



Indian River Land Trust

Conserving Land and Water

LANDMARKS

Winter 2025

BEE GUM POINT – A Refuge Like No Other

Thanks to the generosity of supporters like you, in 2011 the Indian River Land Trust acquired the 111-acre Bee Gum Point Nature Preserve (picture above). This was the last unprotected property of its size on the barrier island. The acquisition saved it from development of up to 20 waterfront homes along its one-mile of Indian River Lagoon shoreline and extensive interior wetlands. Twenty homes may not seem like a lot, but the impact to the natural resources of this property would have been destructive.

Bee Gum Point is situated on the Atlantic Flyway, a critical corridor for millions of migrating birds traveling back and forth from as far as the tundras of the Northwest Territory to South America. With the generosity and foresight of hundreds of enthusiastic donors, Bee Gum Point is instead **home to more than 150 bird species** that take refuge on the property. The preserve also continues to be **home to a healthy population of the threatened diamondback terrapin turtle** and hosts seagrass beds that may unlock the key to re-establishing seagrasses in the Lagoon and **help our beloved manatees recover**. Additionally, years of scientific research has been conducted in the preserve on the movement of iconic fish species such as tarpon and snook in order to **strengthen fish populations in the Lagoon**.

Your support allows Bee Gum Point to continue to thrive as a place of refuge. Over the years, many residents have visited the preserve through guided tours where they enjoyed the opportunity to connect closely with the natural world. Recent grant funding, matched with your contributions, will allow the Land Trust to make further, much-needed improvements to the water quality of the wetlands and an area of eroding shoreline in the preserve.

Normally closed to the public as a wildlife sanctuary, you can enjoy this preserve during special conservation and birding tours held each year from December to April – RSVPs are required. Additionally, on **Friday, March 7, 2025 the Land Trust is opening the gates of the preserve to the public from 9AM to 3PM**. Please join us to see the preserve first-hand. You will be able to walk or bike to the Lagoon and enjoy the views of a saltwater pond from the William C. Buck Memorial Observation Platform dedicated by the 1830 Family Foundation in honor of the late Bill Buck, a long-time and devoted Land Trust Board member. This special place strikes at the heart of the Land Trust's mission, and would not have been protected forever without your generosity.



William C. Buck Memorial Observation Platform at Bee Gum Point

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, 2025.**



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



SIP AND SHOP

February 21, 2025

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

A portion of every purchase made at this J. McLaughlin location on February 21st 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 our efforts to conserve land and water resources in Indian River County.



A MAJOR STEP FOR A FUTURE GREENWAY: A New Acquisition on the St. Sebastian River

In January 2025, the Indian River Land Trust acquired a second conservation property along the St. Sebastian River, adding 20 additional acres of protected green space in Indian River County. This purchase would not have been possible without your steadfast support.

The property is located on the South Prong of the St. Sebastian River, along the southwestern border of the City of Sebastian, in an area under considerable development pressure. The St. Sebastian River is home to manatee, alligator, the prehistoric garfish, important bird rookeries, and species of globally rare fish. It is the only natural tributary of the Lagoon in Indian River County, which underscores its conservation value to the Land Trust and residents of our community.

The property contains an Old Florida cypress forest that stood long before the cities of Sebastian and Vero Beach were incorporated. The property was purchased from members of the Bob Russell family

which settled in Vero Beach in the 1920's. A portion of the property was a citrus grove for 65 years, but a critical part of it encompasses mature cypress and live oak trees with 1,000 feet of river frontage.

While not yet open to the public, the Land Trust is excited to work with the neighboring landowner, the Marine Resources Council, to extend its planned trail system along the St. Sebastian River and eventually fulfill a long-imagined greenway trail along the river. Plans have recently resumed for a scenic nature trail along the river between Route 510 and Route 512, an area designated by the County as the St. Sebastian River Greenway. The effort to obtain this designation was originally spearheaded by the Land Trust and other local organizations in 2006.

We are grateful for your partnership and unwavering commitment to continue protecting our community's wildlife corridors and green spaces. Together, we are shaping a legacy of conservation and connection. Thank you!

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Thank you to our Annual Benefit sponsors,
Benefit committee, guests, and volunteers for
supporting our conservation efforts in 2024!

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

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VOLUNTEERS HELP CONNECT OUR COMMUNITY TO NATURE!



Volunteer Spotlight: Jim and Terry Byrnes

While financial support from members is essential to achieve its mission, the Land Trust would not be able to accomplish its goals without the efforts of volunteers from the community, whether they are serving on the Board, helping with events, picking up trash, or removing invasive plants from conservation properties. Two such volunteers are tour guides Jim and Terry Byrnes.

Jim and Terry spend the cooler months in Vero Beach and retreat for the warmer months to Ithaca, New York where they lived for years. Also involved with the Finger Lakes Land Trust, they have been IRLT donors

since 2018, began volunteering for trash cleanups in 2022, and stepped into the role of tour guides in 2023 with the opening of the Oyster Bar Marsh Conservation Area. Now in their third season as tour guides, they have enjoyed the opportunity to share this preserved area with many others. Passionate about their love of nature, they feel that, "The natural areas being protected will exist in perpetuity, providing wildlife habitat, helping water quality in the Lagoon and providing places for people to experience nature up close."

And, they aren't shy about advocating for others to get involved, saying "Most people we know have similar concerns about the effect we are having on the environment and the impact this will have on those who follow us, so we encourage our friends to learn about the Land Trust and to get engaged." If you share their interests, please consider volunteering, attending an upcoming tour to learn more about our natural areas, and donating to support our conservation efforts. As Jim and Terry said, "Helping this key organization is an opportunity for all of us. It is great to work with others who share our concerns and want to help in such a direct way."

Thank you, Jim and Terry!

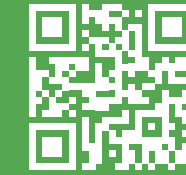
ENGAGE, PARTICIPATE, AND LEARN ON LAND TRUST PROPERTIES

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



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

02/27

THURSDAY

Lagoon Greenway

03/13

THURSDAY

Bee Gum Point

03/27

THURSDAY

Lagoon Greenway

04/17

THURSDAY

Bee Gum Point

NATIVE PLANT TOURS

9:30AM

03/18

TUESDAY

Bee Gum Point

03/25

TUESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

04/05

SATURDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

04/15

TUESDAY

Bee Gum Point

04/19

SATURDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

04/22

TUESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

05/06

TUESDAY

Lagoon Greenway

CONSERVATION TOURS

9:30AM

02/04

TUESDAY

Spoonbill Marsh

02/12

WEDNESDAY

Bee Gum Point

02/13

THURSDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

02/19

WEDNESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

03/06

THURSDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

03/12

WEDNESDAY

Bee Gum Point

03/19

WEDNESDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

04/10

THURSDAY

Oyster Bar Marsh

VOLUNTEER CLEAN-UPS

9:30AM

02/11

TUESDAY

Lagoon Greenway

02/21

FRIDAY

Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail

03/21

FRIDAY

Lagoon Greenway

SAVE OUR MANATEES – TAKE ACTION TODAY

The Indian River Lagoon, a critical habitat for the West Indies manatee along Florida's east coast, has experienced extensive seagrass loss over the years. There is an abundance of scientific evidence indicating that residential septic systems in our county, especially those close to waterways, are polluting the Lagoon. This pollution has been a major contributor to the demise of thousands of acres of seagrass over the past decade. Since seagrasses are their primary food source, manatees have suffered malnutrition, starvation and increased mortality rates in recent years.

In an effort to mitigate this issue and improve water quality in the Lagoon, the Land Trust has joined with the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County, the Economic Opportunities Council and the Indian River Community Foundation to accelerate the conversion of septic systems for income-challenged homeowners located near the Main Relief Canal in the City of Vero Beach. This project has led to the conversion of approximately 30 homes close to a critical Lagoon waterway since its inception a year ago. Additionally, the Land Trust is working with Indian River County to accelerate the conversion of septic systems in two neighborhoods totaling more than 150 homes along the Lagoon abutting 300 acres of Land Trust conservation properties.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

How can you help clean our Lagoon and save our beloved manatees? If you have a septic system for your home, it is imperative to get it pumped out annually to minimize leaching of the septage and keep the drain field from getting overloaded and seeping into the ground water and the Lagoon. This should be completed before the summer rainy season. Don't wait for the tank to become overfilled. If you are not connected to a municipal sewer system, find out how and when you and your neighborhood might be able to connect.

If you are in the City of Vero Beach where many sewer lines are already in place, you can likely connect quickly. With more than 30,000 septic systems still in use across Indian River County, it will take time to convert them all, but it's essential that we do so as quickly as possible. You can be a voice for conservation and our manatees by contacting members of the County Commission and State legislators to let them know we need to act now, before it's too late and irreversible damage is done.



UPDATE ON COUNTY'S ENVIRONMENTAL LANDS ACQUISITION PROGRAM

In November 2022, more than 78% of Indian River County residents voted to approve the County Environmental Lands Bond Acquisition Referendum, a \$50 million program established to conserve and protect ecologically significant lands within the county. The Indian River Land Trust was a strong advocate for the referendum, and since its passage, the Land Trust has nominated for protection three ranch properties totaling 800 acres in the county's western region.

The first nomination period ended in August 2024 and 52 properties were submitted for potential outright purchase or protection with conservation easement agreements that limit future development. After eliminating properties with unwilling sellers, or those that did not meet minimum criteria, 26 properties remained eligible for review by the County's Environmental Lands Acquisition Panel.

The panel, made up of nine members appointed by the County Commission, reviewed and scored these 26 properties over several months. A standard matrix was utilized to keep the scoring process consistent and fair.

The results will be presented to the Board of Commissioners for review this winter, with the goal of finalizing a list of priority lands for conservation. Once Commissioners approve a final list, property appraisals will be commissioned and negotiations will begin with individual landowners. More information on the County Environmental Lands Program can be found by visiting the County website:

<https://indian-river-county-elap-ircgis.hub.arcgis.com/>

REMEMBERING ONE OF OUR OWN

We fondly remember Dr. M. Dennis Hanisak, long-time Land Trust Board Advisor and FAU Harbor Branch Research Professor and faculty member who passed away in May 2024. Dennis joined the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in 1977 where his scientific contributions had great impact on the conservation of the Indian River Lagoon. As an expert in marine plants, he was instrumental in developing long-term seagrass monitoring programs and creating comprehensive management plans for the health of the Lagoon.

Following his belief that scientists need to share with the world what they do and why it is important, Dennis founded the annual Indian River Lagoon Research Symposium and established the public Ocean Science Lecture Series. He also established the Indian River Lagoon Observatory Network, providing real-time water quality and weather data free to the public.



Dr. Hanisak with Junior Scientists

As Director of Harbor Branch's Education Program, Dennis led and developed educational programs for all ages, from grade school through doctorates. His legacy includes Semester By The Sea and the Harbor Branch summer intern program for university students, as well as programs for high school students such as the St. Lucie County School District Marine & Oceanographic Academy. In partnership with the Land Trust, Dennis started the Junior Scientist Fellows Program in Indian River County more than a decade ago, featuring hands-on research at the Land Trust's Coastal Oaks Preserve. True to his passions, his work and spirit will continue to inspire those who are committed to understanding the wonders of the marine environment and finding new and better ways to conserve it.

WELCOMING NEW STAFF

The Land Trust is pleased to announce the addition of two new staff members!



Rose West joins the Land Trust as our new Acquisition Manager. She is a native of northeast Georgia, holds a bachelor's degree in Geography from the University of Georgia and spent more than 14 years in nature park operations and management in Georgia, holding positions as a State Park Manager, municipal Trails and Open Space Manager and Nature Division Administrator. Rose works with local landowners and all of those passionate about helping preserve the beautiful and ecologically important lands of Indian River County. Rose and her husband, Adam, and two children moved to Vero Beach in 2024 and are eager to spend their free time outdoors at the beach and on the water. The moment she set foot here, she knew it was a special place.



Jessica Bischoff joins the Land Trust as our new Operations Manager. She is a native of New Jersey and has lived in Port St. Lucie, FL since 2024. Jessica first attended West Virginia University as a pre-business student and later transferred to Florida Atlantic University, where she obtained her Bachelor's Degree in Marketing. Jessica is excited to be part of an organization devoted to preserving nature and protecting wildlife for generations to come. Her love for the outdoors and camping began at a very young age. She currently enjoys activities such as hiking, horseback riding, cycling, softball, and sitting on the beach with a good book.

MAKE A GIFT TODAY

TO PROTECT THE PARADISE WE CALL HOME

The Indian River Land Trust exists because you share our vision for clean drinking water, thriving wildlife and aquatic life, beautiful waterfront and scenic spaces, and access to the splendors of nature. We ask for your continued trust and support to protect and steward our green spaces and waterways to ensure they will be an asset for the people who live here and the wildlife that rely on them to survive and thrive.

“Supporting the mission of the Land Trust is a wonderful opportunity to protect our environment here. Whether you have a year-round or seasonal home, this is where we all work or play, and also spend time with family. Conservation starts locally. Waiting for someone else to step in is not the best option. The difference each of us can make in preserving what we have here can be truly impactful.”

**Tommy and Caroline Vandeventer,
Land Trust Members**

Your support is critical to protect our slice of paradise and ensure a greener tomorrow for generations to come!



Make your gift today by using the enclosed envelope or by visiting www.irlt.org

Your contribution, no matter the amount, will make a lasting impact by protecting the wildlife, waterways, open spaces and green places we all enjoy, before they are lost forever.

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AND OUR COMMUNITY IS MORE LIVABLE BECAUSE OF YOU!**



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