



# Indian River Land Trust

Protect the Land that Protects the Lagoon

# LANDMARKS

Winter 2023

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## Oyster Bar Marsh is Now Open!

Thanks to a long-standing partnership between the Indian River Land Trust and Indian River County, Oyster Bar Marsh Trail is open to the public! Visitors are welcomed by a beautifully landscaped parking area with native plantings provided by the Land Trust. Past the trailhead kiosk lies a native plant botany trail with clever ID markers.

The main trail rings a vast mangrove wetland, which is an impoundment designed to control mosquitoes. This wetland is actively managed as a nursery for aquatic species in the Indian River Lagoon. As trail users venture further, a boardwalk winds through mangroves before yielding a pleasing view of a pond where wading birds stalk their next meal. A scenic Lagoon overlook is  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the parking area and enjoys a view of Round Island Riverside Park where dolphins and kayakers are common. Offshore, a seagrass bed draws manatees to its underwater feast. The more adventuresome may continue up to 1.5 miles before making the return trip and are rewarded with some benches offering panoramic views of the Lagoon.

Oyster Bar Marsh resembles the Lagoon Greenway public-private partnership, namely IRLT working closely with Indian River County, the Florida Inland Navigation District, Indian River Mosquito Control District, and the Florida Communities Trust. The bulk of the property was purchased by the County in 2001, leveraging local bond funds and state grants. The Land Trust was able to acquire the remaining parcels needed for the trail in 2015. Additional Land Trust fundraising efforts paid for the engineering design and permitting, as well as implementation of a native plant landscaping plan crafted by professional landscape architect Elizabeth Gillick, a Land Trust Board member who provided her services pro bono.

It is with the generous support of you, our dedicated members, that IRLT is able to continue protecting special places such as Oyster Bar Marsh, while providing generations to come with memorable, life-shaping experiences in nature. For more information, visit us online at [www.irlt.org](http://www.irlt.org).



## Indian River Land Trust

# Thanks all

who sponsored our  
Annual Benefit on

**December 7, 2022.**



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### -Special Thanks-

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Rock City Gardens







# Celebrating 10 Years of Volunteer Service to IRLT



## Volunteer Spotlight: Jim Shea

Since 2013, Jim Shea has been sharing his love of birds by serving as a volunteer birding guide for the Indian River Land Trust. Growing up in Miami, Jim became hooked on birding during Boy Scout camping trips to the Biscayne Bay area. His mom was an active Audubon Society member during his childhood, and started visiting Vero Beach with Jim in the late 1950's. After retiring from Miami Dade Fire Rescue, followed by a few decades in the Florida Keys, Jim and his wife, Christine, decided to make Vero Beach their home. As a retired public servant, he was excited to get involved in the community. As an active member in the Pelican Island Audubon Society, Jim enjoys sharing his knowledge and passion for birds with groups at the Land Trust's Bee Gum Point Preserve.

Bee Gum Point is located along the Atlantic Flyway, an important migratory route for hundreds of bird species. During his countless walks through the years, Jim and Land Trust staff have counted more than 150 bird species on this protected property. When asked what he enjoys most about his volunteer role, Jim said he appreciates sharing the opportunity to view our precious wildlife with people who are interested in learning. "Bee Gum is one of the few places left in Indian River County where people can find a semblance of what Florida was like when I was a kid." Jim is pleased that the Land Trust was able to protect this unique property for future generations to enjoy.

Many thanks to Jim for his dedication and commitment to IRLT. We hope you'll consider joining him on a tour this season!

## IRLT Mourns a Long-Time Friend

With the passing of Director Emeritus, Michael O'Haire, the Land Trust lost a long-time supporter and a committed friend. Michael passed away on October 3, 2022 after serving for more than two decades as an IRLT Advisor, Director and then Director Emeritus. As IRLT's real estate attorney during that time, Michael helped the Land Trust to complete more than 30 land acquisition transactions for 1,200 acres and 12 miles of shoreline along the Indian River Lagoon. In whatever way Michael was engaged with the Land Trust, he always exhibited the utmost care and kindhearted humor. He will be sorely missed.

# Engage, Participate, Learn on Land Trust Properties

Thanks to a dedicated group of volunteer guides, our Birding and Conservation Tours are back for another exciting season! To learn more or to RSVP, we invite you to visit our website for the most up-to-date information. All tours are free and open to the public, but RSVPs are required in advance.

Volunteers also help our Land Stewardship staff with property clean-ups and invasive species removals. We hope you will consider joining us for one of these fun days too! RSVPs are required.

**Questions? Call the office: 772-794-0701**  
**or visit [www.irlt.org](http://www.irlt.org) for more info.**  
**Tours made possible by Rehman**

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## Tour Schedule

Sat, Feb 11	Birding Tour	Bee Gum Point	7:00 AM
Wed, Feb 15	Conservation Tour	Bee Gum Point	10:00 AM
Thur, Feb 16	Conservation Tour	Oyster Bar Marsh	9:30 AM
Tue, Feb 28	Conservation Tour	Lagoon Greenway	10:00 AM
Sat, Mar 11	Birding Tour	Bee Gum Point	7:00 AM
Wed, Mar 15	Conservation Tour	Bee Gum Point	10:00 AM
Fri, Mar 17	Volunteer Clean-Ups	Air Potato Round-Up TRW Trail	9:30 AM
Fri, Mar 17	Conservation Tour	Oyster Bar Marsh	9:30 AM
Tue, Mar 28	Conservation Tour	Lagoon Greenway	10:00 AM
Fri, Mar 31	Volunteer Clean-Ups	Air Potato Round-Up Coastal Oaks	9:30 AM
Sat, Apr 15	Birding Tour	Bee Gum Point	7:00 AM
Sat, May 13	Birding Tour	Bee Gum Point	7:00 AM



Protect the lagoon, support a local business and treat yourself or someone you love to a night off of cooking!



## Stay at Home Fundraiser

**Beginning February 2023 - April 30, 2023**

**IRLT is pleased to partner with Ryder's Gourmet Market on Cardinal Drive for our annual Stay at Home Fundraiser.**

Please send us \_\_\_\_\_ certificates at \$135.00 each. Certificates are valid until June 15, 2023.

**Each certificate includes the following from Ryder's daily selection:**

- Dinner and dessert for two
- A bottle of wine from the IRLT Collection

Payment information:

- ☐ By check payable to Indian River Land Trust
- ☐ By credit card as follows:

Total Amount \$: \_\_\_\_\_ Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Expires: \_\_\_\_\_ Billing Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please visit [www.irlt.org](http://www.irlt.org) for more info

**Thank you! You will receive your certificates and donation receipt by mail.**

Reserve your certificate by April 30, 2023.



## Sip and Shop

**March 10, 2023**

**at J. McLaughlin in the Village Shops,  
6210 FL-A1A**

A portion of every purchase made at this J. McLaughlin location on March 10 will go back to support the Indian River Land Trust.

Special thanks to J. McLaughlin and all of you for the many ways you help Protect the Land that Protects the Lagoon.



## Stewardship Update

IRLT's Land Stewardship staff were busy during the 2022 hurricane season. After Hurricane Ian's arrival in late September, Dave Fuss and JD Hart spent several weeks assessing damage and clearing obstructions from trails and access roads. Just over a month later, Hurricane Nicole paid a visit to the Treasure Coast and staff repeated the damage assessment and cleanup process. In both cases, we were spared the storms' worst and public trails were opened in a timely fashion.

Native plants on conservation lands are naturally resilient and often rebound quickly. In the case of these storms, numerous invasive Brazilian peppers were downed, helping to control these unwanted invaders. The biggest impact from the storms was high water levels that inundated IRLT's coastal properties for more than a week after Ian and during unusually high tides following Nicole. Significant erosion occurred along access roads and trails along mosquito impoundments and will largely be addressed by the Indian River Mosquito Control District. A cabin cruiser which lost its mooring in the Lagoon was washed into some mangroves on a Land Trust preserve north of the Barber Bridge (see photo). Local and state agencies will handle its removal.

Storm season in Florida can certainly bring some unwanted surprises. However, it's reassuring to know that the forests and wildlife on Land Trust properties continue to have a safe place to thrive! As an example, staff recently discovered threatened gopher tortoises on two properties where they had not been seen for many years.







## County Bond Referendum Approved!

This past November, 78% of Indian River County voters supported the County's \$50 million bond referendum to acquire environmentally important land throughout our exceptional county. Earlier in 2022, the Indian River Land Trust Board took the lead by offering significant financial and staff resources to promote the initiative which enjoyed the highest voter support of five county land protection measures across the state.

Land Trust staff worked closely with other non-profit groups, including the Indian River Neighborhood Association and the Pelican Island Audubon Society, to connect with our residents this past fall about the importance of the referendum. The Trust for Public Land provided critically needed funding and expertise during the effort.

The County bond funds will be used to acquire natural areas to protect our drinking water, preserve our waterways, and conserve wildlife habitat. The County process to review and prioritize properties for protection will begin later this year.

**Thank you to everyone who voted "FOR BONDS" this past November!**

## Unique Research at Indian River Land Trust's Bee Gum Point Preserve

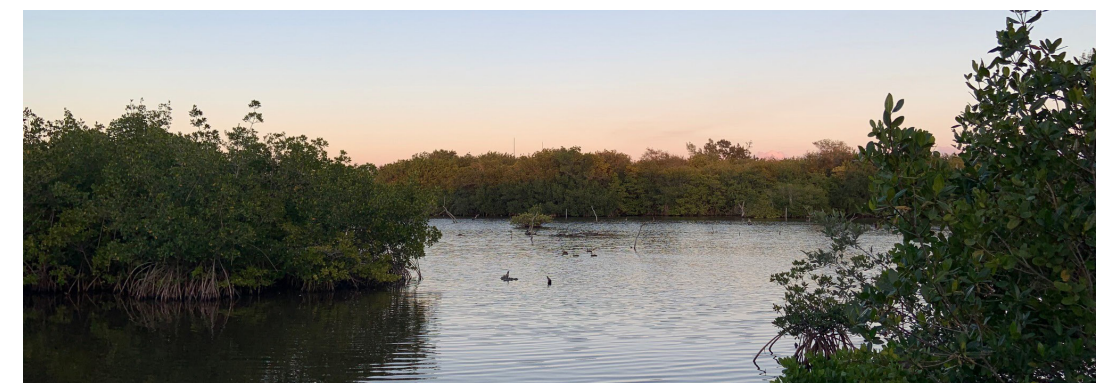
The Indian River Lagoon has been plagued by an onslaught of water quality issues that has resulted in the devastating loss of approximately 70% of all seagrass over the last decade. This has triggered a cascade of ecological setbacks, from a decline in fish populations to the demise of hundreds of beloved manatees.

Fortunately, the Indian River Land Trust has discovered its Bee Gum Point Preserve is a natural nursery for one particular species of seagrass, *Ruppia maritima*, commonly known as Widgeon grass. Research professor Dr. Dennis Hanisak and his team from the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at Florida Atlantic University are studying the seagrass population at the Preserve. They've begun harvesting plant material and seeds which are being grown in large tanks at their nursery on the university campus.

As efforts to improve water quality throughout the Lagoon gain momentum, wide-scale restoration of seagrass beds is becoming a top priority. Dr. Hanisak intends to use the Widgeon grass from Bee Gum Point Preserve to aid in Lagoon restoration efforts. This is an exceptional example of how the Land Trust is preserving and protecting ecologically significant property with the potential to save our Lagoon.

In addition to the seagrass research, Bee Gum Point was featured during a recent multi-agency visit as part of a program evaluation of the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (NEP) by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Bee Gum Point Preserve was highlighted because it is part of the study funded by the NEP to determine alternative methods for boosting the populations of important sportfish such as tarpon and snook living in mosquito impoundments. During a visit to Bee Gum Point with EPA staff and members of the Indian River Lagoon Council and Management Board, the IRLT research team demonstrated the state-of-the-art methods and equipment being used for this research.

As illustrated by Bee Gum Point, conserved properties provide unique opportunities for institutions and agencies to engage in critical research centered on improving the Indian River Lagoon and the species that call it home.







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