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# ONE LAGOON

ONE COMMUNITY • ONE VOICE

## IRL COUNCIL ORIENTATION AND POLICY MANUAL

FOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

IRL Council  
1235 Main Street  
Sebastian, FL 32958

*Proudly hosting the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program*

This document will serve as the Management Conference policy manual for the program. It will be presented to all IRLNEP Management Conference volunteers as a general orientation and guidance document and will be posted on the IRLNEP website to be available to all interested citizens and parties. The document will be reviewed by IRLNEP staff annually and may be updated from time-to-time as needed. All document updates will be reviewed by the Management Board, CAC and STEM AC prior to final policy decisions by the IRL Council Board of Directors.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANEP: Association of National Estuary Programs

CAC: Citizens Advisory Committee

CCMP: Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan

EPA: Environmental Protection Agency

FSC: Finance Sub Committee to the Management Board

IRL: Indian River Lagoon

IRLNEP: Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program

K-12: Kindergarten through 12th grade

NEP: National Estuary Program

PDF: Portable Document Format

RFP: Request for Proposals

SFWMD: South Florida Water Management District

SJRWMD: St. Johns River Water Management District

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Modeling

# INTRODUCTION

## About the National Estuary Program

Congress established the National Estuary Program (NEP) in 1987 as a non-regulatory national center for innovation to protect and restore the water quality, ecological integrity and living resources of estuaries of national significance. Currently, twenty-eight estuaries located along the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts and Puerto Rico are designated as estuaries of national significance (Fig. 1). Each NEP focuses its efforts within a study area that includes its estuary and surrounding watershed.

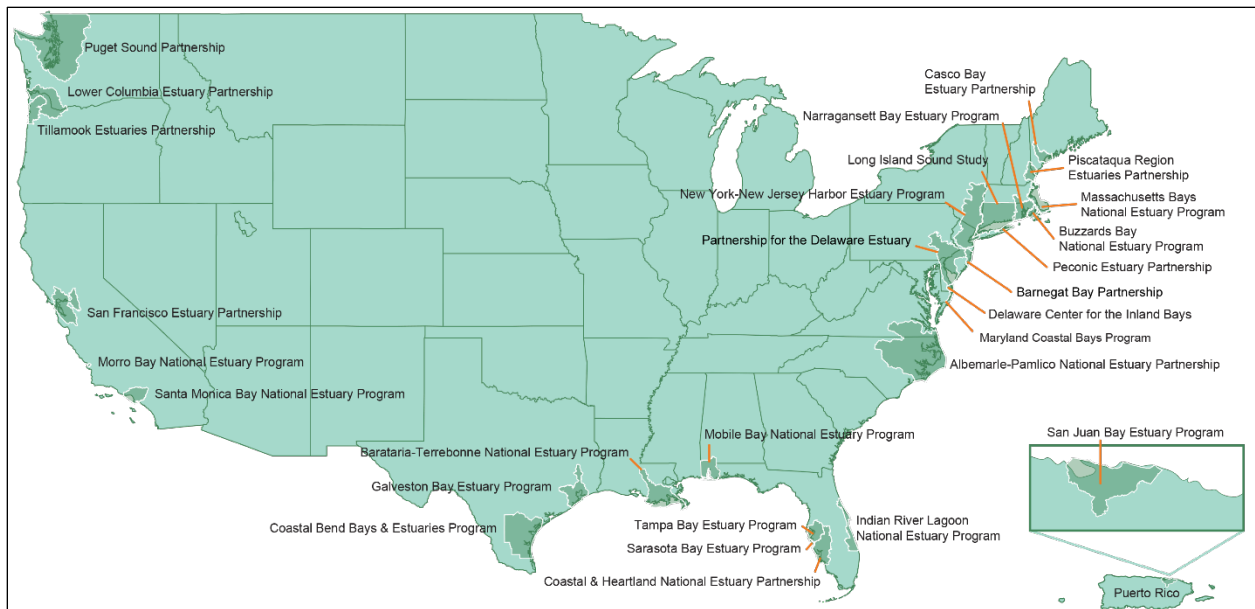


Fig. 1: Map of the NEP network.

NEPs use a science-based, collaborative and consensus-building approach to ecosystem management by involving diverse local stakeholders in the decision-making process. Decisions are made locally. Each NEP is composed of representatives from federal, state and local government agencies, residents, business leaders, educators and researchers that all work together within a program framework called a Management Conference. All NEPs are guided by their Management Conferences, the various boards and committees tasked with program management. Members of the Management conference work toward defining local issues and conditions, work with other stakeholders to build consensus, and finally, implement solutions to improve their study areas. Perhaps the most important function of each Management Conference is developing and implementing each program's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).

The 28 NEPs are represented nationally by the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP), a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of our nation's bays and estuaries (<http://nationalestuaries.org>).

## About the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRLNEP)

The IRLNEP was nominated as an Estuary of National Significance in 1990 and joined the NEP in 1991. The IRLNEP was initially hosted by the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD)

and operated under the guidance of the IRL Advisory Board. In 2015 the IRL Advisory Board developed an Interlocal agreement for the formation of the “IRL Council”, an independent special district of Florida, to sponsor and carry out the goals of the IRLNEP.

The IRL Council operates in compliance with Chapter 189, Florida Statutes — Uniform Special District Accountability Act. Public disclosure of specific information is required by Chapter 189. Required reporting information is posted to the IRLNEP website and is updated no later than 10 days after a program change has occurred. Relevant Florida public records law information and appropriate links to additional information are posted on the IRLNEP website.

The IRL Council recognizes its mission to build a connected and cooperative leadership structure within the IRLNEP that is dedicated to a unified mission of “restoring and maintaining the environmental, social and economic assets of the IRL today and for future generations.”

## **Program Goals**

The goals of the IRL Council and IRLNEP are stated in the IRL Council By-Laws and include:

- To attain and maintain water and sediment of sufficient quality to support a healthy estuarine ecosystem.
- To attain and maintain a functioning, healthy ecosystem which supports endangered and threatened species, fisheries, commerce and recreation.
- To achieve heightened public awareness and coordinated interagency management of the Indian River Lagoon ecosystem; and
- To identify and develop long-term funding sources for prioritized projects and programs to preserve, protect, restore and enhance the Indian River Lagoon.

To ensure that these goals are achieved, a primary function of the IRLNEP is to review and make appropriate updates to its CCMP every five years, with full revisions every ten years.

## **Program Funding**

The organizations which came together to enact the Interlocal Agreement that formed the IRL Council each contribute program support, technical expertise and funding to the program. The IRL Council operates on a base annual budget of \$2.4 million. For the fiscal years 2022 through 2026, the Program will also receive funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

- **U.S. EPA:** \$850,000 annual grant. IRLNEP funding is secured through an annual Work Plan submission to EPA by June 1 of each year. From Fiscal Year 2023 through 2026, an additional \$909,800 annually will be provided from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The IRLNEP will submit a separate work plan and financial accounting for all IIJA projects.
- **St. Johns River Water Management District:** \$500,000 annual contribution.
- **South Florida Water Management District:** \$500,000 annual contribution.
- **Florida Department of Environmental Protection:** \$250,000 annual contribution.
- **Volusia County:** \$50,000 annual contribution.
- **Brevard County:** \$50,000 annual contribution.

- **Indian River County:** \$50,000 annual contribution.
- **St. Lucie County:** \$50,000 annual contribution.
- **Martin County:** \$50,000 annual contribution.

The IRLNEP may secure additional program funding from grants, contracts, donations, and revenues from the sale of the Indian River Lagoon specialty license plate.

## **MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE APPOINTMENTS**

Members of the IRLNEP Management Conference are selected to deliver a network governance model that allows for expanded and enhanced communication and collaboration across the diverse IRL community. With 1.6 million residents in thirty-eight incorporated cities and five counties, it is essential that the IRLNEP Management Conference have broad, inclusive and diverse representation.

Network governance recognizes the scale and complexity of natural resource management. Members within a network must work across agencies, jurisdictions, and land ownerships; exchange ideas, build relationships, identify common interests, and explore options. It is understood that all entities involved must work collaboratively to understand and solve problems.

Board and committee volunteers are an essential part of the IRLNEP and its Management Conference. We thank you for your willingness to serve. All appointments to the IRLNEP Management Conference are made by the IRL Council Board of Directors. All appointees are subject to Florida Sunshine Laws, Public Records Laws, and Ethics Rules. Each volunteer member of the Management Conference will receive information pertaining to IRL Council policies, Florida Sunshine Law, Public Records Law, and Ethics requirements.

It is expected that all board and committee members will adhere to all relevant IRL Council policies, Sunshine Law requirements, preservation of public records, and ethics regulations.

### **Florida Sunshine Law**

Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine Law was enacted in 1967. The Sunshine Law establishes a basic right of access to most meetings of boards, commissions and other governing bodies of state and local governmental agencies or authorities. To assist the public and governmental agencies in understanding the requirements and exemptions to Florida's open government laws, the Florida Attorney General's Office compiles a comprehensive guide known as the Government-in-the-Sunshine manual. A PDF version of the manual can be downloaded at:

<https://www.myfloridalegal.com/sites/default/files/2023-05/2023GovernmentInTheSunshineManual.pdf>

### **IRL Council Policy on Meeting Attendance**

All meetings are held quarterly, noticed in advance and open to the public with general citizen comment as part of every meeting agenda.

Management Conference volunteers appointed by the IRL Council are expected to be actively involved and participate in quarterly meetings. Mandatory attendance is required at a minimum of two meetings per year.

Written notice should be provided when a board or committee member will not be able to attend a scheduled quarterly meeting. Members who cannot attend scheduled meetings are expected to provide written notice via email to staff at least 24 hours before the start of the meeting.

If a board or committee member has three consecutive unexcused absences, the appointment may be terminated and the member replaced.

### **IRL Council Non-Advocacy Policies**

While specific policies and guidelines are posted online in the IRL Council By-Laws, there are two specific policy guidelines that all members of the Management Conference must be aware of. First, it is the general policy of the IRL Council that:

*“At no time shall members of the IRL Council, its staff or members of the IRLNEP Management Conference represent the IRL Council and/or the IRLNEP in public testimony without specific direction and authorization in writing from the IRL Council Board of Directors.”*

Members of Boards and Committees are entitled to represent themselves as individuals at any public meeting, but at no time shall any Management Conference member speak on behalf of the IRL Council or IRLNEP without prior approval from the Board of Directors.

Second, the foundation for a successful IRLNEP is that it is non-regulatory, fact-based, collaborative, consensus-driven, inclusive and dedicated to providing connected leadership throughout the region among scientists, citizens, stakeholders and policy makers. It is therefore important that IRLNEP Management Conference members and staff maintain scientific integrity as a policy cornerstone. As such:

*“At no time shall the IRL Council, its staff or IRLNEP Management Conference members publicly support or oppose specific projects or regulatory permits for specific projects.”*

From time to time, the IRL Council may wish to provide recommendations for:

- New policies or amendments to existing policies at local, state and federal levels;
- Specific IRL restoration, research and citizen engagement programs and/or projects that are identified in and support the CCMP; and
- Specific public and private funding initiatives to implement specific programs and/or projects that are identified in and support the CCMP.

In these cases, IRL Council recommendations shall be developed and reviewed within the IRLNEP Management Conference to determine Management Conference consensus prior to making recommendations or taking actions.

## **BOARD AND COMMITTEE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

IRLNEP Management Conference framework consists of the following boards and committees:

### **IRL Council Board of Directors**

The IRL Council Board of Directors is the governance and policy-making arm of the program. Members of the Board are elected county officials or state agency representatives. Final decision-



making on all programmatic matters rests with the Board of Directors, who receive advice and input from all other boards and committees.

Responsibilities for the Board of Directors include the appointment of all members of the Management Conference. The Board of Directors may direct the formation of new boards, committees, working groups or task forces and may dissolve boards and committees at their discretion. The Board addresses all proposed changes to the Interlocal Agreement through a defined process that includes Management Conference participation and citizen input. The Board directs the issuance and approval of Requests for Proposals, Requests for Qualifications, work plans, budgets, and other documents related to program funding and operations.

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 of the Interlocal Agreement further define the powers and specific actions the Board of Directors may take with respect to their responsibilities.

### **Management Board**

The Management Board advises the Board of Directors. Their primary role is to develop consensus on how to best guide the activities of the IRLNEP and implement the CCMP for the IRL. Management Board members are representatives of federal, state and local agencies, governments, non-governmental organizations and other organizations that play a direct role in management of natural resources, restoration, policy development or regulation.

Responsibilities of the Management Board include providing guidance to program staff and the Board of Directors by vetting ideas, projects and outcomes to arrive at consensus in implementing plans to reduce IRL stressors. The Management Board defines and ranks the environmental problems of the watershed, develops management strategies, work plans, program budgets and planning documents and works with IRLNEP staff to oversee implementation of the CCMP. Management Board members are active during the annual funding cycle in reviewing and ranking proposals submitted for funding. The Chair or Co-Chair of the Management Board attends all quarterly IRL Council Board of Directors meetings and provides the Board with a meeting summary from each Management Board meeting.

### **Financial Subcommittee of the Management Board**

The Financial Subcommittee of the Management Board is organized within the Management Board to provide senior-level fiscal management, accounting advice and oversight of program management. The subcommittee is composed of members of the Management Board. The Financial subcommittee meets in advance of the Management Board and provides the Board with a subcommittee report at the outset of every quarterly meeting.

Responsibilities of the Financial Subcommittee include meeting as needed with the Executive Director and IRLNEP staff, offering financial guidance on all aspects of project and program delivery, input into the independent audit process, review of the annual operating budget, monitoring adherence to the annual budget, providing assistance in determining long-range financial goals and developing funding strategies to achieve them. The Chair or Co-Chair is responsible for presenting a meeting summary to the Management Board during each quarterly meeting.

### **Science, Technology, Engineering and Modeling Advisory Committee**

The Science, Technology, Engineering and Modeling (STEM) Advisory Committee also advises the Board of Directors. The STEM Advisory Committee provides expertise on scientific, research and

technology matters, evaluates new ideas, and reviews research findings and results. STEM members are selected from academic, research, and other scientific or research organizations and include individuals actively working on IRL-focused research programs, projects and issues.

Responsibilities of STEM members include evaluating complex environmental issues involving IRL restoration and protection efforts. STEM representatives serve as a 2-way communication node between their organizations and the IRLNEP. Various ad hoc task forces may be created by the STEM Advisory Committee as needed to ensure that IRLNEP plans and resulting actions are science-driven. STEM members are expected to alert the Management Board about emerging problems and recommend scientific studies, monitoring programs, modeling efforts and restoration strategies that can determine the causes or answer questions about IRL ecology and ecosystem function. STEM members provide guidance to staff and input into planning documents, CCMP updates, and IRL health assessments. STEM members review project proposals, rank and recommend projects for funding. The Chair of the STEM Advisory Committee also sits as a voting member on the Management Board and attends all quarterly Board of Directors meetings to give a meeting summary from each STEM meeting.

### **Citizens Advisory Committee**

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) are advisors to the Board of Directors. Citizens Advisory Committee members are selected to represent the interests of citizens throughout the watershed. Their primary role is to ensure that citizen concerns and issues are incorporated into IRLNEP decision-making. Areas of interest for CAC members may include public education, public engagement, outreach, tourism, recreational and commercial fishing, and industry/business interests.

Responsibilities of CAC members are to recommend effective ways to inform the public and solicit public participation with the primary goal of creating a well-informed IRL community throughout the entire region. CAC Members may assist in planning and implementing public events; and may help in identifying key representatives and organizations within their counties that may assist the IRLNEP in bringing watershed issues to the public's attention and build support for Program activities. CAC members assist with the review and ranking process for proposals submitted for funding and help administer the IRLNEP Small Grants Program. The Chair or Co-Chair of the CAC also sits as a voting member of the Management Board and attends all quarterly Board of Directors meetings to give a meeting summary from each CAC meeting.

Other boards, committees, working groups or task forces may be created or dissolved at the discretion of the IRL Council Board of Directors.