

INDIAN RIVER LAGOON COALITION - A CALL TO ACTION



Our Indian River Lagoon is on life support, dying before our eyes. This is a call to develop a unified plan to work together to restore the Lagoon before it's too late.

The Indian River Lagoon's seagrass beds are the biological foundation of the 156 mile long estuarine ecosystem which supports the coastal economy of 5 counties. This ecosystem is in dire need of our directed, concerted assistance. We recognize and commend significant efforts by government, individuals and organizations that have contributed to the knowledge of the lagoon and its varied habitats, increased awareness and worked to correct some of the problems.

Unfortunately, continued degradation of the Lagoon indicates that those efforts have been insufficient. Success in turning this trend will require the leadership and financial support of federal, state, county and city governments in cooperation with non-profit organizations, corporations, small businesses and individuals. Government leadership is essential to solve this problem because it has the power to construct improvements, regulate, fund, enforce, acquire land, mitigate and provide services.

Research and monitoring of the Lagoon provide data that demonstrate the gravity of the problem, but simultaneously can guide us towards future solutions necessary to revive the Lagoon.

1. Seagrass coverage is the prime indicator of the health of the Lagoon⁽¹⁾. During a two year period (2009-11) there has been an estimated 43% loss in area covered by seagrass which is equivalent to approximately 53 square miles⁽²⁾.
2. The Lagoon contributes \$3.7 billion to the coastal economy annually⁽³⁾. Seagrass productivity contributes between \$10-20,000 annually per acre per year in economic benefit⁽⁴⁾. Based on seagrass losses over the last two years the economic loss is approximately \$340 million annually⁽⁵⁾.
3. Chemicals are degrading the Lagoon. Lesions on fishes and sea turtles, flesh-eating fungus on dolphins and fish kills are increasingly common, demonstrating declining habitat quality⁽⁶⁾.
4. Habitat loss of seagrass beds, mangroves, oyster reefs and wetlands is affecting the viability of lagoon and ocean fisheries, as well as bird and manatee health and will continue to decline unless action is taken!
5. High nutrient inputs to Lagoon waters result from storm water releases, runoff, seeping septic systems and overflow events at sewage treatment plants. The cumulative results of those events reduce water quality creating a chain of negative impacts on the Lagoon, including recent algae superblooms.

The health of the Indian River Lagoon is a foundation of economic viability and social wealth for the Treasure and Space Coasts. An overall vision and viable plan to restore the Lagoon back to health is the top priority. We the undersigned believe a successful Lagoon remediation will require government leadership and community commitment by all. We cannot delay – the future of the Lagoon is in our hands and must be addressed on our watch

This document is a “Call to Action” for our governments to accept this leadership role.

Individual: _____

Organization: _____

Contact Person: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP+4: _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Return completed form to:
Patricia Tierney
3275 Dixie Hwy NE
Palm Bay, FL 32905
SaveTheIRL@gmail.com

References:

1. IRL NEP, Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Plan. 2008. Indian River Lagoon assessment and analysis update, final report, contract no. 24706. Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program, Palm Bay, FL.
Steward, J.S., R. Brockmeyer, R. Virnstein, P. Gostel, P. Sime, and J. VanArman. 2003. Indian River Lagoon Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Plan, 2002 Update. St. Johns River Water Management District, Palatka, Florida and South Florida Water Mangement District, West Palm Beach, Florida
2. St John’s Water Management District; preliminary data
3. Environmental Protection Agency, National Estuary Program, 2007
4. Dennis Hanisak, PhD, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, personal communication
5. 33,920 acres of seagrass loss in the IRL from 2009-2011 x \$10,000/acre/year
6. Edith Widder, PhD, Ocean Research and Conservation Association, personal communication