



THE INFLUENCE OF HUMANITY ON THE COASTAL LANDSCAPE OF FLORIDA:
The Indian River as a Case Study

By

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INTRODUCTION

The coastal landscape has attracted ever increasing numbers of people since the very early days of Florida's history. In no other area of Florida is the presence of humanity more visible. It is estimated that well over 70% of Florida's total population lives within the coastal zone. The ecological impacts of accomodating ever increasing numbers of individuals within the coastal zone are not well understood and as a consequence in most cases are not considered as decisions are made concerning growth of the region. Only after symptoms of a declining environmental quality are noticed is there sufficient public attention drawn to the issues of growth management and environmental planning to achieve some measure of protection of the landscape components and processes that are threatened. For example, experience has shown that only after marked declines in commercial and sports fisheries is there enough public awareness of the problem to foster enough support to achieve some reversal of the trend. However, in many cases not enough is known about the causes of the declines much less what management strategies are necessary, so little if anything is done of lasting impact.

Again and again attention is focused because of some symptom....loss of sport fisheries, eutrophication of water bodies, near extinction of species, or salt water intrusion....and resources are directed at solving the symptom, not the problem. The problem, in most cases is the development of the landscape with little attention given to the "system" of the landscape. Little awareness is shown of the structural and functional "wholeness" that is the landscape system of wetlands and uplands, dry lands and water bodies, and developed lands and natural lands. Development patterns recognize individual property rights, and the infrastructure of urbanization, but pay little heed to the "infrastructure of nature"... the storage, movement, and discharge of surface and ground waters, the movements and budgets of nutrients, or the currents, eddies, and tides of marine waters.

Any plans to manage growth, or solve the myriad problems associated with the existing web of the urbanized coastal zone must have as a basis an understanding of Florida's landscape as an integrated whole system. Development regulations, plans for infrastructure expansion, and public policy need to reflect a new awareness of the landscape as a whole system, where wetlands are recognized for their values of water storage and