

**Mosquito Lagoon Marine Enhancement Center
Management Plan Amendment, August 2020**
Volusia County, Florida



Introduction: Set in eastern Volusia County, Florida, in the City of New Smyrna Beach, sits the Mosquito Lagoon Marine Enhancement Center (MLMEC), also known as the Marine Discovery Center (MDC). This FWC-managed area is approximately 34.75 acres in size and is known for its many recreational and educational opportunities. Lying just north of the Mosquito Lagoon Aquatic Preserve, the MLMEC is surrounded by pristine marsh lands, and waters that empty into the Indian River Lagoon North.

The area, now known as the MLMEC, was previously the location of the New Smyrna Beach High School. However, through a donation from The Volusia County School Board, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Board of Trustees) now holds the title and has leased the area to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The FWC has lead management authority over the MLMEC for the purpose of providing education, research and recreational opportunities, with a sub-lease agreement issued to the MDC for cooperative management of the area.

Location: As noted above, the MLMEC is 34.75 acres, and is located in Eastern Volusia County, Florida in New Smyrna Beach. The MLMEC is located on the corner of Barracuda Blvd. and Quay Assisi. There are two entrances, one located on Quay Assisi just west of Barracuda Blvd, and another entrance located on Barracuda Blvd, just north of Quay Assisi. Located along the Atlantic Coast of Florida, surrounded by marsh land, and located adjacent to the Mosquito Lagoon Aquatic Preserve, the nearest Section, Township, and Range are Sections 40 and 41 in Township 17S, Range 34E.

The MLMEC is not within an area of critical state concern.

Acquisition History: As noted above, the MLMEC was originally acquired by the Board of Trustees through a donation from the School Board of Volusia County, in May 2008. Subsequently, the area was then leased to the FWC, making the FWC the lead managing authority over the area. In December 2009, the area was then subleased to the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, Inc., in order to "...manage the subleased premises only for educational, research and passive recreational purpose..."

In February 2012, the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida, then known as the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, entered into the sub-sublease agreement 4568-01-01 with the Artists' Workshop of New Smyrna Beach, Inc. (Artists' Workshop). Under this agreement, "...the Artists' Workshop is responsible for 100% of expenses and obligations related to the sub-subleased premises... which is approximately 40% of Building 11...the (Artist's Workshop) may use the sub-subleased premises only for the establishment and operation of an art education facility..."

In April 2012, the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida entered into the sub-sublease agreement 4568-01-02 with the Marine Discovery Center, Inc. Under this agreement,

“...the Marine Discovery Center is responsible for 100% of expenses and obligations related to the sub-subleased premises... which is approximately 60% of Building 11...the Marine Discovery Center may use the sub-subleased premises only for the establishment and operation of a membership-driven, not-for-profit organization that promotes the protection of the Indian River Lagoon and surrounding water through education, research, restoration and preservation...”

Subsequently, in September 2017, the sublease agreement between the FWC and the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida was transferred to the MDC. Under this new agreement, sublease number 4568-01 “...does hereby assign, transfer and convey 100% of its right, title, and interest... to Marine Discovery Center, Inc., for and during the remainder of the term of the Sublease...” making the MDC the new sub lessee for the area. Currently, the FWC and the MDC are also in the process of updating the sub-sub lease agreement with the Artists’ Workshop to reflect these changes.

Management Authority: The FWC is the designated lead managing agency for the MLMEC under the authority granted by Lease Agreement 4568 from the Board of Trustees. The FWC and the Board of Trustees have also granted authority under sublease agreement 4568-01 to the MDC for management of the area for educational, research and recreational uses. Further management authority derives from Article IV, Section 9 of the Florida Constitution as well as the guidance and directives of Chapters 253, 259, 327, 370, 373, 375, 378, 379, 403, 487, 597 and 870 and of the Florida Statutes. These constitutional provisions and laws provide the FWC the authority to protect, conserve and manage the State’s fish and wildlife resources.

Land Cover and Vegetation: The natural communities for the MLMEC were mapped using the Florida Cooperative Land Cover Map (CLC). The CLC is a cooperative effort between the FWC and the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) to develop ecologically based statewide land cover from existing sources and expert review of aerial photography. The CLC describes six natural and anthropogenic community types existing on the MLMEC including over 50% of the area classified as ruderal, with over 20% classified as salt marsh or salt marsh restored, nearly 10% mangrove swamp, 7% estuarine, and 4% mixed hardwood. Native and invasive exotic plant species lists have been compiled for the area and listed in the management plan. No imperiled plant species are known to exist on the MLMEC.

Fish and Wildlife Resources: As described above, the MLMEC has a variety of natural communities and habitat types that support nine imperiled or protected animal species, also known as listed species, which have been documented or may occur within the MLMEC. Additionally, the MLMEC has a diverse assortment of native fish and wildlife species. The FWC also maintains a list of exotic and invasive species documented or expected to occur at the MLMEC. The area’s mixture of marsh, mixed hardwood, swamp and water resources provide a

mosaic of habitat for wildlife. The proposed changes, described below, to the MLMEC have been determined to have no adverse effects on the wildlife on the area or their associated habitats.

Management Plan: The MLMEC management plan was approved on January 19th, 2018 and an update to this plan is due in January 2028. However, at this time, the FWC is submitting this management plan amendment to outline a proposed sublease agreement with Volusia County and request recreational facility improvements that Volusia County, in cooperation with the FWC and the MDC, plan to perform on the area.

Management Activities:

Project Description: As described in section 5.10 of the management plan, and above, Volusia County is requesting approval for the development of a trailhead and trail on the MLMEC (Figure 1). The developments, further described below and in section 5.10 of the management plan, are occurring on an existing, heavily altered site and will not have any adverse impacts to the area. These improvements will provide connectivity to the Volusia County regional trail system and provide the public with compatible recreational facilities that will further enhance the public recreational opportunities on the area. This trail and trailhead will include the following improvements on the MLMEC:

- A trail connecting to the Volusia County regional trail system. This trail will be a 12-foot-wide concrete trail, and approximately 1,000 feet in length.
- Removal of existing parking lot.
- Construction of a restroom facility.
- Installation of a bike rack.
- Drainage improvements associated with trailhead improvements.

As stated previously, these improvements will have no adverse effects on the wildlife or their associated habitats on the area. Additionally, these improvements will have no impact on the daily operations for the FWC and MDC staff. All construction and utility connection costs related to the proposed facilities, and maintenance of the trail, would be the responsibility of Volusia County. Staff responsible for all regular maintenance cost, utility costs and activities associated with the trailhead facilities will be further outlined and delineated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or other similar agreement, between Volusia County and MDC.

Sublease Description: Additionally, Volusia County, with the support of the FWC and the MDC, is requesting to enter into a sublease agreement with the FWC to maintain the developed trail as described above. However, the proposed restroom facility, also described above, will not be included in this sublease agreement. The newly constructed restroom facility will be a part of MDC's existing sublease agreement with the FWC. As mentioned previously, in conjunction with the proposed sublease agreement, an MOU, or other similar agreement, will also be developed to further delineate responsibility of the MDC and Volusia County in management and maintenance of the proposed trailhead facilities on the area.



Figure 1. Proposed Footprint of Volusia County Improvements on the MLMEC