



Florida
Oceanographic
Society

2021 IMPACT REPORT



OUR MISSION:

TO INSPIRE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP OF FLORIDA'S COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY.



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Photography:

Sam Farkas

Florida Oceanographic Society

RKnight Photography



**Florida
Oceanographic
Society**

890 NE Ocean Boulevard, Stuart, FL 34996
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2021: CELEBRATING PROGRESS

While we continued to work through the impacts of COVID-19, we were cognizant of embracing new opportunities. By expanding our Coastal Lecture Series online and "zooming" into more classrooms and living rooms, we expanded our geographic reach, providing thousands of new individuals with the opportunity to learn about our coastal ecosystems. We have been able to more actively engage our water advocates as meetings have been offered online, making them available to people who would not have been able to attend in person. And we have benefited from a dedicated group of volunteers, donors and community supporters who have had the time and inspiration to recommit themselves to their love of nature and the world around us.

We have also been able to strategically focus on applying science and research to our local habitat restoration programs, ensuring that the data that we collect, analyze and report on, will not only improve our waterways, but can also influence sound water policies and legislation. Collaborations with other institutions have led the way to innovative program enhancements, implementations of shared best practices, and an expanded network of scientists, researchers and partners.

Our advocacy has continued as we move toward a significant turning point in the management of Lake Okeechobee. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is restructuring the plan that determines the direction and amount of water discharged from the lake, and we have been fighting for the best outcome for the health of the St. Lucie Estuary, the Everglades and other waterways in south Florida. Our approach remains steadfast that we must restore the River of Grass and eliminate the discharges that bring polluted, toxic water into our vital coastal estuaries.

Our dream of welcoming visitors to the Ocean EcoCenter was realized on July 16, 2021, a day that will remain an important milestone in Florida Oceanographic's history. We were able to share our vision of inspiring, engaging and educating the community about Florida's coastal ecosystems, the animals that call this environment home, and the steps we can take to protect this unique place. The Ocean EcoCenter represents the natural wonders of South Florida, tells the stories of our waterways and their interconnectedness, and seeks the support of our visitors to protect and preserve these local habitats.

We look forward to greeting new friends and renewing past acquaintances at the Coastal Center as the season continues!



Bob Mathias, Board Chair, &
Mark D. Perry, Executive Director

AT THE COASTAL CENTER



The Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center is a 57-acre marine life nature center, located on Hutchinson Island in Stuart, Florida. While here, guests can explore a mile-long nature trail, interact with stingrays and local invertebrate species, and attend daily educational programs that teach about local gamefish, sharks, and sea turtles that live in the 750,000+ gallon Gamefish Lagoon. The brand new Ocean EcoCenter, a 5,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility, features exhibit galleries dedicated to Florida's coastal ecosystems and includes interactive exhibits and 2,000+ gallons of aquariums that educate guests on why estuaries are essential to our local wildlife, how baby sea turtle hatchlings reach the ocean, why seagrass population growth is vital, and what can be done to save local waterways!

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATES

The next step in the capital campaign is a renovation to the Frances Langford Visitor's Center, which opened in 1994. Updates will include an improved guest admission experience as well as expanding the footprint of the gift shop. Further planned expansions to the Coastal Center will include the construction of bridges over the Gamefish Lagoon as well as a Waterworks Exploration Zone that will provide water-based interactives for learning and play.



OCEAN ECOCENTER



Upon entering the Ocean EcoCenter guests are reminded of “this unique place” we inhabit along the Treasure Coast. Situated between the temperate zone to the north and the tropical zone to the south, brackish coastal lagoons and barrier islands provide a home to specialized plant and animal species that can withstand storms, salt spray, and direct exposure to the force of the ocean. No other place in North America has such a diverse ecosystem as the Treasure Coast. And none is more deserving of our protection and restoration!



Florida's Water Story, the first of the four exhibition spaces, tells of the diversion of Lake Okeechobee water from the Everglades to the east and west coasts, complete with a floor projection and accompanying narration.



An interactive, tabletop marble maze challenges guests to maneuver water from the Kissimmee River, through Lake Okeechobee, down across the Everglades and into Florida Bay, all while navigating the pitfalls of the run-off canals peppered throughout the state.



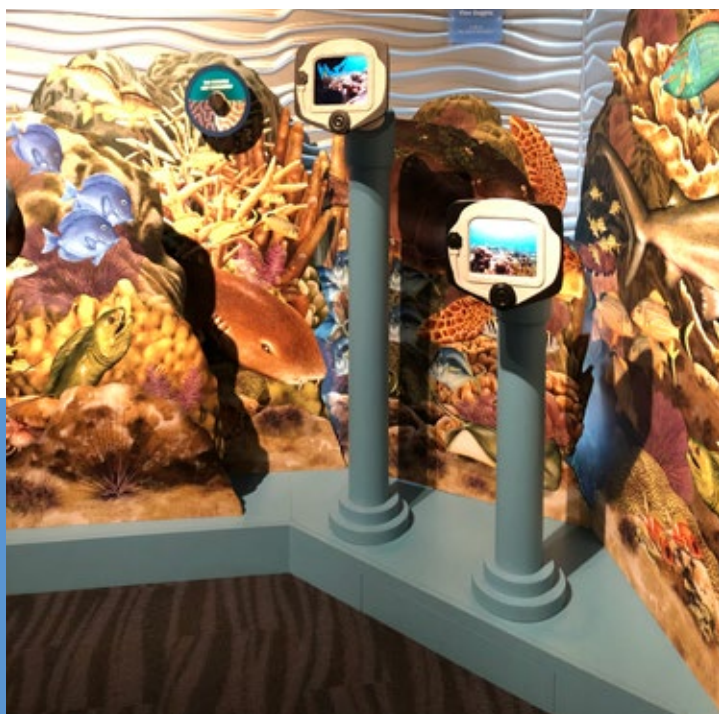
OCEAN ECOCENTER

Moving into the *Estuaries* gallery, guests can witness snook darting between oyster beds, an octopus hiding among the roots of a red mangrove, and seahorses clinging to the blades of seagrass. It is a model of life as it should be among the brackish waters of the estuaries, complete with overarching vegetation and the sounds of nature playing rhythmically in the background. Along the walls, interactive displays show the result freshwater run-off and discharges from the Lake Okeechobee canal system have had on the sustainability of such an ecosystem.



Personal, environmental stewardship is another key component of Florida Oceanographic Society's mission. In the *Life Along the Shore* gallery, a life-like replica of the Sabellariid worm reefs of nearby Bathtub Beach lunges from the wall as part of an aquarium display where local marine life like stingrays, eels and porkfish, can be viewed swimming about the tank. Florida's coastal story is intrinsically linked to the Atlantic Ocean, which graces our shoreline with clear tropical water and an incredible diversity of life. Within the final gallery, titled *Ocean Connections*, guests can explore the impact our coastal reef systems have on the environment through underwater view goggles and turn-and-reveal displays that hide interesting facts about the essential and delicate nature of coral.

Upon leaving the Ocean EcoCenter, a column of trash collected from local beaches juts out into the gallery space, reminding visitors of the role personal environmental stewardship can play in protecting our community and inspiring them to take action into their own hands.



ANIMAL CARE



Caring for the Coastal Center’s Animal Ambassadors is a top priority for the Animal Care and Life Support team at Florida Oceanographic. Every day, we are responsible for providing a healthy and safe environment for over 300 animals on property, ensuring that they receive fresh, ethically sourced food, daily well-being check-ups and clean habitats in the exhibits and aquariums that total nearly 1 million gallons of water. With the addition of the aquariums in the new Ocean EcoCenter, we have been able to showcase local species of animals in their unique coastal habitats. Our Animal Ambassadors provide opportunities for visitors to learn about and appreciate the creatures that call this area home, so that they can become lifelong environmental stewards, protect what they love, and make environmentally friendly decisions.



EDUCATION

Protecting and preserving our natural world starts with an educated and empowered community. A critical component of Florida Oceanographic Society's mission, our commitment to environmental education, runs deep. From daily educational programming and field trips at the Coastal Center, to lectures, special programs, and guided walks, we work hard to provide unique and inspirational educational opportunities for learners of all ages.

MARINE SCIENCE SUMMER CAMP

Summer camp at the Coastal Center is all about hands-on learning – combined with a healthy dose of sand, salt, mud, and good old-fashioned fun. Our campers spend their days in the great outdoors, discovering the creatures that make our part of Florida so special and learning about the environmental problems that are threatening the health of our waters. Our camp families let us know how much this unique program means to them, sending their youngsters back year after year. We love watching our campers develop a true passion for nature as they grow up!



SEA TURTLE NESTING WALKS

Treasure coast beaches are an important nesting stop for mother sea turtles. Each summer, we offer a limited number of guests the opportunity to witness this incredible process firsthand. Operated under a special permit from the State of Florida, our turtle walk program introduces attendees to the threats that sea turtles are facing around the globe.

When Mother Nature cooperates, we're able to quietly and safely observe a mother loggerhead turtle as she prepares to bring her next generation into the world. Our small group size creates an intimate experience, and we even offer a single-family option. In addition to nighttime sea turtle walks, we also partnered with Ecological Associates, Inc. to lead morning sea turtle nest excavation presentations on local beaches, showing guests another aspect of this fascinating story.



COASTAL LECTURE SERIES

In 2021, we shifted the annual Coastal Lecture Series to an online platform in response to COVID-19. Although we missed getting together for in-person lectures, this new format allowed us to reach a larger audience than ever before. A total of 2,500 attendees tuned in live to watch the ten virtual lectures we hosted in January, February, and March, breaking our previous attendance record for the 7th year in a row! Guests were captivated by a broad range of scientific and historical lectures presented by a suite of world class speakers, including 2011's National Geographic Explorer of the Year, Dr. Kenny Broad. This program truly showcased our community's passion for learning.

DESERVING KIDS TO THE COAST

We are dedicated to providing educational opportunities for socioeconomically disadvantaged students from our community, as all children deserve opportunities to learn about the natural world. In past years, the grant-funded "Deserving Kids to the Coast" marine science education program provided free field trips to the Coastal Center for students who would have otherwise been unable to experience these opportunities. This year, in response to COVID-19, we restructured "Deserving Kids to the Coast" to utilize an entirely digital format, providing free virtual field trips (live-streamed lessons) to 50 classes from Title I elementary schools in St. Lucie County, reaching 1,225 students. "Deserving Kids to the Coast" was made possible through the generous support of the William & Helen Thomas Charitable Trust, the Roy A. Hunt Foundation, and the Andrew & Robin Hunt Philanthropic Fund at The Community Foundation Martin - St. Lucie. In addition to "Deserving Kids to the Coast," we provided another 28 virtual field trips this year, reaching 730 elementary, middle, high school, and college students. Our virtual programming allowed Florida Oceanographic Society to continue inspiring students during a school year that was greatly impacted by COVID-19.



RESEARCH & CONSERVATION



FLOOR FLORIDA OCEANOGRAPHIC OYSTER RESTORATION



- Works to restore and research critical oyster reef habitat in the St. Lucie Estuary (SLE) and southern Indian River Lagoon (IRL)
- Relies on direct, hands-on community involvement
- Collects oyster shell from 10 partner restaurants, which is then used for the restoration of reefs
- Conducts monthly monitoring of oyster recruitment, settlement and health at 6 restored reef sites in the IRL and SLE which provides a better understanding of oyster health in the estuary.
- This year we collected 58,535 pounds of shell which went towards restoring a one-acre reef!



FOSTER FLORIDA OCEANOGRAPHIC SEAGRASS TRAINING EDUCATION & RESTORATION



- Restores seagrass habitat by educating and engaging the local community through a citizen science-based seagrass research and restoration program
- Depends on volunteers to collect stranded seagrass fragments from local shorelines and grow them on-site in our 34 nursery tanks and 5,381 sq. ft. wet lab.
- Provides a vital, non-destructive seagrass source for restoration
- This year we planted 1,000 seagrass mats totaling 16,000 seagrass shoots and restored over 400 sq. ft. in the IRL!

We have recently expanded our nursery to include three additional species of seagrass, and are now growing six

of the seven seagrass species found in the IRL. Launched in spring, our pilot citizen science seagrass network currently monitors 10 seagrass beds across the SLE and southern IRL. On a monthly basis, our team of 12 volunteer citizen scientists monitor seagrass coverage and canopy height in addition to recording algae coverage. This allows us to better understand the health of the lagoon, monitor changes in seagrasses over time and provide useful insights to improve restoration efforts.

WATERQUEST

Our water quality program, WaterQUEST, has been monitoring the health of our local waterways since 1998, providing valuable data to local and regional environmental managers and scientists. This program has expanded to monitor 44 sites across 10 zones which encompasses the SLE and the southern IRL. Our volunteer citizen scientists record weekly observations of salinity, temperature, water clarity, dissolved oxygen, and pH to assess estuary health. To date, this program has involved more than 124 volunteers who have collectively submitted over 18,500 data sets. This valuable data is collated into a weekly public report and shared with our email subscribers and social media followers, to educate our community, spread awareness of current water quality issues and inspire advocacy.

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

This year we hosted four summer interns who worked closely with staff scientists to complete a mini research project on either seagrass, oysters or mangroves. The overall goal of the internship project is for the students to gain experience in collaboration, experimental design, data collection, and dissemination of results, while providing the research department with critical data necessary to complete projects or for use in grant proposals. At the end of the internship, students gave a 15-minute presentation on their work at our 2nd annual Summer Internship Symposium. The internship structure is both beneficial to the students career goals and the department's objectives.

RESEARCH

Staff scientists have been collecting data on clams, seagrass, oysters and mangroves in field and laboratory based experiments. This work is done in partnership with multiple academic, government and non-profit organizations. Our scientists have also contributed to the scientific community through the dissemination of their research in international, national, regional, and state-level, peer-reviewed publications and presentations.



COLLABORATIONS INCLUDE

Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program | City of Satellite Beach
CERP RECOVER Science Coordination Group | Marine Discovery Center
Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserves | UF/IFAS Marine Resources Council
Brevard Zoo | Florida Sea Grant | South Florida Water Management District
Smithsonian Marine Station | St. Johns River Water Management District
Ducks Unlimited | Coastal Conservation Association | Marine Resources Council
Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission | Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

ACADEMIC PARTNERS

University of Florida | Villanova University | Roosevelt University
UF - Whitney Lab for Marine Biosciences | University of Alabama | Samford University
Florida Atlantic University - Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute

TAKING THE MESSAGE TO THE COMMUNITY

We must all join forces to protect our waters! That's why we work hard to lead the conversations, get involved in stakeholder meetings and educate our local leaders and community about issues facing our waterways. Our collective efforts as part of the Everglades Coalition and Rivers Coalition, as well as partnerships with other community groups, lead to better solutions and a united voice for change.

OUR INVOLVEMENT INCLUDES:

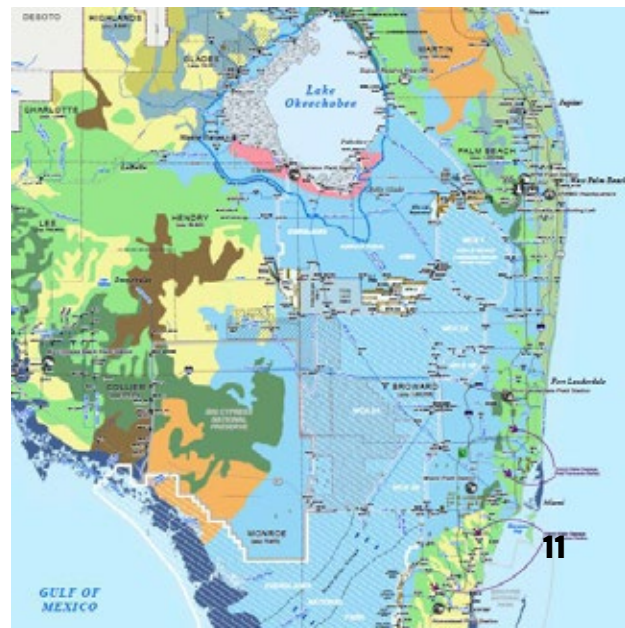
- Attending 54 local, state and federal agency meetings and workshops related to Florida's watershed
- Initiating calls to action from the community to provide input and feedback on the best options to revise the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM)
- Meeting with Senator Rubio for roundtable discussions on the harmful discharges from Lake Okeechobee
- Engaging in feedback meetings with Colonel Kelly and Colonel Booth of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding managing Lake Okeechobee
- Acting as Co-Chair of the Everglades Coalition and Co-Chair and moderator of the 36th Annual Everglades Coalition Conference
- Serving as a trusted source on environmental issues for local media including episodes of WPTV's "Protecting Paradise," "Eco Sense for Living" on PBS, and "Tortured Coast" for Congressman Brian Mast
- Facilitating monthly meetings as chair of the Rivers Coalition, a 105-member organization
- Representing current water issues as an expert environmental panelist, moderator and community advocate



ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY UPDATES

Beginning in 2019, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) took the time to reevaluate and assess water management policies for Lake Okeechobee to coincide with the completion of the Herbert Hoover Dike rehabilitation project in 2022. This process will result in a new schedule the USACE will use to release water from the lake known as the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual or LOSOM. During this time, Florida Oceanographic, along with local stakeholders and legislative allies, including U.S. Representative Brian Mast, spoke out for the need to put an end to harmful discharges plaguing the waterways of the Treasure Coast, including toxic cyanobacteria (blue green algae) that threatened the health of both local residents and our waterways. In our demands for a more comprehensive water policy, we asked the USACE to: 1) Eliminate all discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) and St. Lucie Estuaries (SLE), 2) Send water south to the Everglades to restore the River of Grass and revitalize Florida Bay, and 3) Reduce all harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee River and Lake Worth Lagoon.

In November, 2021, the USACE chose a plan out of thousands of model runs that will reduce Lake Okeechobee discharges currently coming into the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie Estuary. Our ultimate goal in this process has always been to push for zero overall discharges to the Treasure Coast, and although this is the tentatively selected alternative of the LOSOM plan, the USACE has made it clear that our opinion in the process still matters. In the coming months they will continue to mold the plan into a workable schedule, allowing stakeholders to give feedback. We could not have gotten this far in the process without the passionate outpouring of support from local stakeholders. The fight for clean water begins with local voices willing to speak out and protect what they love. As stewards for a cleaner coastal environment, we must continue to fight for our rivers, streams, lagoons and estuaries.



VOLUNTEERS

MAKING OUR MISSION POSSIBLE

Florida Oceanographic has been fortunate to continue our volunteer activities throughout the year, with only minor modifications due to COVID. We are inspired by both new and returning volunteers, showing us that our organization and its mission are a source of hope and engagement in our community. We appreciate all of our volunteers, and we want to give an extra round of applause and thanks to these folks who have been able to support our organization during these times.

**Our volunteers donated over 10,000 hours of their time this past year -
an overwhelming show of support!**

- **43 Water Quality Testers** spent **2,400 hours** testing and reporting on the health of our local waterways
- **46 Exhibit Guides**, including 16 new volunteers, **contributed over 2,100 hours** inspiring our guests at both the invertebrate touch tank and in our new Ocean EcoCenter
- Over **1,300 hours** spent by volunteers helping with habitat restoration programs including our **oyster, seagrass and wetland restoration** efforts
- **Six College Interns** worked tirelessly for over **1,000 hours** in our Animal Care, Research and Education Departments
- **100 volunteers** collectively spent 800 hours putting their stewardship into action by **cleaning up local beaches, waterways and roads**
- Our **Green Team Gardeners** provided close to **800 hours** with **garden and grounds upkeep**
- **11 Turtle Scouts** donated **215 hours** **walking our beaches** during hot summer nights to help with our nighttime sea turtle walks
- **150 hours** were spent by our **Teen Conservation Ambassadors** making a difference in our community
- **Countless hours** by **Board Members** who ensure that we continue with our mission



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OCEAN LEGACY SOCIETY

Members of the Ocean Legacy Society have notified Florida Oceanographic that we have been included in their legacy giving and estate plans. The Ocean Legacy Society supports the long-term health and sustainability of Florida Oceanographic.

Don & Jessica Armstrong
 Mary Jo & Jim Askew
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 Larry Cusick
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 a gift of Kay & John Ziegler
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Gordon & Anita Lamb through the Jefferson Family Charitable Foundation
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James & Kathryn Nichol
Robert & Suzanne Pearson
Riverview Cosmetic & Restorative Dentistry
Ken & Ilene Stern
Martin & Alicia Weber
Wilmington Trust

\$1,000 +

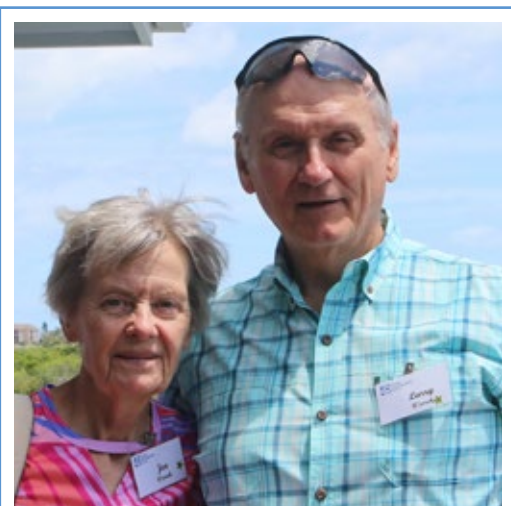
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Sally Batz & Henley Sandidge
The Howard Bayne Fund
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Frederick & Judy Blount
Patricia A. Borg
Drs. Anne Marie & John Borneman
Briggs-Trimble Family Charitable Fund
Larry & Sally Brodie
Jane & Robert Burton
Kim & Jeff Capen
Frank & Dee Cermak
Theresa L. Chafel
Norman & Monever Chambers
Sue & Steve Chase
Dan & Diane Clapp
Club Med Sandpiper Bay
John & Dorathea Coblentz
Tom & Lori Corcoran
Timothy & Maureen Cotter
William & Audrey Crandall
Kathy & Thomas Cullen
Gail & Donald Curtis
Richard & Karen Dakers
Steven & Marcia DeKramer
Michael & Nancy Del Priore
Kathleen DeMont
Doug & Jane Ditmars
Stephen & Lori Dutcher
Bernadette & Per Ellingsen
Sally Bradford & Lee Elsey
Melissa W. Escobar
Sally & Peter Ettlinger
Scott & Georgia Evaul
Elizabeth Fedele and Charles Ike
Ferreira Construction
Rip & Noreen Fisher

Florida Dept. of Agriculture &
Consumer Services
Rebecca Forster
Kathleen & Brent Freihofer
Wayne & Debra Freihofer
Beth & Lee Gaines
Michael & Linda Gambardella
Joan & Richard Gibbons
Great Florida Shellfish
Company, LLC
Barbara Grimmer
Harbour Ridge Yacht &
Country Club
Marjorie Hohman
Twinks Irvine
Hooks Construction
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John & Kallie Jurgens
Thomas & Pegi Kane
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Minneapolis Foundation
John & Julie Kime
Shannon & Nicholas King
Paul & Helen Kleinfeld
George & Carol Labadie
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Suzanne Schluter
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Kristofer & Melanie Lyon

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New England Wholesale
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Paulsen Kelly Family Fund at
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Martin - St. Lucie
Anonymous
Mark & Nancy Perry
The Susan & Nils Peterson
Charitable Fund
Rich & Angie Pontynen
Premier Realty Group Charitable
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Anonymous
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CAPITAL CAMPAIGN DONORS

\$1,000,000 +

The Kopf Family

\$500,000 +

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Philanthropic Fund at
The Community Foundation
Martin - St. Lucie
Martin County Tourism
Capital Project Grant

\$200,000 +

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In Memory of
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\$100,000 +

The Bauman Family Foundation
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Honor of their daughter
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\$25,000 +

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Memory of James Lewis
Askew, our "Pap"
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Sharkey Family Foundation
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\$15,000 +

Lee Elsey given In Memory
of Gaby Elsey
John & Carole Gregory
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Legatus Foundation
Ralf & Bob Massey
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The Pegasus Foundation

\$10,000 +

William & Cecilia Anspach
George & Anna Bergalis
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In Memory of Dan Chabot
The Collins Family In Loving
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Jason & Abbey
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Matthew & Susan King
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The Janet Prindle Seidler
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Douglass & Patricia Stewart
Alex & Mary Wade
Kathleen B. Walgreen
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Mr. Charles R. Walgreen III
Stanley & Laura Wiegand

\$2,000 +

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Up to \$2,000

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Scott & Kelly Turnbull
Isa Von Hessert
In Memory of May Webb



OPERATING PERFORMANCE

FISCAL YEAR OCT. 2020– SEPT. 2021 (FROM FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 9/30/21)

SUPPORT AND REVENUES

Admissions.....	\$447,591
Educational Programs.....	\$98,088
Gift Shop.....	\$221,556
General Contributions.....	\$548,854
Membership Contributions.....	\$230,752
Special Events.....	\$198,010
Research & Grants.....	\$110,131

Total Support and Revenues.....\$1,854,982

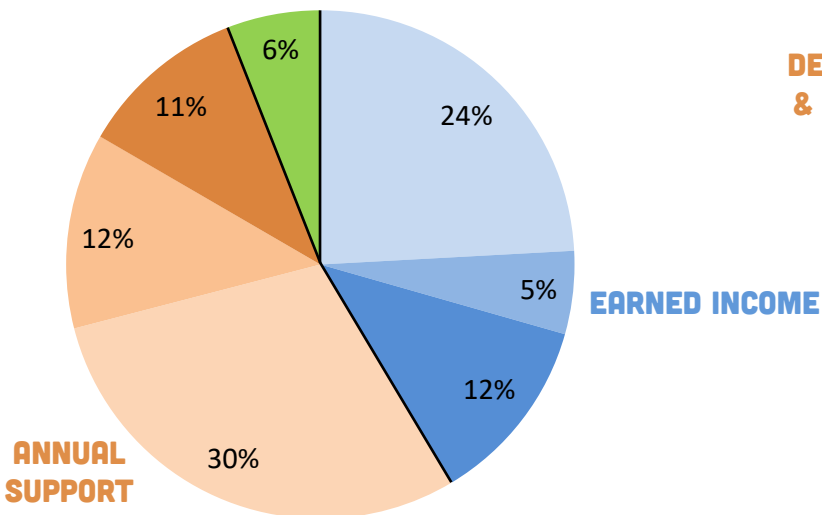
Gain from Extinguishment of Debt-
PPP Loan Forgiveness: \$471,200

EXPENSES

Visitor Center.....	\$201,801
Facilities.....	\$293,722
Animal Care & Life Support.....	\$257,369
Education & Volunteer Department.....	\$258,393
Research & Conservation.....	\$327,967
Development & Marketing.....	\$263,578
Administration.....	\$253,881

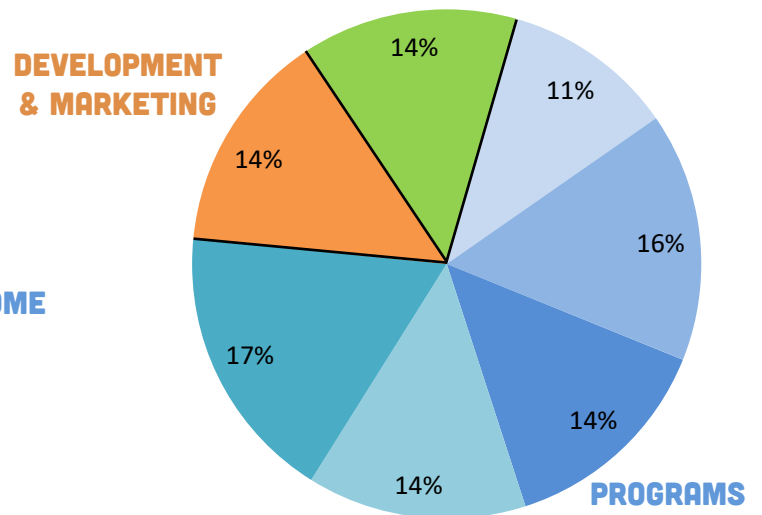
Total Expenses.....\$1,856,711

RESEARCH & GRANTS



- Admissions
- Educational Programs
- Gift Shop
- General Contributions
- Membership Contributions
- Special Events
- Research & Grants

ADMINISTRATION



- Visitor Center
- Facilities
- Animal Care & Life Support
- Education & Volunteer Department
- Research & Conservation
- Development & Marketing
- Administration

BOARD & STAFF DIRECTORY

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Animal Care Specialist
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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals
can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."

~Margaret Mead



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