LAND MANAGEMENT
Native Plants and the Indian River Lagoon: A View from a Different Perspective (or A Walk on the Wet Side) by Robert A. Day

The National Estuary Program (NEP) was created during the 1987 revisions of the Clean Water Act. The purpose of the NEP is to develop Comprehensive Conservation Management Plans for estuaries of national significance.

The Indian River Lagoon was nominated for inclusion in the National Estuary Program by Governor Bob Martinez in 1990 and, following review by the Environmental Protection Agency, included. Staff was hired and a Management Conference Agreement developed and signed by the participating agencies and local governments. This agreement anticipates completion of a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan for the Indian River Lagoon in 1996.

Given the short life span (five years) of the initial phase of the NEP and the limited amount of funding available, it was determined that the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRLNEP) needed to focus on one or two issues rather than attempting to address the myriad of issues concerning the lagoon. The IRLNEP Management Conference agreed that protection, enhancement, and restoration of the submerged aquatic vegetation community (SAV) in the Indian River Lagoon should be the focus for IRLNEP.

The SAV community, which in the Indian River Lagoon is largely seagrasses, was chosen because the habitat is vital to the survival of many important species in the lagoon, requires good water quality to survive and flourish, and, as a result, is a good indicator of the health of the lagoon. It was the opinion of the IRLNEP Management Conference that efforts to protect and enhance the SAV community would also address many of the identified problems of the lagoon. In addition, the general public could develop an understanding of the relationship between good water quality, improved SAV coverage, and good fisheries.

The IRLNEP, working in cooperation with the Indian River Lagoon Surface Water Improvement and Management (IRL-SWIM) program, have developed a strategy to protect and enhance the SAV community. The overall goal of this strategy, known as the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Initiative, is to increase the amount and quality of SAV and associated resources in the Indian River Lagoon.

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Recommended citation: