

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **Q: Why does Indian River County purchase land for conservation?**

In an effort to preserve the unique quality of life in Indian River County, the County took steps in 1990 to conserve significant natural resources that might otherwise be subjected to development. The County established objectives in its Comprehensive Plan to acquire certain acreages of different types of environmental land. The benefit to residents of conserving specific conservation lands include: improving water quality and protecting aquifers and watersheds; protecting a community's scenic beauty, vistas and open space by keeping landscapes free of sprawl; conservation of protected species; providing buffers to State parks and other public lands; contributing to regional Greenways and conservation efforts; providing educational opportunities for the public to observe and learn about native plant and animal species; and providing the public with beautiful trails and amenities to use for recreation.

## **Q: Where do the funds come from for this conservation land purchase and management?**

The Board of County Commissioners appointed a Land Acquisition Advisory Committee (LAAC) to advise the Board on land acquisition matters and established the Indian River County Environmental Lands Program. Voters approved an ad valorem tax bond referendum of up to \$26 million in 1992 to fund this program. A second bond referendum of \$50 million was approved in 20xx; to date the majority of these funds have been expended to acquire conservation lands. Both of these bond referendums were leveraged by the County with other funding opportunities (i.e. grant funds, partnership with other entities, etc.) so that the actual monies directed at conservation efforts was approximately \$xx million. To date there are over 11,900 acres in permanent protection through the County's acquisitions and partnerships with other agencies. Approximately 2,300 acres of conservation lands are directly managed by the County.

Conservation areas that were purchased have detailed land management plan that direct the long-term management goals and objectives, which includes public access improvements, educational opportunities, wildlife conservation, etc. Management of the conservation areas is provided through MTSU (Multi Taxing Service Unit) which is part of the County's annual budget. Currently the conservation lands are managed by a conservation lands manager assisted by two staff members, with support provided by the Parks Division. Management funds are leveraged through grant applications and funding for public use improvements and management. Volunteer assistance is an integral component of the County's land management efforts; in 2016 volunteers contributed approximately 2400 hours of field time at the various County preserves (which equates to over \$20,000 of services).

## **Q: How can I get involved to help with conservation efforts in Indian River County?**

- *Contact the Indian River County Parks Department (772) 589-9223 if you observe activities at County managed conservation areas that may be detrimental to our conservation efforts.*
- *Keep your domesticated pets safe by bringing them in at night, and leashing them to prevent predation to native wildlife.*
- *Do not feed scrub jays in the wild – you can literally be killing them with your kindness*
- *Please do not speed through areas where there are known wildlife crossings.*
- *Use native plants to landscape your yard. Refer to the home page of our website for information concerning native plant utilization and providers.*
- *Consider planting a small pollinator garden in your yard to encourage use by butterflies and other species critical to the proliferation of flowering plants, including fruits and vegetables we consume every day.*

- *Participate with shoreline, beach, park or roadside cleanup events in your area. If you are enjoying a day in the outdoors you are encouraged to pick up litter or discarded fishing line and dispose of it properly.*
- *Download Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) gopher tortoise smartphone app. [This app](#) will allow you to take a picture of a gopher tortoise and record its location by uploading the photo and its GPS coordinates from your Smartphone to FWC. This will help the FWC get a better estimate of where large populations of gopher tortoises live.*

*Go to <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/gopher-tortoise/app/> to find out how to download the app to your smartphone. VOLUNTEER in your community! Some of the local volunteer opportunities may be found at the following locations:*

1. *Indian River County Conservation Lands: Refer to the home page of our website for upcoming volunteer opportunities*
2. *Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: <http://myfwc.com/get-involved/volunteer/programs/>*
3. *Florida Native Plant Society: <http://www.fnps.org/participate/volunteer>*
4. *Indian River Land Trust: <http://www.irlt.org/> Phone - (772) 742-285*
5. *Friends of the Sebastian River: <http://www.fssr.org/contact.htm>*
6. *Florida Department of Environmental Protection: <https://www.floridastateparks.org/get-involved/volunteer>*
7. *Pelican Island Audubon Society: [piadubon@bellsouth.net](mailto:piadubon@bellsouth.net) Phone - (772) 567-3520*
8. *Keep Indian River County Beautiful: [dpacker@KIRB.org](mailto:dpacker@KIRB.org) Phone - (772) 226-7738*
9. *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: <https://www.fws.gov/volunteers>*
10. *The Nature Conservancy: <http://www.nature.org/about-us/volunteer/search-volunteer-opportunities/index.htm>*

**Q: What do I do if I see a gopher tortoise crossing a road?**

*The FWC recommends the following:*

- *Do not take the tortoise with you or move it to a different area.*
- *You can move the gopher tortoise across the road in the same direction in which it was headed*
- *Do not put your life in danger to move the tortoise.*
- *Do not put the tortoise in water - gopher tortoises are terrestrial turtles which means they live on land.*
- *Take an injured tortoise to the nearest licensed wildlife rehabilitator or call the FWC for further information at 888-404-3922.*

*Once a gopher tortoise has been removed from the wild and its place of origin is unknown, it is referred to as a waif tortoise. Waif tortoises cannot be returned to the wild and must be kept in captivity for the rest of their lives. It is important to work together to decrease the number of waif tortoises and keep gopher tortoises wild. For more information visit: [MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise](http://MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise)*

**Q: What do I do if I have gopher tortoises on my property?**

*Gopher tortoises are commonly seen in suburban areas around Florida. If a gopher tortoise is living in your yard, take the opportunity to learn about a threatened species and how to conserve it. Here are a few tips from the FWC website:*

- *Gopher tortoises graze naturally on a wide variety of plants, including broadleaf grasses, wiregrass, prickly pear cactus, wild grape, blackberry, blueberry, beautyberry and many more.*
- *They generally feed within 160 feet of their burrows but have been known to travel more than twice that distance to meet their foraging and nutritional needs.*
- *Grow plants native to Florida in your yard, since non-native plants can be harmful to Florida's biodiversity. Many native plants will blend in beautifully with your landscaping and also attract native species of birds and butterflies. [A Florida Guide to Gopher Tortoise Friendly Plants](#) provides a list of tortoise-friendly plants, many which can be found at your local native nursery.*
- *Leave the tortoise alone and keep dogs and children away from the tortoise and its burrow.*
- *If possible, avoid mowing, digging, driving over or otherwise disturbing the area right around the burrow. Trimming of grass or weeds right around the burrow can be done using a weed trimmer.*
- *Never block the burrow opening which could prevent its exit or entrance.*

**Q: Can I move a gopher tortoise off of my property?**

*Gopher tortoise relocation is only appropriate where development is proposed within 25 feet of a tortoise burrow. Landowners must obtain permits from the FWC before relocating a gopher tortoise. For concerns regarding a burrow under an existing structure, contact the gopher tortoise conservation biologist in our region: [MyFWC.com/license/wildlife/gopher-tortoise-permits/contacts/](http://MyFWC.com/license/wildlife/gopher-tortoise-permits/contacts/).*

*Learn more about living with gopher tortoises in urban areas, landscaping with tortoise-friendly plants, and ways to get involved by contacting the gopher tortoise office*

*at 850-921-1030 or visit [MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise](http://MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise).*

**Q: What do I do if I see a sick or injured manatee?**

*Report injured, orphaned, entangled, distressed or dead manatees to the FWC Wildlife Alert Hotline at : (888) 404-3922 or text an alert to: [Tip@MyFWC.com](mailto:Tip@MyFWC.com) Early reporting sets the rescue team in motion so that the animal(s) can be saved.*

*Look out for, but do not touch or remove, [GPS/telemetry tag units](#) on manatees. These animals are monitored for research purposes or for health reasons with activities conducted under a federal research permit. The tags do not cause harm and are made to breakaway if they become entangled.*

**Q: Who do I call if I have a question about an alligator near my house?**

*The Statewide Nuisance Alligator Program (SNAP) is administered by the FWC's Division of Hunting and Game Management. Persons with concerns about an alligator may call the toll-free Nuisance Alligator Hotline at 866-FWC-GATOR ([866-392-4286](tel:866-392-4286)). Generally, an alligator may be deemed a nuisance if it is at least four feet in length and the caller believes it poses a threat to people, pets or property.*

*SNAP uses contracted nuisance alligator trappers throughout the state to remove alligators from locations where they are unwanted or unwelcome. If a complaint meets the qualifying criteria, SNAP will issue a permit to a contracted nuisance alligator trapper authorizing the removal of the animal.*

*Complainants must be able to grant legal access to the property on which the alligator is located. SNAP does not permit the removal of nuisance alligators from private or publicly managed property without first obtaining permission from the property owner or management authority.*

**Q: How do I find out if a species is protected by State or federal laws?**

*The full list of Florida's federally-listed species and state-listed species that already have a draft and final management plan can be found on the FWC website: <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/imperiled/>*

*To find out whether a species may be found in Indian River County, contact the Parks Department at (772) 589-9223.*

**Q: Who do I call if I see a dead or injured protected wildlife species?**

*On weekdays from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., call 850-921-1030. After hours and on weekends, call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Wildlife Alert hotline at 888-404-3922 (FWCC), dial #FWC or \*FWC on your cell phone or text [Tip@MyFWC.com](mailto:Tip@MyFWC.com).*

*You may be referred by the FWC to a list of licensed wildlife rehabilitators to contact for assistance with injured animals. The FWC link for this list is found at: <http://myfwc.com/media/2779805/licensedwildliferehabilitatorsbyregion.pdf>*

**Q: How would I know if there were scrub jays near my house?**

*The Florida scrub-jay is the only species of bird that is unique to Florida. Florida scrub jays are protected by the Endangered Species Act, and impacts to scrub jays are regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Habitat for scrub jays typically includes sand pine and xeric oak scrub, and scrubby flatwoods, which occur in some of the highest and driest areas of Florida. Scrub-jays do best in areas that contain large quantities of oak shrubs. Scrub jays have become increasingly opportunistic over time, and have been documented within pine flatwoods, citrus groves, and other disturbed lands. If you have questions about whether your property may have Florida scrub jays, please contact the Parks Department at (772) 589-9223.*

**Q: What can I do to help with scrub jay conservation?**

*Several of the Conservation Areas within Indian River County are managed for the preservation of scrub jays in this region. The County Conservation Lands Department regularly schedules volunteer opportunities to assist with our conservation efforts. Please visit the home page of our website to learn about scrub jay conservation and upcoming volunteer opportunities.*

**Q: Does the Indian River County help homeowners that may have wetlands on their property?**

*The County requires a permit to alter wetlands; this permit is issued by the Indian River County Environmental Planning staff. You can reach this Department at 226-1237.*

*Regulation of wetlands and surface waters varies between State and federal permitting entities. We recommend that if you have questions regarding possible jurisdictional wetlands on your property, you contact representatives from either the West Palm Beach office of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Cocoa Field office of the U.S. Corps of Engineers, and/or the Palm Bay office of the St. Johns River Water Management District. These agencies can assist in identifying the extent and functional values of wetlands and surface water communities.*

**Q: How can I treat Brazilian pepper and other exotic vegetation on my property?**

*For more information on exotic species control in Indian River County, please refer to the home page of our website.*

**Other useful links include:**

FWC Invasive Species Program:

<http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/invasive-plants/#program>

National Park Service/FWC South Florida Edition of Florida Invaders:

<https://www.nps.gov/ever/learn/education/upload/2008-Florida-Invaders-For-Web.pdf>

**Q: Where can I find more information on sea turtles and turtle nesting?**

Refer to the Indian River County Coastal Engineering Department:

[http://www.ircgov.com/Departments/Public\\_Works/Coastal\\_Engineering\\_Section/](http://www.ircgov.com/Departments/Public_Works/Coastal_Engineering_Section/) to find out information on sea turtle nesting and conservation within Indian River County.

- Report sea turtle sightings and hazards to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-FWCC.
- Never disturb a nesting female, nests or emerging hatchlings.
- Sea turtles can get disoriented by beachfront lighting. Be sure to shield indoor lights and turn off outdoor lights after dark.
- Fires and fireworks can also disorient sea turtles. Avoid these activities on beaches during nesting season.
- Recreational equipment left on beaches overnight can block or ensnare nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings. Make sure to remove equipment and stack beach furniture.
- Stay off the dunes where sea turtles nest.

**Q: Why is the County burning lands near my home?**

Naturally-occurring fires caused by lightning once played a major role in forming and maintaining much of Florida's pine lands, sandhills, scrub areas, prairies and wetlands. Indian River County works with the Florida Forest Service to complete prescribed burns on many of the conservation areas managed by the County.

Numerous wildlife species depend on the re-growth of vegetation that sprout from fire-enriched soils. Fires promote nutritious new growth of flowering plants and shrubs as well as seed and fruit production. The influence of fire on Florida landscapes is so critical to the survival of numerous plants and wildlife species that prescribed burning is one of the most extensively-applied habitat management practices.

In addition to the habitat enhancement, beneficial effects of prescribed fires for the public include:

- The reduction of dangerous fuels from overgrown vegetation. The risks to nearby properties are reduced because the controlled fires reduce the fuel load thereby lowering the possibility for fast moving, catastrophic wildfires.
- Prescribed burns aid in nutrient recycling and promote the growth of flowering plants

- *Prescribed burns reduce the growth of shrubby vegetation, which improves access to areas for hiking, biking, fishing, and wildlife viewing.*