

**INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of County Commissioners

THROUGH: John A. Titkanich, Jr., County Administrator
Nancy A. Bunt, Assistant County Administrator

THROUGH: Kylie Yanchula, Natural Resources Director

FROM: Melissa Meisenburg, Sr. Lagoon Environmental Specialist

SUBJECT: Agency Cost-Share Agreement between the Indian River Lagoon Council and Indian River County for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Transformational Habitat Restoration Grant

DATE: November 20, 2024

DESCRIPTIONS AND CONDITIONS

In 2022, the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRLNEP) proposed to its partners the idea of working collaboratively to achieve wide-spread restoration in the Indian River Lagoon (IRL). As a member of the IRLNEP Management Conference, Indian River County (IRC) joined with nine other partners to develop a series of individual projects specific to the needs of each location. IRC Lagoon Division staff worked with Sea & Shoreline, LLC, a member of the IRLNEP's Seagrass Consortium, to identify two seagrass projects, Big Slough and Preachers Hole.

The projects are designed to enhance and restore important seagrass communities near Sebastian Inlet and Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. These sites were identified based on their proximity to Sebastian Inlet, water quality, and shelter from wave energy. Both sites historically supported robust seagrass communities but suffered extensive losses after widespread algal blooms in 2016. Recovery in these sites is important for juvenile sport fish, bait fish, green turtles, and manatees. Big Slough is a 12.8-acre site slated to receive 64,000 planting units of *Halodule wrightii* (seagrass species shown to be present in this area of the IRL). Preachers Hole is a 10-acre project site slated to receive 50,000 planting units of *Halodule wrightii*. The sites will receive regular maintenance and monitoring for two years post construction.

The IRLNEP and partners worked collaboratively to apply for a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Transformational Habitat Restoration Grant to provide the necessary funding for each of the proposed projects. In July 2024, NOAA recommended funding the collaborative community of practice established by the IRLNEP by awarding \$9.4 million over the next three years. The grant was accepted and executed by the IRLNEP on October 1, 2024. The grant will provide funding for a total of 15 projects spanning from Volusia County to Martin County, including IRC's Big Slough and Preachers Hole.

The IRL Council, as the IRLNEP sponsor, has provided a cost-share agreement to IRC for

execution as a sub-awardee of the grant. The IRLNEP will manage the grant funds and provide quarterly reimbursement to the County for costs associated with the projects. Under this agreement, Sea & Shoreline, LLC will supply the necessary materials and staff for planting, maintenance, and monitoring of the two project sites. Sea & Shoreline is providing a match of \$340,000 from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Foundation. IRC is contributing in-kind support through staff involvement in construction, maintenance, and monitoring. The total cost for the two IRC projects is \$1,412,507.90 with \$1,073,506 expected to be reimbursed to IRC. As Sea & Shoreline LLCs contribution to the project consists of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Foundation funds, after complete reimbursement to the County, IRC's ultimate costs will be the staff time necessary for planting, maintenance and monitoring of the 2 project sites.

The Board adopted the Indian River County Lagoon Management Plan (October 2023), which provides specific action items concerning the restoration of seagrasses. The Ecosystems and Habitat Use Goal includes, "Identify and install seagrass beds in viable locations to initiate recovery." as an action item. Moreover, Table 7 includes designed projects to achieve Lagoon Management Plan goals and objectives, of which Big Slough and Preacher's Hole are both listed projects.

FUNDING

While IRC is responsible for paying Sea & Shoreline, LLC for the planting, maintenance, and monitoring of 22.8 acres of seagrass over the next three years, all funds expended will be reimbursed through this agreement. Should this sub-awardee grant be accepted by IRC, funding for this initiative would be made available in the Lagoon Division Budget, under General Fund/Lagoon/Other Professional Services (00128337-033190).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff respectfully requests the Board of County Commissioners authorize the County Administrator to execute the IRL Council Cost-Share Agreement on behalf of the County as a sub-awardee of the 2024 NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration Grant upon concurrence by the County Attorney.

ATTACHMENTS

1. IRL Council Cost-Share Agreement IRL2024N-08
2. Exhibit A-NOAA Notice of NOAA Award Cover Letter
3. Exhibit B- Administrative Report Forms
4. NOAA Expanded Project Narrative
5. IRC IRL2024N-08 Grant form