



Indian River Land Trust

Conserving Land and Water

LANDMARKS

Winter 2026

COASTAL OAKS PRESERVE – A Place for Education, Research & Discovery

The Indian River Land Trust is creating something extraordinary at **Coastal Oaks Preserve** (pictured above) - a place where nature, learning, and community will come together. The preserve, which encompasses 226 acres and a mile of Indian River Lagoon shoreline, is located in southern Indian River County on US Hwy 1. Coastal Oaks is becoming a **living classroom** that protects critical habitat while opening the door to hands-on education and scientific exploration for the community.

The Land Trust has made exciting progress with development of the living classroom project. Last summer and fall, skilled contractors completed the installation of more than 80,000 native trees and plants, transforming what was once a tangle of invasive Brazilian pepper trees on a former citrus grove into an alluring native landscape as you enter the preserve. This has been a monumental effort, with oversight by landscape architect Sally Coyle, PLA, ASLA, from Coyle & Caron, Inc., and long-time Land Trust Board members and professional landscape architects Elizabeth Gillick, PLA, ASLA, and Dick Brickman, PLA, FASLA who are volunteering their time and extensive expertise.

The preserve's newly restored entrance is only the beginning. Construction of a **rustic gathering pavilion** - complete with technology-ready wet labs, restrooms, and a scenic boardwalk winding from the parking area to the pavilion - will begin this winter. Moor, Baker and Associates, Architects have donated their professional services to design the pavilion, which will be both a hub and a launching point, supporting everything from youth field trips to adult workshops and environmental research.

The pavilion is a gathering place, but the preserve itself is the living classroom, with its extensive lagoon shoreline and nearly every type of habitat you can find in the coastal region - from mangroves and salt marsh to ancient oak hammocks, towering pine forest and freshwater wetlands. By partnering with organizations and institutions from around the region, Coastal Oaks Preserve will provide a unique, hands-on learning and research experience for all ages.

The Land Trust is raising funds to match a **\$1 million community challenge** that will complete Phase 1 of the living classroom project. Phase 2 will include boardwalk trails and platforms that will allow safe and easy access to the lagoon and mangrove forests. Every dollar expended so far has come from the generosity of supporters like you. Now with this tremendous challenge, gifts will have double the impact.

If you are interested in supporting the project, please contact the Land Trust's Chief Development Officer, Melissa DePriest at 772-794-0701. Special tours can be arranged upon request.



Rendering of the Gathering Pavilion envisioned for Coastal Oaks Preserve.

STAY AT HOME FUNDRAISER

Protect our waterways, open spaces, and green places, support a local business, and treat yourself or someone you love to a night off from cooking!

You are cordially invited to *Stay at Home* to help conserve land and water



We are pleased to partner with Ryder's Gourmet Market, located on Cardinal Drive, for our annual **Stay at Home** fundraiser.

Certificates are \$150 and include dinner and dessert for two, along with a bottle of pre-selected white or red wine. **Certificates can be purchased through April 30, 2026.**



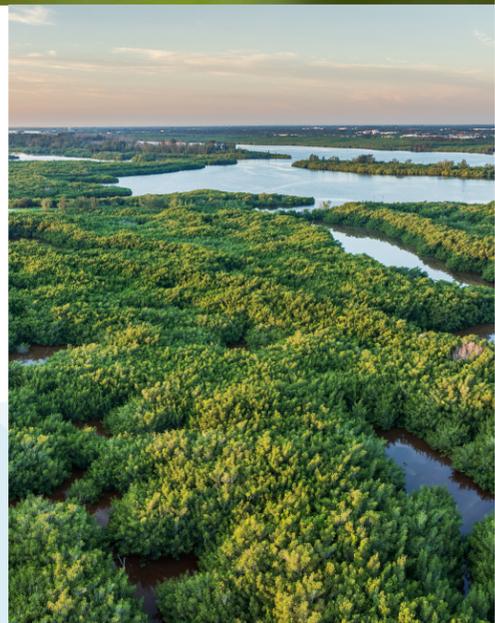
To purchase your Stay at Home certificate, scan the QR code, visit irlt.org, or call our office at 772-794-0701.

JOIN US FOR "IN THE FIELD" FRIDAY

February 27, 2026 | 9 AM - 3 PM

Bee Gum Point Preserve | West end of Fred Tuerk Drive in Indian River Shores

Bee Gum Point Preserve is a 111-acre protected lagoon-front property owned and managed by the Indian River Land Trust. The Preserve is managed as a bird sanctuary with limited public access due to its location along the Atlantic Flyway. The Land Trust is excited to open the Preserve for a full day to allow the community to come see behind the gate! IRLT staff will be on hand to answer questions, and guests can enjoy self-guided hikes.



LAND TRUST RECEIVES MAJOR GRANT FOR NEW HEADWATERS PRESERVE

We are excited to announce a win for conservation! As this newsletter went to print, the Land Trust was on the cusp of receiving state grant funds, totaling \$894,000, from the Florida Communities Trust as partial reimbursement for the acquisition of its 36-acre Headwaters Preserve. The property, situated on the South Prong of the St. Sebastian River along the southwestern border of Sebastian, is in an area under considerable development pressure. Part of the grant funds will be used to restore wildlife habitat and establish amenities such as an observation deck and small picnic pavilion for the public to enjoy this unique place, complete with ancient cypress trees and globally rare fish. Hiking trails will also be added that will one day serve as an important link along the planned St. Sebastian River Greenway.

The St. Sebastian River is home to manatee, alligator, the prehistoric garfish, and important bird rookeries. It is the only natural tributary of the Indian River Lagoon in Indian River County, which underscores its conservation value to our community.

The planning and design for the improvements to Headwaters Preserve will begin later this year. The remaining grant funds may be used to purchase additional conservation properties that are threatened by development as the Land Trust continues to prioritize lands for conservation across the county.

We are grateful for your enthusiasm and support as the Land Trust continues to protect our community's wildlife corridors and green spaces, and provide access for residents and visitors alike to experience special places like Headwaters Preserve. Together, we are shaping a legacy of conservation and connection.



New Entry Signage at Headwaters Preserve

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**Thank you to our Annual Benefit sponsors,
Benefit committee, guests, and volunteers for
supporting our conservation efforts in 2025!**

To see photos of our Annual Benefit, please visit our website at www.irlt.org

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VOLUNTEERS HELP CONNECT OUR COMMUNITY TO NATURE!



Volunteer Spotlight: Anne Lanier

Vero Beach has long been shaped by people whose deep love of this place inspires them to give back. Among them is Anne Lanier, whose commitment to the Indian River Land Trust spans more than 15 years. Anne first became involved with IRLT in 2009, but her connection to the land stretches much further - back to 1971, when she moved to Vero Beach and raised her three daughters surrounded by the county's natural beauty.

Anne's middle daughter, Becky, had a special passion for nature and water quality. Her enthusiasm ignited Anne's own love for the environment, and today, volunteering with the Land Trust serves as a meaningful way for Anne to stay connected to Becky's memory. Becky passed away in 2004

at just 29, a loss no parent should ever endure. Anne continues to honor her legacy by supporting causes that were important to her.

Community service has always been central to Anne's life. She taught in Indian River County schools for 20 years, has actively served for more than a decade on the board of the Mental Health Association, and was a charter member of Impact 100, also serving on its board for many years.

Anne was first introduced to the Land Trust when invited as a guest to the Annual Benefit, and soon after became a dedicated member and volunteer - especially in the field, where she loves learning about local flora and fauna. She has served on IRLT's Annual Benefit Committee for more than a decade. What Anne values most about being involved with the Land Trust is the shared passion she feels from the staff, board, and supporters, and the opportunity to help protect the lands, waters, and wildlife she cares about - turtles, manatees, birds, and more.

Many thanks to Anne for her unwavering support, her generous spirit, and the meaningful way she continues to strengthen and inspire the Indian River Land Trust community.

ENGAGE, PARTICIPATE, AND LEARN ON LAND TRUST PROPERTIES

The Indian River Land Trust's most popular tours and events return this season. Explore the wonders of our local ecosystem. Whether you prefer bird watching along the Atlantic Flyway, native plant identification, or understanding the natural features of Land Trust preserves, join our expert volunteer tour guides to learn about current conservation efforts in our community! To learn more or to RSVP, visit our website (irlt.org) for the most up-to-date information. All tours are free and open to the public, but **RSVP'S ARE REQUIRED IN ADVANCE.**

Volunteers also help our land stewardship staff with property clean-ups and invasive plant removals. We hope you will consider joining us for one of these fun days too! **RSVP'S ARE REQUIRED.**

TOUR DATES

All tours made possible by
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DUE TO LIMITED SPACE, RSVP'S ARE REQUIRED FOR ALL IRLT EVENTS. Reserve Online www.irlt.org Call Ahead 772.794.0701

BIRDING TOURS

7:00AM

02/17
TUESDAY

Bee Gum Point

03/26
THURSDAY

Lagoon Greenway

04/09
THURSDAY

Lagoon Greenway

05/14
THURSDAY

Lagoon Greenway

NATIVE PLANT TOURS

9:30AM

03/10
TUESDAY

Lagoon Greenway

03/31
TUESDAY

Bee Gum Point

04/11
SATURDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

04/21
TUESDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

05/05
TUESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

05/12
TUESDAY

Lagoon Greenway

NATURE PRESERVE TOURS

9:30AM

02/04
WEDNESDAY

Spoonbill Marsh

02/11
WEDNESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

02/12
THURSDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

02/18
WEDNESDAY

Bee Gum Point

03/04
WEDNESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

03/12
THURSDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

03/18
WEDNESDAY

Bee Gum Point

04/09
THURSDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

04/14
TUESDAY

Bee Gum Point

04/15
WEDNESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

NEW! BEEKEEPING TOUR

9:30AM

04/16
THURSDAY

Bee Gum Point

VOLUNTEER CLEAN-UPS

9:30AM

02/11
WEDNESDAY

Invasive Plant Removal
Lagoon Greenway

02/20
FRIDAY

Invasive Plant Removal
Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

03/06
FRIDAY

Invasive Plant Removal
Coastal Oaks Preserve

03/20
FRIDAY

Invasive Plant Removal
Lagoon Greenway

HELP SAVE THE FLORIDA PANTHER

The Indian River Land Trust, along with the Alliance of Florida Land Trusts, is asking for your help to secure dedicated state funding to protect the Florida panther, black bear, and other important wildlife.

In 2014, 75% of Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment to provide at least **\$500 MILLION A YEAR FOR 20 YEARS** to Florida Forever—a program created to protect the state's natural lands, water resources, wildlife habitats, and parks. These funds come from real estate transaction fees and are meant to support:

1. **ACQUISITION OF LAND** by the state to permanently protect natural areas.
2. **RURAL AND FAMILY LANDS PROGRAM** – helping ranchers protect their land from development by purchasing development rights on these properties.
3. **FLORIDA COMMUNITIES TRUST** – grants for cities, counties, and land trusts to buy land for public recreation and conservation.

Unfortunately, much of this funding has not been allocated over the past decade, leaving Florida Forever only partially funded. This year, land trusts and other conservation groups statewide are uniting to urge the State Legislature to restore full funding—and **WE NEED YOUR VOICE TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN.**

HOW YOU CAN HELP.

Please contact your state legislators and ask them to fully fund Florida Forever with **\$500 million**, including **\$350 million for the Rural and Family Lands Program** and **\$50 million for the Florida Communities Trust**. Your outreach will help ensure Florida's wildlife and natural lands are protected for generations to come!

STATE SENATOR ERIN GRALL

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Legislative Aide: Susan.Aguirre@myfloridahouse.gov

Their staff want to hear what matters to you.

The Legislature recently convened and will meet through March for the 2026 session, so **now is the time to reach out.** Your voice makes a tremendous difference. Thank you for speaking up!

HOW DOES STATE FUNDING HELP SAVE THE PANTHER?

Florida panthers need large, connected areas of habitat to survive. As development expands, these habitats are being fragmented. State funding is essential for protecting the key lands that connect important natural areas. In 2021, the State Legislature adopted the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act which recognized the importance of a statewide network of more than 18 million acres of connected habitats. Florida Forever funding will keep the Florida Wildlife Corridor intact, support wildlife movement, preserve working ranches, and safeguard Florida's natural resources.

Without steady state investment, the Wildlife Corridor cannot function—and the Florida panther will lose the habitat it needs to survive.

Protecting land today means ensuring the panther has a home tomorrow.



RESTORING WILDLIFE HABITAT FOR THE FUTURE

Do you enjoy viewing wildlife in their natural environment? Well, the Indian River Land Trust is working hard to ensure you will always have that opportunity. Across the nation, native habitats are threatened by development, degradation of water and air quality, and the invasion of non-native species that displace them. Native habitats in Indian River County continue to decrease every year and wildlife such as bobcat, river otter, fox, wading birds, and ducks have fewer places to find food, shelter and clean water. To help reverse this trend, the Land Trust has undertaken multiple habitat restoration projects and has plans for more.

With grant funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Land Trust's Coastal Oaks Preserve and Winter Beach Salt Marsh, more than 20 acres of highly invasive Brazilian pepper trees have been removed to make way for colonization by native high salt marsh plants that support rare species such as the Atlantic salt marsh snake, eastern black rail, diamondback terrapin and a wide variety of wading birds. Not to be overlooked, 35 acres of freshwater marsh and adjoining uplands at Coastal Oaks are

also being restored. Formerly citrus grove containing an abandoned wastewater treatment plant, the area has been transformed with tens of thousands of native flowering plants, shrubs and trees. Meanwhile, removal of Brazilian pepper trees on two other Land Trust properties have restored habitat along more than a mile of the St. Sebastian River and its tributaries, where bobcat, wild turkey, and white-tailed deer have recently been observed.

Photos and drone observations have documented the Land Trust's restoration progress. In addition, the Junior Scientist Fellows Program, in which high school juniors and seniors are mentored by Land Trust staff and FAU-Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute faculty during on-the-ground research projects, are assessing the progress of salt marsh restoration at Coastal Oaks Preserve. The Land Trust is planning at least six additional habitat restoration projects over the next several years, so that wildlife will have more natural space to prosper. Your support helps to ensure that future generations will be able to experience their own wildlife wonders.

COME DISCOVER THE BEAUTY AND CONSERVATION LEGACY OF BRIDGEVIEW

Between 2013 and 2020, the Indian River Land Trust acquired seven properties totaling 300 acres along the west side of the Indian River Lagoon, just north of the Barber Bridge. Together, these lands form **Bridgeview** (pictured below) - a breathtaking stretch of nearly two miles of protected green shoreline along a section of the Lagoon known as The Narrows, visible to all who cross the busy bridge each day.

While this property is not yet open to the public, the Land Trust is pleased to offer all members of our community a rare opportunity to experience its natural, peaceful beauty firsthand at our **Annual Members Event on Saturday, March 28, from 9:00 to 11:30 AM.**

This extraordinary landscape features mangrove forests, high salt marsh, tidal creeks, upland meadows, and sweeping views of the lagoon. Protected forever, Bridgeview stands as one of the most visible and inspiring examples of land conservation in our community.

Guests at our Members Event will enjoy a light breakfast, live music, engaging presentations from community partners, and time for self-guided exploration through this remarkable conservation landscape. It's a morning dedicated to celebrating our shared victories, the power of community support, and the lasting impact of preserving our natural lands for future generations.

We warmly invite you to join us for this special gathering of appreciation, connection, and conservation. Casual attire and walking shoes are recommended. Visit our website for more information. **RSVP by March 20** at 772-794-0701 or rsvp@irlt.org.

We'd like to thank our Members Event sponsors for their continued commitment to land conservation in Indian River County:

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If you are interested in joining this dedicated group of sponsors, please contact the Land Trust's Director of Annual Giving and Marketing, Loreto Murray, at 772-794-0701 x 3.

JOIN THE LAGOON LEGACY SOCIETY

Protecting Nature's Future – Together.

The Indian River Land Trust envisions a community where clear waters sustain life, wildlife flourishes in protected habitat, and the quiet beauty of natural places remains untouched for future generations. By including the Land Trust in your estate plans, you ensure that this vision endures - protecting the lands and waters that nourish life.

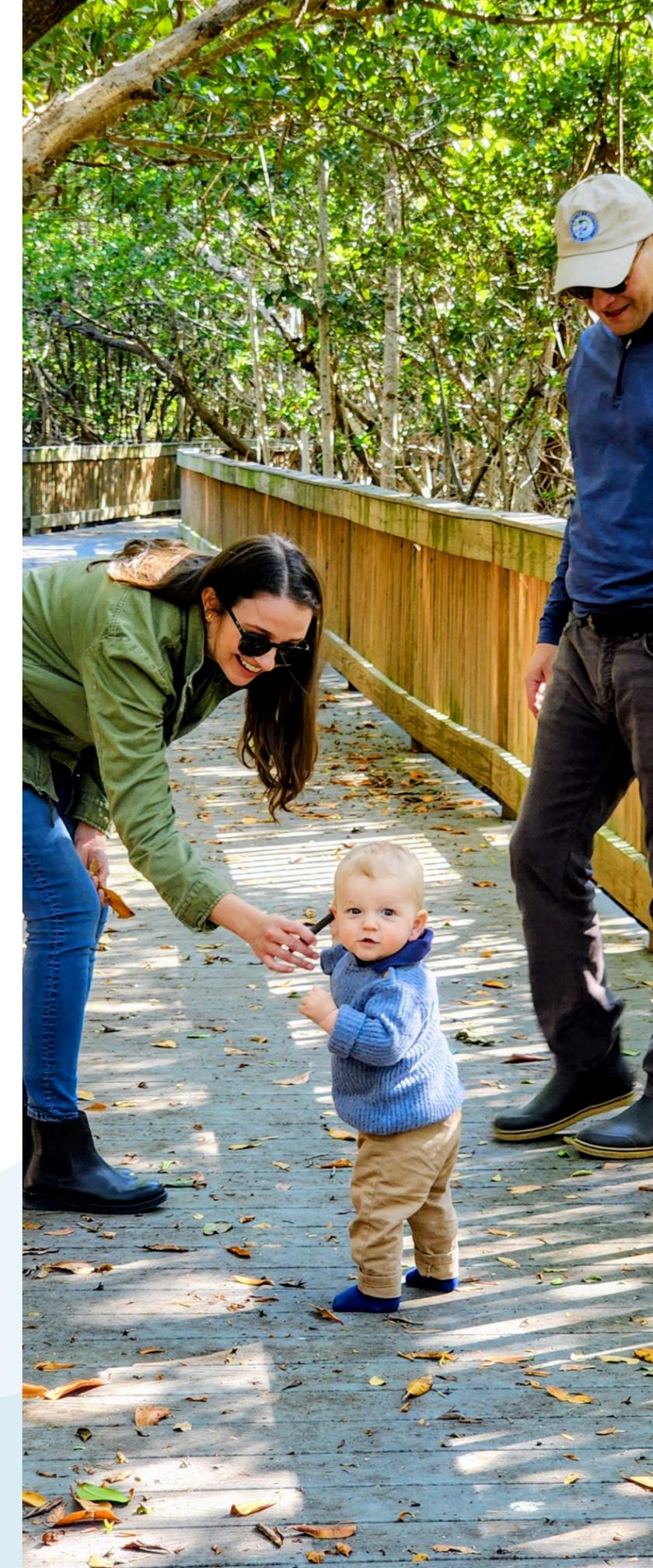
A legacy gift is more than a gesture of generosity - it is a promise. A promise that the lands where young wildlife take their first steps, the scenic views that take our breath away, and the waterways that sustain our community will remain protected long after we are gone.

By joining the Lagoon Legacy Society, you ensure that the places you love today - quiet trails, resilient wetlands, cherished wildlife habitat - will be here to inspire and sustain the generations that follow. Your legacy becomes part of the Land Trust's future, empowering us to act with thoughtful urgency to protect what cannot be replaced.

We invite you to consider making a lasting impact by including the Indian River Land Trust in your will, trust, or other planned gift.

To learn more, please contact the Land Trust's Chief Development Officer, Melissa DePriest at 772-794-0701.

Together, we are protecting the beauty, health, and vitality of Indian River County - creating a legacy of nature that will shelter wildlife and enrich lives for generations to come.





☎ 772-794-0701
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