MRC
Marine Resources Council
LoveTheIRL.org

INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

COASTAL COMMUNITY OF EAST CENTRAL FLORIDA

2023 PROGRESS REPORT

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Dive Into One of Our Earth's Greatest Natural Treasures

Jim Moir, Chair,
Board of Directors,
Marine Resources Council

Ask people living in east central Florida how it's going and they sometimes will reply: "It's another day in paradise."

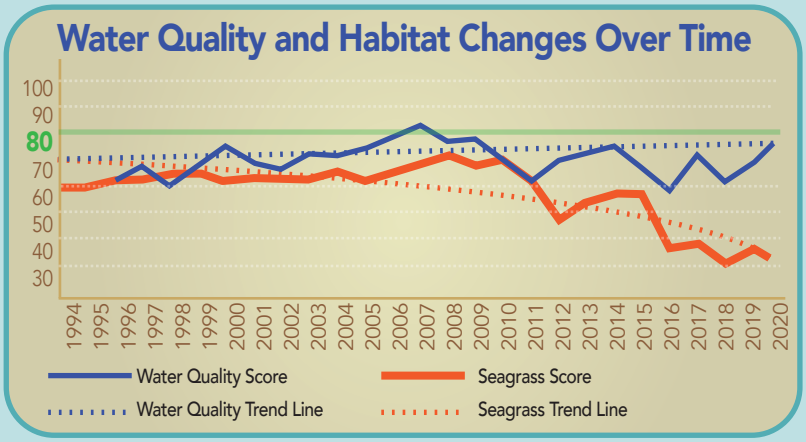
Recently, good fortune has rained upon this paradise, bringing with it a rising tide of opportunity, while straining its fabulous, yet fragile, Indian River Lagoon (IRL). The region is awash with new development, which existing stormwater and wastewater infrastructure cannot handle.

Too much of anything is usually not good.

Excess nutrient pollution is draining into the lagoon. Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus from increased fertilizer, pet waste, wastewater, stormwater, polluted groundwater, soaps, detergents and the burning of fossil fuels are at play.

Fortunately, much is being done to reduce excess nutrient pollution. Much more will need to be done, and everyone will need to to get on board if the fragile balance with nature is to be restored. The regional economy depends upon a healthy lagoon.

At an average of about four feet deep, the lagoon stretches more than 150 miles taking in nearly 40 percent of the state's Atlantic coastal community. Once carpeted with meadows of emerald green seagrass, the foundation of life in the lagoon, pollution has placed it in peril.

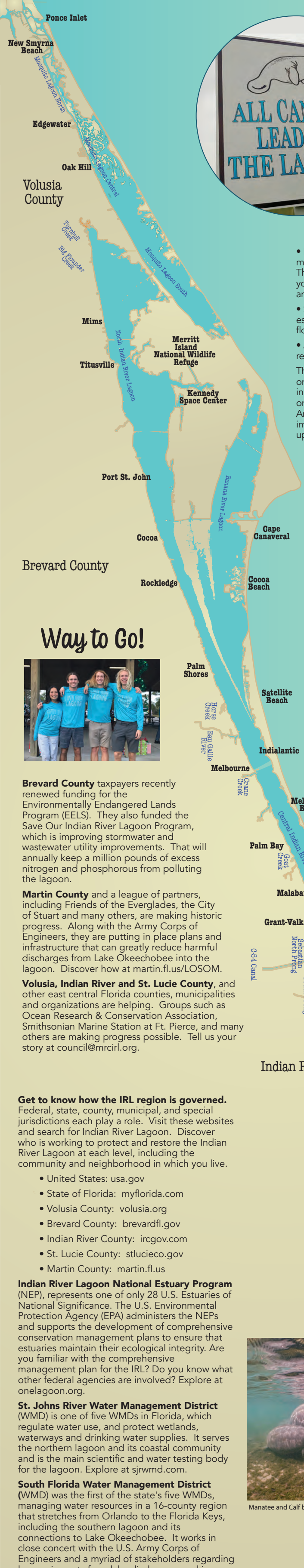


An 80 meets target.
Seagrass, the key indicator of habitat health, is dying, even though water quality is improving.

Dive into the Data

This graph tells a story. Generally, the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) is getting clearer, and water quality, as currently measured in the lagoon is improving. That's progress and very good news. Historically, seagrass, the foundation of the marine habitat would be improving. It's not. We need to know why and act accordingly.

Currently, water quality in the IRL is based on just four factors measured by the state: nitrogen, phosphorus, chlorophyll-A, and water clarity (turbidity). Please join MRC in calling on our state to broaden water quality testing in the IRL, and determine what, in addition to excess nutrients, is preventing seagrass from recovering.



Way to Go!
Slow the Flow.
Get in the Know.

- Did you know historic progress is being made in east central Florida? Way to go! This progress report will begin to acquaint you with the vast network of organizations and others making progress possible.
- Slowing the flow of stormwater is essential to lagoon recovery. Slow the flow!
- Are you in the know? This progress report will help you navigate your way.

The Indian River Lagoon (IRL) is one of only 28 Estuaries of National Significance in the U.S. When healthy, the IRL supports one of the most diverse habitats in North America. Sustaining the globally important regional economy depends upon a healthy lagoon.

What is a lagoon? A lagoon is a stretch of salt water separated from the sea by a low sandbank or coral reef.

What is an estuary? An estuary is a partially enclosed, coastal water body where freshwater from rivers and streams mixes with salt water from the ocean.

Get in the Know.

Marine Resources Council (MRC) is working with a growing league of other non-profit organizations to provide clear, concise and consistent communication. MRC and these organizations can help you navigate your way to the information you need.

IRL Coastal Community of East Central Florida

Marine Resources Council, LoveTheIRL.org, 321.725.7775, council@mrcirl.org

Volusia County

Marine Discover Center, marinediscoverycenter.org, 386.428.4828

Brevard County

Brevard County Indian River Lagoon Coalition, helpthelagoon.org, info@helpthelagoon.org

Indian River County

Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County, cwcirc.org, 772.231.2037, info@cwcirc.org

St. Lucie County

Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County, conservationalliancesIc.org

Martin County

Rivers Coalition, 772.225.6849, riverscoalition.org, info@riverscoalition.org

Way to Go!

Brevard County taxpayers recently renewed funding for the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program (EELS). They also funded the Save Our Indian River Lagoon Program, which is improving stormwater and wastewater utility improvements. That will annually keep a million pounds of excess nitrogen and phosphorous from polluting the lagoon.

Martin County and a league of partners, including Friends of the Everglades, the City of Stuart and many others, are making historic progress. Along with the Army Corps of Engineers, they are putting in place plans and infrastructure that can greatly reduce harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the lagoon. Discover how at martin.fl.us/LOSOM.

Volusia, Indian River and St. Lucie County, and other east central Florida counties, municipalities and organizations are helping. Groups such as Ocean Research & Conservation Association, Smithsonian Marine Station at Ft. Pierce, and many others are making progress possible. Tell us your story at council@mrcirl.org.

Discover what else is being done. As you explore, consider these organizations that currently have shoreline restoration, seagrass planting, and aquaculture facilities around the IRL.

AquaTech Eco Consultants
Bethune-Cookman University
Brevard County Natural Resources Department
Brevard Zoo (and its proposed IRL aquarium)
Ducks Unlimited
Florida Atlantic University Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Florida Oceanographic Society
Hubbs-Seaworld Research Institute
Loxahatchee River District
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Sea & Shoreline, LLC
Seagrass Ecosystems Analysts
University of Central Florida
University of Florida/IFAS
Volusia County Environmental Management

Get to know how the IRL region is governed. Federal, state, county, municipal, and special jurisdictions each play a role. Visit these websites and search for Indian River Lagoon. Discover who is working to protect and restore the Indian River Lagoon at each level, including the community and neighborhood in which you live.

- United States: usa.gov
- State of Florida: myflorida.com
- Volusia County: volusia.org
- Brevard County: brevardfl.gov
- Indian River County: ircgov.com
- St. Lucie County: stlucieco.gov
- Martin County: martin.fl.us

Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (NEP), represents one of only 28 U.S. Estuaries of National Significance. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the NEPs and supports the development of comprehensive conservation management plans to ensure that estuaries maintain their ecological integrity. Are you familiar with the comprehensive management plan for the IRL? Do you know what other federal agencies are involved? Explore at onelagoon.org.

St. Johns River Water Management District (WMD) is one of five WMDs in Florida, which regulate water use, and protect wetlands, waterways and drinking water supplies. It serves the northern lagoon and its coastal community and is the main scientific and water testing body for the lagoon. Explore at sjrwmd.com.

South Florida Water Management District (WMD) was the first of the state's five WMDs, managing water resources in a 16-county region that stretches from Orlando to the Florida Keys, including the southern lagoon and its connections to Lake Okeechobee. It works in close concert with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a myriad of stakeholders regarding lagoon impacts from lake discharges, and is making historic progress in that regard. Explore at sfwmd.gov.

Manatee and Calf by Rand McGrath Photography

Slow the Flow.

Start at home and work. Install rain barrels to capture rainwater; then, distribute the water as needed. Plant rain gardens, fed by rain barrels, or planted where water naturally pools. Don't fertilize during summer, and stop watering in fertilizer; learn more at BeFloridianNow.org. Discover and install attractive, durable, pervious surfaces, which allow rain water to seep into the ground rather than run into streets and storm drains that flow to the lagoon.

It's time for Low Impact Development (LID). Put the LID on harmful development practices by implementing common sense Low Impact Development (LID) in the counties, municipalities, districts, and developments of east central Florida. Discover what your county and municipality are doing now to update their comprehensive plans, zoning, codes, and ordinances, and whether they have LID projects underway.

We're all in this boat together.

Restoring balance is possible. If we continue to work together, MRC believes, as do other scientific organizations, that the fragile balance of the lagoon will be restored. MRC salutes the state for calling for $100 million of annual funding for IRL restoration and invites you to join in monitoring progress.

Much is happening; celebrate that progress!

More needs to happen.

What more will you do?

We need to know why seagrass is not recovering. Historically, seagrass recovers as water in the IRL gets clearer and nitrogen and phosphorous decline. That is no longer the case and we need to know why. MRC is calling on the State of Florida to broaden scientifically reliable water quality testing in the IRL. Please do the same. We need to know what is in our water and why seagrass is not recovering. Seagrass is the foundation of the ecosystem. It existed for thousands of years before our current population explosion, and fish, crabs, oysters, dolphins, and manatee thrived.

MRC will continue to convene, collaborate and advocate.

Since 1990, MRC has collaborated with the community and hosted 20 action assemblies to assess, prioritize and publish actions needed to restore balance to the IRL coastal community. The most recent focused on seagrass and was held in January 2023.

Those assemblies led to the designation of the IRL as an estuary of national significance; the IRL National Estuary Program and its Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan, as well as a series of IRL Report Cards, published by MRC, which helped build international attention, awareness and action.

We are excited to publish this progress report, now that there is a growing tide of awareness, resources and action. Many thanks to all who have made progress possible.

Explore how you can join MRC and stir a SEA Change: Science + Education + Action. Visit LoveTheIRL.org. Be sure to register for the monthly MRC newsletter.

MRC is Stirring a SEA Change:
Science + Education + Action.

Please Donate to Marine Resources Council (MRC)

Donors are MRC Annual Members,
working together to protect, restore, unite, and promote
the IRL coastal community of east central Florida

Online at LoveTheIRL.org
Mail to:
MRC
3275 Dixie Hwy NE
Palm Bay, FL 32905

Or call us at 321.725.7775

Marine Resources Council
(Marine Resources Council of East Florida, Inc.; MRC)
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