

Restoring and Protecting Lake Worth Lagoon

This 25-mile-long urban estuary is an ecologically sensitive area that touches 11 Palm Beach County municipalities: North Palm Beach, Lake Park, Riviera Beach, Palm Beach Shores, West Palm Beach, Palm Beach, Lake Worth, South Palm Beach, Hypoluxo, Maitland, Boynton Beach, and Clewiston Ridge. Two permanent, man-made inlets — the Lake Worth Inlet and the South Lake Worth Inlet — allow saltwater to mix with freshwater from canals creating a rich environment for marine life to thrive. One can observe seagrass, mangroves, rose hedges, oyster reefs, wading birds, cays, more than 270 fish species and other marine life from the Atlantic. It is home to one of the world's most sought after snorkeling and diving spots under the Blue Heron Bridge. It is a natural highway for boaters crossing the Intracoastal Waterway and home to the Port of Palm Beach, the fourth busiest container port in Florida. The Lagoon is critically important to Palm Beach County's economy and to its residents' quality of life.

The northern Lagoon waters are cleaner, aided by channeling tidal flows from the Lake Worth Inlet. Water quality declines through the Lagoon's central and southern segments where there is limited flushing and ongoing contributions of nutrient-laden discharges from major drainage canals carrying both agricultural and urban runoff from the expansive watershed.

Sustainable Palm Beach County actively supports PBC SRDF's Lake Worth Lagoon Management Plan and is an emerging participant in the Lake Worth Lagoon Initiative. PBC's activities include making the case for septic to sewer conversion to ensure that inputs to the Lagoon (preventing septic and septic effluent to municipal lines waiting to better manage their discharges), supporting effluent water projects that have a direct impact on the Lagoon and opposing suboptimal land development in the Lagoon.

SPBC Board Member Tom Furbush is President of the West Palm Beach Fishing Club. He says, "Human activity over the past century has created challenges in Lake Worth Lagoon, but I'm encouraged that so many are the need to restore and protect this unique urban estuary so important to our County. Using our experience and expertise, we are proud to partner with government and civic agencies to enhance water quality, protect fish and wildlife."

Keeping voters' intent for the Agricultural Reserve

The Palm Beach County Agricultural Reserve was created in 1998. Taxpayers voted to pass a \$170 million bond program to buy 22,000 acres west of State Road 7 between Clint Moore Road and Lantana Road.

What led to the creation of the Ag Reserve? Two key concerns from agricultural land — farming is an important economic driver in Palm Beach County, bringing in an estimated \$1.4 billion in sales — and loss of environmentally sensitive green space as suburban pushed westward.

Developers within the reserve had to preserve 60 percent of their holdings while building on the other 40 percent. Developers could trade land within the reserve for permission to build elsewhere in the reserve.

Today, as the amount of land to develop in the Ag Reserve declines and the County's population expands, Palm Beach County Commissioners are trying to balance pressures for more development while keeping a promise to voters to promote farming and low-density residential spaces. More than half of the Ag Reserve's land is in preservation — nearly 6,200 acres for conservation and over 6,000 acres for agriculture — and more than 6,000 acres have been approved for residential use. Of the 22,000 acres that make up the Ag Reserve, 1,779 acres remain for use.