

# Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway

Five Year Corridor Management Plan Update



FINAL  
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# 1. Introduction

The Indian River Lagoon is the most biologically diverse estuary in North America. It straddles 156 miles of Florida's east coast, from Ponce Inlet in Volusia County, to Jupiter Inlet in Palm Beach County. The Lagoon meanders through delicate expanses of national wildlife refuges and state parks. It is home to over 4,000 species of plants and animals, including one third of the U.S. population of the endangered West Indian manatee. This pristine, fragile resource welcomes visitors year after year encouraging them to get "off the beaten path" through boating, swimming, fishing, bird watching or by experiencing glimpses of Florida's past and visions of the future.

Combined with the ocean beaches to the east and the St. Johns River a few miles to the west, the Indian River Lagoon attracts visitors from around the world who seek to experience nature's beauty and man's history. Together these special resources feed an economic engine that has the capability of sustaining the region.

In April 1999, a group of 36 community advocates representing Brevard and Indian River counties, eight municipalities, the St. John's River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) and a number of community organizations came together to discuss the importance and beauty of the lagoon. After being introduced to the National Scenic Byways Program (NSBP) and the Florida Scenic Highways Program (FSHP) by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), the group voted unanimously to organize into a Corridor Advocacy Group (CAG) to seek designation as a Florida Scenic Highway. The newly organized CAG voted to adopt the preliminary name of the corridor as the Indian River Lagoon Scenic Highway (IRLSH). The CAG also decided to ask for sponsorship from the Marine Resources Council (MRC), a regional 501(c)(3) community organization, with a mission and vision that was compatible with that of this fledgling group. The MRC subsequently voted to approve the sponsorship. With this vote, the IRLSH CAG began operation as a special committee of the MRC.



**Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge Entrance**

At a meeting in June 1999, the CAG voted to define the preliminary limits of the corridor as a route beginning at Canaveral National Seashore to the north and ending at the Wabasso Causeway (CR 510) to the south. Following US Highway 1 on the mainland and SR A1A on the barrier island, the route encompasses the heart of the Indian River Lagoon, which is the principal natural water feature of the east central coast of Florida. The corridor was later amended to include Kennedy Space Center and thus all of the rich history of America's space program as shown on the map in Appendix A.

Along with the Canaveral National Seashore, operated by the National Park Service, the corridor includes three national wildlife refuges: Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge and Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, as well as numerous county and local parks and recreational facilities—all with a lagoon focus.

The corridor was designated as a Florida Scenic Highway by FDOT in June 2000, and the CAG became a Corridor Management Entity (CME) with continuing support from the MRC. Soon after, the CME sought and received designation as a National Scenic Byway in 2001. Upon designation at the national level, the CME became known as the Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway (IRLNSB) Coalition, and they set out to accomplish the Goals, Objectives and Strategies (GOS) that were approved as part of the original Corridor Management Plan (CMP). Since designation in 2000, many of the original GOS of the Coalition, including efforts to help fund and construct the Lagoon House in partnership with the MRC, have been accomplished. Many of these accomplishments are listed in Appendix B. From the Byway's designation in



2000 to 2008, the Coalition and its partners delivered close to \$3,000,000 to the region in the way of planning, design and construction projects that were directly focused on preservation and enhancement of the corridor's intrinsic resources and enriching the visitor's experience.

Because many of the original GOS had been accomplished by 2006, Coalition membership and participation began to decline. In 2008, FDOT tasked Corridor Solutions, Inc. to prepare an organizational needs assessment and evaluation for the seven Byways in FDOT's District Five. The findings for IRLNSB (Appendix C) included a recommendation to identify new leadership and reconstitute Coalition membership as a way to refocus and reenergize the group.

Over the last two years, the Coalition (based in part on Corridor Solutions' recommendations) has begun to restructure itself. The Coalition first worked to assess and update the original Corridor Vision, GOS, and to create a strong Mission Statement to carry them into the future. In addition, several new members have joined and brought new energy to the organization. This reenergized Coalition has worked hard to carry forward the traditions of its founding members while refocusing itself to advance the group into the future.

Recently, the Coalition has worked to formalize their organizational structure (Appendix D). The Coalition is overseen by a Board of Directors (the board) that includes: President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. Additionally, the board includes other directors representing a number of diversified interests along the corridor. In support of the board, three working committees have been established to address the most pressing needs of the Coalition. The Sustainability, Membership and Web Site Committees provide technical support, accomplish tasks as assigned by the board and provide recommendations on special issues based on in-depth review.

As part of their focus on the future, the Coalition has begun the process of establishing themselves as a not-for-profit organization. The group has become incorporated in the State of Florida and has recently obtained its Federal Employee Identification Number (EIN). They have submitted paperwork to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to become designated as a tax exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. IRS approval is expected during the summer of 2011. The board is currently in the process of developing a yearly operating budget and has established a local bank account that will allow them to receive donations and manage finances to further its mission.

This five-year CMP update is intended to inform FDOT on this organizational evolution and document previous accomplishments.

More importantly, the IRLNSB proposes using this CMP update as a road map for the next five years. GOS have been updated, a renewed Action Plan has been created, and most importantly, the organization is revitalized. This revitalization is reflected in the renewed interest and commitment of the current membership and strong partnerships that are being reestablished with communities and local governments along the Byway. Part of the need for this revitalization is a result of the mutually agreed upon separation from having the MRC serve as the IRLNSB's parent organization. The "new and improved" Coalition is prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with the MRC as separate but equal partners working for the good of the region.

The Coalition applauds the successes of its predecessors and its long and successful relationship with the MRC, while at the same time looking forward to accomplishing its renewed vision for the Byway. The group proposes to accomplish this by being a good steward for the Byway, thinking strategically and partnering with other advocacy groups in the region who share its vision for the roadway network and the resources it embraces.

## 3. Corridor Vision and Mission

### 3.1. Corridor Vision

A Vision Statement describes broad community aspirations for the corridor and should be based on an ideal, yet attainable situation. A meaningful Vision Statement has a frame of reference of approximately 20 years. As part of the designation process, the founding IRLNSB Coalition developed a broad vision for the corridor that spoke of a healthy ecosystem that balanced clean waters, an abundance of wildlife and enhanced recreational opportunities.

As part of this CMP update, the Coalition conducted a series of brainstorming sessions to review its original vision along with the creation of a Mission Statement. Participants were asked to describe their vision for the corridor in 20 years, similar to the original Vision Statement creation efforts from 1999/2000. Although many of the participants of this recent visioning exercise were not part of the original process, their views for the future of the resource were similar in many ways. Concepts that remained important included:

- Resource protection
- Resource enhancement
- Attracting visitors

Other values that ranked high, perhaps higher than in the original visioning effort, included:

- Enhanced heritage resources
- Eco-tourism
- Economic development
- Advocacy
- Wayfinding/wayshowing

This slight change is due in part to successes of the group in its early years. It is also due to current regional economic conditions and the two recently completed corridor extensions to the byway, all of which have served to broaden the Coalition's view of the resource. Based on the recent visioning efforts, the Coalition's newly adopted Vision Statement is:

*The Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway promotes an environment where travelers are surrounded by a unique and diverse habitat with special places and breathtaking scenery that inspires a sense of calmness and creates unforgettable memories.*

### 3.2. Corridor Mission Statement

A Mission Statement is the foundation for an organization; it provides a concise explanation for why a group exists. Although no Mission Statement was required, nor was one developed during the original designation process, the Coalition believes it is important that a Mission Statement is established, ensuring all interested parties clearly understand the group's path to accomplishing its vision.

Based on a series of brainstorming exercises in 2009/2010, the Coalition developed a Mission Statement that has become the implementation tool for accomplishing its vision. The Coalition's adopted Mission Statement is:

*The Mission of the Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway Coalition is to preserve, protect, and enhance the intrinsic resources of the Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway and to promote public access to and enjoyment of these resources.*



## 4. Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goals, Objectives and Strategies (GOS) are considered to be the building blocks used to construct the “final product,” or to implement the vision for the scenic corridor. Goals and objectives incrementally attain the vision by defining strategies that transform the corridor from a concept to a reality. The original GOS were crafted to guide the coalition toward accomplishment of the Vision Statement and had a significant focus toward natural resource protection and enhancement. The Coalition worked diligently to achieve these original GOS. Of particular note is the success that the original members had in the design and construction of the Lagoon House. Appendix F provides a review of completed GOS.

Many of the original GOS have now been accomplished or are no longer a focus of the organization due to changing times and an evolving mission. In late 2010, the Coalition set out to review and update its goals with selected members being assigned the task to review, edit and recommend updates. This effort was made more challenging as a result of the recent addition of the Fellsmere and Pineapple Avenue extensions. Both corridor extensions developed their own set of GOS as part of their designation process. Review of this information, along with the requirements of the current scenic highway manual, has resulted in an updated set of GOS (Appendix G) designed to be the roadmap into the future and a guiding tool for accomplishing the Coalition’s vision. This updated set of GOS still has a lofty focus for improving the health of the resource, but it now offers a broader perspective. They emphasize the need for economic development, maintaining healthy community economics, diverse partnerships and a heightened respect for the region’s heritage. The Coalition committed to this set of GOS in spring 2011.



Coalition business partner located along the Pineapple Avenue Extension



## 5. Corridor Story

Over the 10-year life of the Coalition, there have been numerous accomplishments. The group set out to tell the story of an 80-mile-long water body that passes by and ties together numerous communities. The Coalition's original goal was to educate the regional community on this resource and all that it has to offer. Protection, enhancement and education were all part of the corridor story. The efforts and accomplishments of this group to successfully tell the story of this resource is one of the most spectacular success stories of the FSHP.

One of the most monumental undertakings of any CME around the state was the design and construction of the Lagoon House. This facility and the educational opportunities that it offers tell the story of the corridor like no other scenic highway resource around the state. Few other corridors have developed the partnerships, funding, community commitment and pride necessary to develop a facility like the Lagoon House. It is a facility that has continued to receive national attention since the day it opened its doors to the community.



**The Lagoon House located in Palm Bay**

The Coalition/MRC partnership has educated hundreds of members of the community and visitors from far and wide since its opening in 2002. This facility is the perfect resource for not only telling the story of the lagoon itself, but also for highlighting the overall eminence of the FSHP. The facility offers educational tools for all ages, entertaining tour groups of young children on school trips and retired citizens out for a local day trip. Both regional and statewide Scenic Highway workshops have been held in the facility. It stands as a testament to the program and the community, and it serves the entire Indian River Lagoon region as a unique and special resource.

The IRLNSB Coalition is also a success story as a result of the regional and intergovernmental relationships that have been established. Brevard and Indian River counties, the Cities of Titusville and Palm Bay, SJRWMD, and the Sebastian Chamber of Commerce have supported this effort with staff involvement and advocacy since the early days of designation. Their successes have attracted others with a similar vision including Pineapple Avenue in the City of Melbourne and the City of Fellsmere. Each of these corridor extensions actively participate in byway activities.

Over the years the Coalition has developed several communication tools to help tell the byway's story. The byway brochure includes a corridor location map, discussion of resources and a brief glimpse of the region's history. This brochure has been distributed at byway functions and at local chamber offices. It is currently being updated to better tell the story of the byway and its interaction with the communities that it embraces. The recently completed byway Website and associated social networking tools offer interested persons a simple way to navigate the byway without leaving their computer.



Website banner

The Coalition and its supporters have been successful in telling the corridor story through grant opportunities. These successes over the years are a good measure of the Coalition's ability to educate granting authorities on the value of the resources and the need for enhancements. As mentioned earlier, the Coalition and its partner organizations have received numerous grants, specifically NSB grants. Much of these funds have been directed toward the completion of the Lagoon House, but other successful projects have helped to tell the corridor story in its own way. A few projects include:

- Melbourne Beach historic pier rehabilitation.
- Shoreline rehabilitation.
- Waterfront property acquisition.
- Pedestrian pedway improvements.



As the Coalition discussed updating its GOS as well as its Action Plan, it became apparent that its work was not finished. The Coalition's goals have taken a broader view of the byway that more adequately highlights the communities along the corridor including their culture, heritage and interaction with the lagoon. They also stress the need for economic development, membership and balancing competing issues. Because of this the byway story needs to grow. Enhanced educational materials including additional improvements to the Website and updated brochure will help to better tell this story. Pineapple Avenue and the Fellsmere extensions have a strong connection to the Indian River Lagoon, but also bring a strong heritage and cultural perspective to the byway.

The Coalition has discussed other tools for telling the corridor story. Educational kiosks, targeted brochures, enhanced bus tours, a speaker's bureau, and increased participation from local elected officials are all included as part of the updated GOS.

Finally, the Coalition realizes that without participation and involvement, there is no advocacy. The group is currently developing a marketing program to attract new membership, provide educational opportunities and identify funding to ensure that the story is never lost. Although a work in progress, the recently approved Action Plan establishes this effort as a short-term goal to be accomplished within the next 18 months.



## 6. Community Participation

A Community Participation Program (CPP) is an outreach tool which ensures that the Coalition is regularly updating byway stakeholders about programs, projects and accomplishments. Byway stakeholders include residents, business owners, local government officials and agencies, tourism agencies, and other non-profit organizations. It is a systematic way to educate the community on the benefits of the designation and the Coalition. It is important that there be a clear understanding of the organization's mission in the community.

Implementation of the CPP is important for several reasons. First it builds support for the byway and the Coalition. Unfortunately in many cases, people who live and work along the byway are often unaware of the byway's designation or the existence of the group and its mission.

Second, implementation of the CPP is one of the best ways to recruit new members and volunteers. A visible presence in the community will help identify individuals and groups who support the Mission and are willing to participate. Making a connection with other groups also affords opportunities for partnerships.

Finally, a consistently implemented CPP will build trust for the Coalition in the community. If there is a clear understanding of the group's mission in the community, there is less likely to be opposition to Coalition projects or programs. When implemented consistently and with timely follow-up, the CPP helps identify supporters in the community who may eventually become volunteers, members or donors.



Coalition and community members awaiting the corridor bus tour – 2009



During the designation process a CPP was developed. The plan spoke to initiating a CPP in three phases:

- Phase I: Corral, Include, Stimulate
- Phase II: Gather, Inform, Synthesize
- Phase III: Recommendations, Implementation, Strategize

The concepts that are part of this process remain valid. Involvement, education and partnership are the keys to a successful plan.

As part of the 2008 Corridor Needs Assessment performed by Corridor Solutions, Inc. it was noted that the Coalition needed to increase participation. The findings of the Corridor Needs Assessment confirmed the dramatic decline in Coalition participation in recent years. As a result the Coalition became aware of the need to develop additional tools to help reverse this trend.

The Corridor Needs Assessment recommended updating the CPP as the implementing tool to help increase membership and reenergize the byway. A revised CPP is included in Appendix H. The CPP focuses on promoting community awareness and enhanced participation. This is consistent with Goal 6 of the Coalition's Goals and Objectives that strive to educate the community on the byway and recruit members and/or volunteers.

To accomplish this goal, the CPP identified a number of tools to aid in community education and recruitment including discussion on the development of a newsletter, fact sheets, targeted resource-specific educational materials, and engaging the news media. As part of the Coalition's revival, the Sustainability Committee has included an enhanced targets list for potential new membership, and they are investigating methods of reengaging with past members.

# 14. Corridor Action Plan

The Corridor Action Plan outlines the sequence of actions the Coalition will perform or oversee in an effort to meet its GOS and ultimately achieve its corridor vision. The Action Plan is organized into a categorized listing of topics that serve as an “instruction manual” on how to implement the CMP.

As part of the Coalition's update of its GOS, they have also updated their Corridor Action Plan. This updated Action Plan has been developed to document attainable milestones for the Coalition, and is identified in short-term (next 18 months) and long-term measures. Short term efforts focus on increasing the Coalition's membership base, reintroduction of the Coalition to the community and identification of funding for long term sustainability. This updated Corridor Action Plan was approved in March 2011 and is included in Appendix I.