

Lake Worth Lagoon – An Overview

Background

Historically, Lake Worth Lagoon was a freshwater lake with drainage from a swampy area along the western edge. The barrier island to the east separated Lake Worth from the Atlantic Ocean. In the late 1800s, settlers first arrived on the banks of Lake Worth and immediately began the changes known as progress that continue to this day. Extreme high tides and waves, high lake water levels and storms occasionally caused the formation of temporary inlets. Several early attempts were made to create navigable inlets from the ocean. In 1877 construction of a stable inlet was achieved and the lake began to change to a saltwater lagoon system. During the 1890s the completion of a navigation canal from the north end of Lake Worth Lagoon to Jupiter Inlet resulted in increased freshwater discharges to the Lagoon. Also during this decade developers began filling the wetland edges of the Lagoon, an activity that continued into the 1970s.



In the early 1900s, the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway was completed from the south end of the Lagoon to Biscayne Bay. By 1915, the Port of Palm Beach created a permanent inlet four feet deep at the north end of Lake Worth Lagoon. In 1925, the inlet was deepened to 16 feet and dredged material deposited in Lake Worth Lagoon resulted in the creation of Peanut Island. In 1917 the South Lake Worth Inlet was created in a failed effort to improve tidal circulation and provide flushing to the south end of the Lagoon. The completion of the West Palm Beach spillway in 1925 resulted in significant freshwater inflow to Lake Worth Lagoon and provided the drainage necessary for the development of the west shore of the Lagoon.

Lake Worth Lagoon Today

The Lagoon is now connected to the Atlantic Ocean by two permanent inlets. The Lake Worth Inlet is 800 feet wide by 35 feet deep; the South Lake Worth Inlet is 130 feet wide by 6 to 12 feet deep. The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway runs the entire length of the Lagoon. Eight causeways and bridges connect the mainland to the barrier island. Twenty-eight marinas and hundreds of private docks are scattered along the Lagoon's shoreline. Approximately 65 percent of the shoreline is bulkheaded; only 19 percent of the shoreline remains fringed by mangroves.



Restoration and Enhancement

Since 1994, there has been heightened awareness and communication among interested parties and local governments concerning the need for water quality improvements and habitat restoration and enhancement within the Lagoon. To focus attention on and provide impetus to the restoration effort, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and Palm Beach County formed the Lake Worth Lagoon Ecosystem Management Area team in January 1997. Only 18 months later, in August 1998, that team approved the **Lake Worth Lagoon Management Plan** to guide the Lagoon's restoration and enhancement. Cooperative efforts among all the team partners is necessary for funding all the projects identified in the management plan.

That same year, the Florida Legislature appropriated the first \$1 million dollars to fund the Lake Worth Lagoon Partnership Grant Program. This pass through grant program — from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to Palm Beach County to local sponsors — provides funding for the construction of projects to benefit the Lagoon’s water quality and habitat. Since 1998, the legislature has committed \$12.8 million with local sponsors committing an additional \$33.7 million in matching funds for the construction of more than 30 approved projects totaling \$47.1 million. Twenty-seven projects have been completed with the remaining projects in various stages of implementation. The grant program has also helped fund a limited amount of monitoring in the Lagoon including seagrass mapping and monitoring and the evaluation of muck sediments.

