

INDIAN RIVER COUNTY

Additional acres adjoining Lagoon Greenway in Indian River County could be for future trail expansion

Janet Begley Special to TCPalm.com

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VERO BEACH — Tucked off Indian River Boulevard at Eighth Street are 187 acres known as the Lagoon Greenway, a recreational and educational 3-mile trail system for walking and bicycling.

Managed by the Indian River Land Trust, along with assistance from Indian River County and the Indian River Mosquito Control District, the property provides an opportunity for the public to get to know Old Florida up close and personal.

“It’s a great way to understand the lagoon and the very intricate ecology that goes on here,” said Al Brown from Fort Pierce, who joined in on a scheduled tour of the Lagoon Greenway Tuesday morning. “There are very knowledgeable people on these walks and the tours are free to the public.”

Donna Winter is a volunteer who leads tours of the Greenway three times a year. She said her goal during the tour is to introduce people not only to the local flora and fauna, but to the importance of the Indian River Lagoon and how to protect it.

“There are some things that all of us can do when we live along the lagoon,” said Winter. “Everything that goes into storm drains and canals eventually end up in the lagoon and it’s important that we think about what we’re doing in our homes and yards and how that affects the lagoon.”

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Ken Grudens has led the Indian River Land Trust as executive director for more than 15 years. He said one of his proudest accomplishments is the Greenway.

“What is great about the Greenway is that there are so many users who enjoy it and take care of it as if it was their own,” said Grudens. “In the beginning, there was a question about whether there might be conflicts among the different users, but that has not turned out to be the case. Walkers, bicyclists, dog walkers, it doesn’t matter.”

The Greenway was developed in two parts. In phase one, the trail head parking area was developed, along with the natural surface trail. In phase two, Indian River County provided money to build the elevated boardwalk that rambles through the mangrove forest to an observation deck over the Indian River Lagoon.

“Indian River County has been an excellent partner for the Land Trust,” said Grudens. “They do all of the maintenance on the trail and the boardwalks, and are always ready and willing to help.”

In January, the Land Trust completed the purchase of additional acreage along the lagoon, with 35 acres adjoining the Lagoon Greenway.

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“We made some big acquisitions recently and one of those parcels could be connected easily to the Greenway,” said Grudens. “It’s an exciting prospect for extending the Greenway trail sometime in the future.”

Whether the trail remains 3 miles or is expanded, snowbirds Tom and Jan Cookson from Michigan said walking the Lagoon Greenway is still a favorite activity during the six months they live in Vero Beach.

“There’s so much to learn here,” said Jan Cookson. “Just taking the tour and finding out more about the environment, the lagoon and even the mosquitoes today was very enlightening.”

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Next at the Greenway

What: The 5th Annual Gator Gallop 5K Trail Run/Walk

Where: Lagoon Greenway at Eighth Street and Indian River Boulevard, Vero Beach

When: Saturday, Feb. 22 at 7:30 a.m. The entry fee is \$25 in advance and \$35 on race day.

Why: All proceeds benefit the Indian River Land Trust

Information: Visit www.IRLT.org or call 772-794-0701.