speed April 1 to November 14
- No Anchoring - Shell Key Preserve

Boating Regulatory Zones

NOTE: Only a small number of the boating regulatory zones in the Tampa Bay area are shown on the maps below.

* - Please look out for posted signs and follow instructions. When in doubt, slow down.



Data Sources:
• Safety and Security Zones - U. S. Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg
• Manatee Speed Zones - U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Hillsborough County
• Seagrass Protection Zones/Shell Key Preserve - Pinellas County
• Port Manatee Seagrass Mitigation Area - Port Manatee

The Monofilament Recovery and Recycling Program (MRRP) is a statewide effort to educate the public on the problems caused by monofilament line left in the environment, to encourage recycling through a network of line-recycling bins and drop-off locations, and to conduct volunteer monofilament line cleanup events. Place used or old fishing line in outdoor recycling bins mounted at many piers, boat ramps, and marina throughout the state. Indoor recycling bins are also available at many tackle shops.



Curtis Kruer

