

A quarterly newsletter produced by the Environmental Learning Center
for the Environmental Leaders Coalition of

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

ECO-CONNECT

MEET OUR TEAM

- [Clean Water Coalition IRC](#)
- [Coastal Conservation Association - Treasure Coast Chapter](#)
- [Coastal Connections, Inc](#)
- [Environmental Learning Center](#)
- [Eugenia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society](#)
- [FAU Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute](#)
- [Friends of St. Sebastian River](#)
- [Friends of the Spoil Islands](#)
- Indian River County:
 - [Coastal Division](#)
 - [Conservation Lands Program](#)
 - [Solid Waste Disposal District](#)
 - [Stormwater Divison](#)
- [Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program](#)
- [Indian River Land Trust](#)
- [Indian River Neighborhood Association \(IRNA\)](#)
- [Keep Indian River Beautiful](#)
- Wildlife Refuge - [Archie Carr](#)
- Wildlife Refuge - [Pelican Island](#)
- [Pelican Island Audubon Society](#)
- [Sebastian Inlet District](#)
- [Sustainable Sebastian](#)
- [Temple Beth Shalom](#)
- [Be A Good Neighbor](#)

PARTNERSHIP FOR PROGRESS

by Barbara Schlitt Ford, Coalition Facilitator

The Environmental Leaders Coalition of IRC was formed in 2020 as means of keeping the various environmental organizations and agencies in the county connected and informed. These environmental leaders work together to make sure the public is informed as to what each group is working on and how we can each support these important efforts.

The resulting collaborations serve to most efficiently use limited resources to make positive impacts for our local ecosystems. The Coalition established priorities with the most pressing being the health of the Indian River Lagoon, as well as restoration of biodiversity and protection of natural areas among a host of other environmental topics.

Of course, we know that all of these issues are closely linked with one another. The important thing is to be discussing them as a community and taking action to effect change. We all agree that the time to act is now. The Coalition members decided to create a quarterly newsletter for the community. This is the first and is dedicated to overviews of the organization that submitted summaries. *(continued on page 13.)*

CLEAN WATER COALITION INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

by Paul Fafeita, Board President

The Clean Water Coalition (CWC) of Indian River County is a nonprofit which acts as an independent, unifying voice with over 1000 partner organizations and/or businesses to protect and restore the surface and ground waters of Indian River County.

Initiatives include the restoration of the health of the Indian River Lagoon, improved wastewater treatment, safe biosolid disposal, a no-discharge zone for boats, and a clean and sufficient supply of potable water for current and future generations.

We envision the surface and ground waters of IRC to be clean and healthy serving as the foundation of our social and economic well-being for current and future generations. Visit our [website](#) to learn more, register as a member, and receive our emails so that you can attend our educational presentations.



COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOC – TREASURE COAST

by Paul Fafeita, Board President

CCA's vision is to ensure the health and conservation of our marine resources and anglers' access to them. Created in 1977 in response to commercial overfishing, CCA has proven time and again that anglers are the best stewards of the marine environment. The 900+ members who make up the Treasure Coast chapter understand the unique nature of our state's marine resources and work to protect them. Members from this chapter are extremely involved with local government to help solve issues and preserve the IRL. They were instrumental in saving the Oslo Boat Ramp development and keeping it a sanctuary for spawning and juvenile fish. Social events, habitat restoration projects, and trash cleanups are just some of the ways you can get involved. Follow CCA Florida on [Facebook](#) for the latest! Join the CCA Florida Treasure Coast Chapter at Walking Tree Brewery for the Treasure Coast BBQ and Auction on March 19, 2021.



COASTAL CONNECTIONS, INC.

by Kendra Cope, Founding Director

Coastal Connections, Inc. (CCinc) is a young but quickly developing organization with a vision to be a driving force for environmentally friendly and sustainable practices leading to the recovery of sea turtles. We achieve our mission of protecting coastal habitats by providing immersive experiences that enhance sea turtle conservation and community sustainability efforts in Indian River County.

Our programs, like Turtle Digs, Beach Baskets, Turtle Rescue, and Coastal Cleanups are focused on the human element of conservation and how each of us can make a positive impact on our environment in our daily lives. To be a part of the impact visit coastalconnections.org or follow us on Facebook [@coastalconnectionsinc](https://www.facebook.com/coastalconnectionsinc)

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

*by Nicole Lemmo Saini
Environmental Educator & Digital Marketer*

For over 30 years, the Environmental Learning Center's (ELC) 64-acre lagoon island campus has been a vital source of environmental education and outdoor experiences for the community.

Their mission to educate, inspire and empower all people to be active stewards of the environment and their own well-being is what motivated Executive Director Barbara Schlitt Ford to form a new coalition of IRC environmental leaders.

The ELC strives to be the bridge connecting our community to nature, science, and the solutions we need for a healthy environment.

From school field trips to family adventures, educational events to wellness programs this Indian River nature center has something for everyone. Visit discoverelc.org to plan your next connection to nature.



EUGENIA CHAPTER OF THE FLORIDA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY (FNPS)

by Janice Broda, Secretary

The Eugenia Chapter of the FNPS serves Indian River County and northern St. Lucie County. “Preserving, conserving, and restoring the native plants and native plant communities of Florida” is the mission of the FNPS. The Eugenia chapter focuses on encouraging the use of native plants in yards, commercial landscapes, and public plantings to conserve water, reduce the need for fertilizers, enhance pollinator populations, provide food and shelter for wildlife, and to protect the real Florida.

Monthly outdoor activities will be held on Saturday or Sunday afternoons until covid conditions resolve. These activities include visits to members’ yard, guided walks in public, native plantings at the Environmental Learning Center and the Laura Riding Jackson House, native plant identification contests, and outings to local preserves.



FAU HARBOR BRANCH

by Dr. Gabby Barbarite
Director of Outreach and Engagement

For 50 years, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute has been a leader in marine science, with critical research in areas like ecosystem conservation, ocean and human health, sustainable aquaculture, engineering and exploration. As a premier oceanographic center, our research community of over 200 scientists, engineers, staff, and students work together toward a goal of “Ocean Science for a Better World”.

In 2007, the institute became the northernmost campus of Florida Atlantic University, which further expanded our programs and their reach to 100 miles along Florida’s east coast. In addition to highly impactful research, we are committed to sharing our knowledge with the goal of inspiring, educating and training the next generation of professionals in STEM fields as well as members of our community so that they will support scientific endeavors and ocean stewardship.

FRIENDS OF ST. SEBASTIAN RIVER

by Tim Glover, President

The Friends of St. Sebastian River was formed in 1989, an off-shoot of what today is the Roseland Community Association, by citizens concerned with the health and water quality of the River. An all-volunteer organization, our mission is to help maintain the health and beauty of the River and its watershed through advocacy and education.

One of our greatest challenges is helping the public appreciate the wild and scenic quality of our River, and what the impacts are, through a watershed that changes as a result of development and choices made by residents within that watershed. Those choices ultimately impact the Indian River Lagoon as the St. Sebastian River is one of the largest tributaries to the Lagoon and also provides unique habitat to some rare fish species that are endemic to our River.



FRIENDS OF THE SPOIL ISLANDS

by John Bacon, President

The mission of the Friends of the Spoil Islands (FOSI) is to support aquatic preserve staff in the management of seven aquatic preserves and the spoil islands within them, through volunteerism, financial support, and outreach. A spoil island is a man-made island, created as a byproduct of channel dredging. The material dredged up during the process is called “spoil”. Spoil Islands are designated as conservation, preservation, and recreation.



FOSI is working on an initiative to provide increased accessibility to several recreation Spoil Islands, the first phase has been completed with funding from the Indian River Lagoon NEP Council, local agencies, and organizations.

Our members are individuals that enjoy nature, picnics, sailing, boating, fishing, camping, and paddling on our waterways while supporting and enhancing our aquatic preserves through conservation and partnerships.

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY ORGANIZATIONS

by Kathleen Keenan



STORMWATER DIVISION

Alexis Peralta

IRC's Stormwater Division is dedicated to protecting the health of the IRL by reducing runoff pollution through education, filtration, and innovation.

Residents are educated on reducing personal pollution such as fertilizer use, dog waste, litter, and more. Businesses and construction sites have their runoff inspected by our stormwater enforcement officers, Todd Tardif and Travis Major. The stormwater engineer, Keith McCully, has been designing innovative and state-renowned stormwater treatment facilities for over 10 years, including Egret Marsh and Osprey Acres.

Together the team, with stormwater facilities manager Mike Thorne and his staff, have led the way in stormwater management. Working together with other divisions, local municipalities, and environmentally focused groups the Stormwater Division focuses on not just cleaning the stormwater, but bringing the community together to prevent stormwater pollution from the start. [Visit](#) here for additional information.



CONSERVATION LANDS PROGRAM

Beth Powell and Wendy Swindell

The Indian River County Conservation Lands Program manages 26 Conservation Areas encompassing over 2,300 acres of native habitat. Each conservation area has a management plan directed at enhancing and maintaining diverse habitats for use by wildlife, and conserving these valuable ecological resources in perpetuity. These lands provide walking trails and other recreational activities for visitors and residents, as well as opportunities for public education and outreach.

Currently, the program is finishing construction of public access amenities including created wetlands, boardwalks and wildlife viewing sites at several conservation areas including Jones' Pier and Oyster Bar Marsh. Residents and visitors are encouraged to visit our [website](#).



INDIAN RIVER COUNTY ORGANIZATIONS

SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL DISTRICT

Sue Flak

Indian River County's solid waste system is an organized dependent special district known as Indian River County Solid Waste Disposal District (SWDD). The purpose of the Refuse Disposal Division under SWDD is to operate five Customer Convenience Centers (CCC's) around the County and transport materials delivered to these centers by county residents to the landfill site for recycling and/or disposal.

The CCCs provide collection points for the residents to deliver municipal solid waste, yard trash, household hazardous waste, and various recyclable materials. SWDD then transports these materials to the landfill for ultimate disposition to maintain the health and wellbeing of the community and environment.

The county provides residential curbside recycling collection for residents. The charge is included in their solid waste assessment in an effort to encourage recycling. Recycled material is brought to the Main County Landfill and eventually the St. Lucie County sorting facility.

Collaboration with this coalition is important to continue to make positive and proactive decisions so that the Indian River County community continues to be a healthy and sustainable environment for our residents and visitors. For more information [visit here](#).



COASTAL DIVISION

Molly Klinepeter

Indian River County's Coastal Division manages the County's programs related to beaches, sea turtles, artificial reefs, derelict vessels and the Indian River Lagoon. The Lagoon Program focuses on creating a County-specific Indian River Lagoon Management Plan using research and data on topics potentially impacting the estuary.



Currently, the Coastal Division is in the second phase of our four-phased approach in creating this plan. The Lagoon Program also partners with various County departments and external agencies on projects to help restore the Indian River Lagoon. For more information, please visit our [website](#) to learn more about the Coastal Division

INDIAN RIVER LAGOON NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

by Kathleen Hill, Deputy Director

The IRLNEP is a non-regulatory, community-based program established within the U.S. EPA under the Clean Water Act to protect and restore the Indian River Lagoon. There are twenty-eight National Estuary Programs.

More than 100 resource managers, scientists and citizens work collaboratively as a management conference to direct and guide the program and advance Lagoon restoration.

The IRLNEP is sponsored locally by the IRL Council, an independent special district of Florida, which includes representatives of the five Lagoon counties (Volusia, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin), the St. Johns River, and South Florida Water Management Districts, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The U.S. EPA serves as an advisory member of the IRL Council.

More information is available at onelagoon.org.



ONE LAGOON

ONE COMMUNITY · ONE VOICE



INDIAN RIVER LAND TRUST

by Ken Grudens, Executive Director

The mission of the Indian River Land Trust is to promote the preservation, conservation, and improvement of natural resources and special places in Indian River County, Florida, for the benefit of the general public and future generations. IRLT's focus for the Indian River Lagoon is to Preserve wildlife habitat and natural resources, Protect scenic waterfront, and Provide access for public recreation & education.

As the largest private landowner along the Indian River Lagoon in Indian River County, the Land Trust's long-term vision is to be the leader for continued acquisition of Lagoon conservation lands, the restoration of coastal habitats, the establishment of public preserves and trail systems, and an advocate for local and state policies and funding initiatives in order to provide a productive, healthy and publicly accessible Indian River Lagoon. This cannot be done without developing partnerships with other organizations and agencies.

INDIAN RIVER NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOC

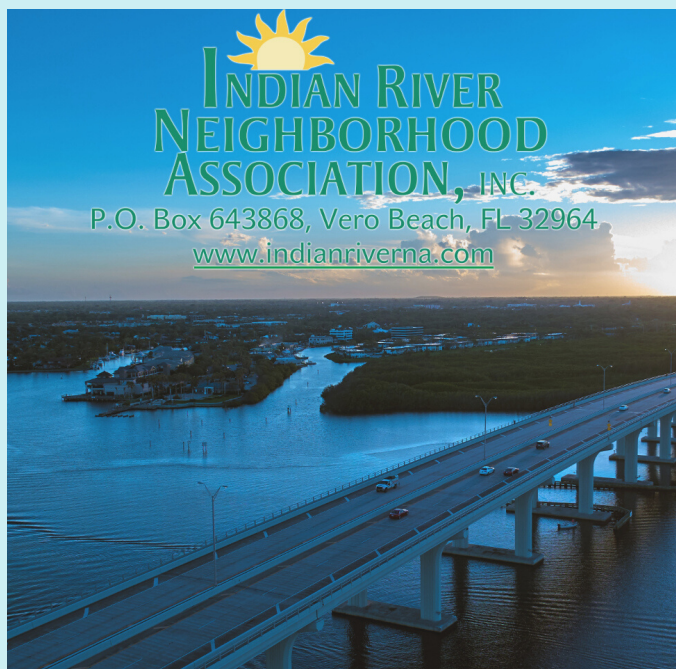
by Susie McDaniel
IRNA Outreach Interim Director

The purpose of the Indian River Neighborhood Association is to identify, study, educate, and advocate for smart growth and environmental protection of our county, and the municipalities therein, so that future generations may enjoy the quality of life we presently enjoy.

IRNA was incorporated in 2004 by a group of residents concerned with the impending growth of Indian River County. It is made up of non-partisan volunteers from neighborhoods throughout our County who share a common goal to preserve and protect our quality of life. We are pro-business, for managed growth and the protection of our natural resources. We have no self-interest, no land ownership or profit motives.

The IRNA will continue to monitor growth, development, and water quality issues.

The IRNA is supported by donations from people like you. IRNA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and contributions are tax deductible.



KEEP INDIAN RIVER BEAUTIFUL

by Daisy Packer

Keep Indian River Beautiful is a 501c3 non-profit organization. Our mission is to unite our community through environmental responsibility. As a Keep America Beautiful affiliate, we focus on three main goals: Improving Recycling, Ending Litter, and Beautifying Our Community. Our number one objective is to unite residents under the common purpose to KEEP INDIAN RIVER BEAUTIFUL for all generations.

There are many volunteer opportunities with KIRB. Please connect with us via our website at <https://www.keepindianriverbeautiful.org> or follow us on Facebook.

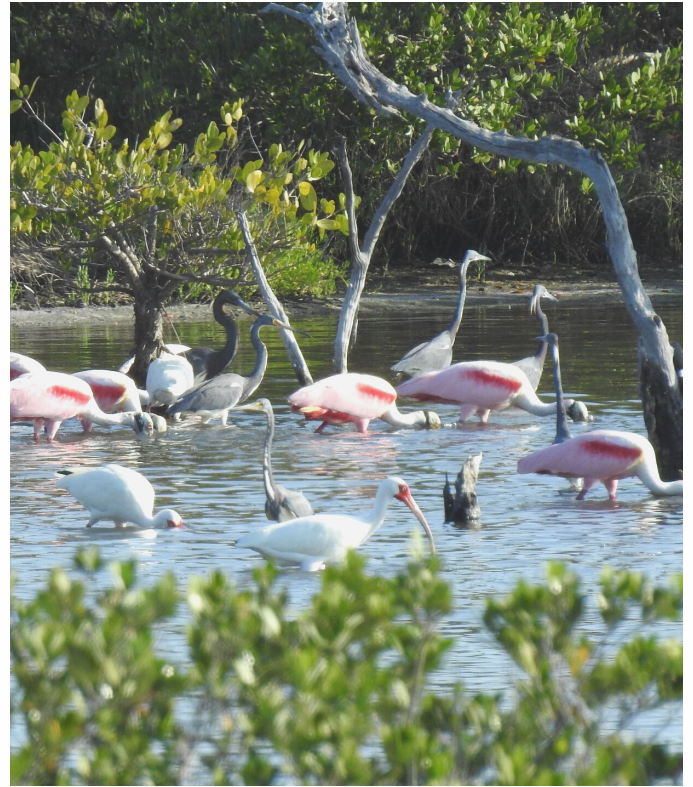
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

by Jeremy Edwardson & Edward Perri

PELICAN ISLAND

Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge holds the distinction of being our Nation's first national wildlife refuge. The Refuge has provided a natural home for fish and wildlife, while proudly serving as the ambassador for the development of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Through the creation of 568 refuges throughout the nation since its designation in 1903, Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge has stood as a testament to our nation's commitment to the conservation of natural lands.

As the nation's first refuge we strive to set an example, not only by carrying out the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System but also by protecting the historical and ecological importance of the refuge's 5400+ acres. The Refuge enhances and restores habitat for migratory birds and threatened and endangered species, and increases public understanding through outreach, interpretation, environmental education, and compatible recreation.



ARCHIE CARR

The Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge stretches across 20.5 miles between Melbourne Beach and Wabasso Beach along Florida's east coast in Brevard and Indian River Counties. The refuge was established in 1991 and was named after the late Dr. Archie Carr, Jr., in honor of his extraordinary contribution to sea turtle conservation. Archie Carr NWR also supports efforts to educate thousands of residents and visitors about the unique characteristics of the barrier island ecosystem.

The refuge was designated to protect nesting habitat for the most significant loggerhead sea turtle nesting in the world and the most significant area for green turtle nesting in North America. The long stretches of quiet, undisturbed sandy beaches, with little or no artificial light, are essential to the reproductive success and survival of the 15,000 to 30,000 sea turtle nests we receive annually.

ORCA (OCEAN RESEARCH & CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION)

The Ocean Research & Conservation Association (ORCA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization focused on preserving the Indian River Lagoon through science, restoration, advocacy and education. ORCA works to collect accurate and scientifically defensible data on water quality and its impact on the marine ecosystems, provide the data to the public and decision makers in an easily understandable format, and engage communities in marine conservation action.

ORCA's Citizen Science Program educates and engages community members in solving the problems that are leading to the degradation of the Indian River Lagoon. Our educators and scientists train citizen volunteers to participate in different components of our research programs and initiatives.



This approach allows us to involve residents of all ages in measuring and monitoring local environmental conditions. If you want to get involved as a citizen scientist, register for one of our presentations or workshops at ORCA's Center for Citizen Science in Vero Beach.

<https://www.teamorca.org/calendar.html>

PELCIAN ISLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

by Dr. Richard Baker

Our Mission is to preserve and protect the animals, plants, and natural communities, and the land and water on which they depend, in Indian River County through education, advocacy, and public awareness. Our vision is an ecosystem that sustains and nurtures native communities of plants and animals and provides for the health and happiness of people. PIAS will continue as the preeminent voice for conservation in Indian River County by educating local governments and citizenry to make conservation a priority in balancing the environmental, economic, and social forces at work in our community.



Our two current major programs are:

1. "Audubon Advocates" an afterschool program for 5th graders from four Title 1 elementary schools at our Audubon House to get kids out into nature and inspire them to become environmental scientists and citizens.
2. "Trees for Life/Plants for Birds" with the goal to plant 100,000 native plants in the next 10 years in order to save our Lagoon, reduce climate change, and bring birds to our back yards. Join us!



SEBASTIAN INLET DISTRICT

by James Gray

Created as an independent special taxing district in 1919 by a special act of the Florida State Legislature, the Sebastian Inlet District was chartered to maintain the navigational channel between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River. The Sebastian Inlet District is responsible for bypassing sand that migrates into the inlet system to downdrift beaches per the Florida Beach and Shore Preservation Act and conducts periodic dredging, channel maintenance, sand bypass, and beach renourishment projects.

Other critical functions include erosion control, emergency beach and dune repair, shoreline stabilization and inlet infrastructure maintenance, public safety in navigation, and environmental monitoring and protection. The Sebastian Inlet District routinely works with marine scientists to conduct biological monitoring of the critically important habitats surrounding the inlet that support a broad range of different species.

SUSTAINABLE SEBASTIAN

by Kimberly Haigler, Environmental Planner

The City of Sebastian's Natural Resources Board (NRB) is a volunteer board of residents, who are committed to protecting, preserving, and promoting our area's environmental resources. The NRB is probably best known for their annual Earth Day Celebration in Riverview Park, but they stay busy year round, whether it's leading programs at the City's Community Oyster Garden site, coordinating clean-up events, or providing valuable input on the City's newest comprehensive plan.

The NRB's largest and most exciting endeavor yet is our Sustainable Sebastian Initiative. "Sustainable Sebastian" is a community-wide environmental initiative, consisting of a collection of tasks to be championed by the Natural Resources Board over the next 5 years, with guidance from City Staff. Tasks were developed in support of sustainability goals for the City, its residents, and its businesses.

For more information on all of our partners, programs, and tasks, please visit our website: <https://www.cityofsebastian.org/260/Natural-Resources-Board>



TEMPLE BETH SHALOM

by Rabbi Michael Birnholz



Temple Beth Shalom hosts a Garden (of Eden) inspired by the flora and agriculture of the land of Israel and the Hebrew Bible whose produce, beauty and spaces enhances the celebration and observance of holy moments and holidays and help us connect with experiences of our ancestors and the stories and values of Torah. Rabbi Michael Birnholz offers different frameworks, activities, and ideas for using a garden to experience spirituality and demonstrate the spiritual values for taking care of a garden specifically and nature in general. If the Garden of Eden was humanity's first classroom it should not be a surprise that a garden (even if it is one large pot with three plants) has the opportunity to be a magnificent place of learning, experiencing and connecting. Beyond our own Garden projects, we seek to collaborate to plant trees, care for nature and promote sustainability in the wider community. Tbsvero.org.

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR TO THE LAGOON

by Katherine Booth

A new nonprofit coming soon! Be A Good Neighbor to the Lagoon, has a mission to advocate and educate for meaningful changes in awareness about the benefits of Florida native plants and the environmental destructiveness of landscaping practices that negatively impact the health of the Indian River Lagoon. Through education and advocacy, Be A Good Neighbor to the Lagoon seeks to persuade COA's and HOA's that fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides applied to grass and especially around stormwater retention ponds are toxic and threatening to groundwater and the Indian River Lagoon.

OTHER MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

- [County Extension Master Gardeners](#)
- [Sustainable Kashi](#)
- [FL DEP - Office of Resiliency and Coastal Protection](#)

ABOUT THE COALITION

continued from page 1

The Coalition meets quarterly on the 2nd Thursdays of February, May, August, and November at 10:30 am. The Environmental Learning Center serves as the facilitator for the Coalition, creates the newsletters, and is working to produce partner spotlight videos so that we can all learn about the initiatives of each group and how to get involved. The group also will be working to create uniform public messaging materials and an environmental dashboard comprised of data that is being collected by the various groups so that we can observe the big picture change over time in Indian River County. Questions can be directed to Barb@DiscoverELC.org. Thanks for reading our first Quarterly Coalition Newsletter! We are happy to be on this crucial journey with you.

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE THIS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER!