The importance of the Florida ICW to Palm Beach County’s history (and its future) is best summed up by the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) when announcing the completion of the waterway in the mid 1930s. “…. [The waterway] forges the last long link in the inland route from northern waters to southern Florida…. [The] joy of cruising to Palm Beach or Miami or still farther southward through the keys to Key West is no longer limited to those who own either big sea-going yachts or sturdy boats of exceptionally shallow draft……” The extension of the waterway to Palm Beach in the 1890s along with the parallel arrival of Flagler’s East Coast Railway (both part of a national strategy to extend the country’s transportation networks to open up new lands for development) put Palm Beach and later West Palm Beach and other communities lining the waterway on the map as premier locations.

As with Flagler’s railway, the waterway (then called the East Coast Canal) was constructed and owned by private entrepreneurs who received from the state large tracts of land along the waterway as compensation. In 1927, the era of private ownership of the ICW (and the tolls charged by those private owners) ended, and FIND (created at that time by the Florida legislature) purchased the waterway and conveyed it to the U.S. government. FIND still maintains and invests in the 370-mile long waterway, which in 1965 was expanded to its current 10-foot depth and 125-foot width. Today, the construction of the waterway, which represents one of Florida’s largest public works projects, continues to create transportation and value for the communities along it and the residents, businesses, and natural environment that benefit from and depend upon it.
Historical Overview: Prologue for the Future

Overview

Imagining Palm Beach County (and Florida’s east coast) without the Atlantic ICW is like imagining that same area without tourism, fishing, boating, marinas, waterfront restaurants and sports, bird watching, nature walks, beautiful houses, and laid back old Florida places. Intertwined with the history of Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast (FEC) Railway, the story of the Atlantic ICW in Florida is about transportation and real estate development. The ICW was designed to be a wide, safe, and sheltered inland waterway to expedite the movement of goods (winter fruits and vegetables) and early settlers and explorers traveling south. It also enabled better access to the land along the waterway, ultimately making those lands more valuable.

“The Waterway had its beginning nearly a century ago as the natural outgrowth of an effort to develop the almost connected chain of creeks, rivers, lakes, and sounds along Florida’s east coast into one continuous waterway.” (The Commission of the Florida Inland Navigation District – Announcing the Completion of the Florida ICW, Jacksonville to Miami, circa 1935)

In many ways, the development of the Intracoastal echoed Flagler’s construction of his railway. Similar to Flagler’s receiving land grants in exchange for developing the railway, between 1881 and 1912, the early entrepreneurs who built what was then called the East Coast Canal were granted large tracts of abutting state-owned land to aid in its construction (a part of a cash-short U.S. strategy to privatize its infrastructure). When developing those lands, many entrepreneurs consulted some of the best urban designers of the day, resulting in the creation of some of the most attractive and enduring towns and villages along Florida’s east coast. In the 1890s, the
storylines of two transportation efforts that would fundamentally shape the future development of Palm Beach County merged: the development of the County’s portion of the ICW (its marine highway) and the construction of the FEC Railway. In that decade, the East Coast Canal reached the Jupiter Inlet and began to push south, and Flagler arrived with his railway (often credited with putting Palm Beach on the map).

By the time the then five-foot deep and 50-foot wide ICW was completed in 1912, Palm Beach County’s 43-mile section was composed of 13 miles of manmade canals (the result of extensive cutting and dredging). Those canals linked (and, through their narrow, straight lines, stood in contrast to) 30 miles of natural flowing waterbodies composed of the rivers, lakes, and lagoons, which comprised the major east county estuaries. The 20-mile Lake Worth Lagoon, a major county estuarine resource located in the center of Palm Beach County, is the largest natural section of the ICW. Additional natural sections include Lake Rogers, Lake Wyman, Lake Boca Raton, and a small portion in northern Palm Beach County of the 156-mile Indian River Lagoon (an Estuary of National Significance) and what is today the Loxahatchee River-Lake Worth Creek Aquatic Preserve. Today’s ICW is maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the FIND (a Special State Taxing District) and is part of a 3,000-mile inland waterway running along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and consisting of natural inlets, salt water rivers, bays, and sounds, and manmade canals.

The Early Years: 1820s - 1870s ~

The Beginnings of the Florida East Coast Canal

The initial discussions of creating a navigable Florida east coast inland waterway began in the early days of the country’s history when leaders turned their attention to improving public transportation through a connected system of canals, rivers, and roads. At that time, a large part of Florida’s east coast was composed of a series of long and narrow peninsulas along with islands that were parallel to the mainland but separated from it by salt and brackish water sounds and lagoons. The dredging of the artificial canals to create a continuous inland waterway for transportation purposes connected those waterbodies.

One of the first mentions of what would ultimately become the ICW goes back to the 1820s when Florida was still a U.S. territory. An Army surveyor recommended joining the Mosquito Lagoon (a part of the Indian River Lagoon) and the Indian River by way of the Haulover Canal (where travelers had to carry boats from one navigable place to another) on the north end of Merritt Island in Brevard County. A few years later, residents in the northern part of Florida proposed to Congress that a canal be cut to connect the Matanzas River (a saltwater bar-bounded estuary that provides the entry to St. Augustine’s port) located in St. Johns and Flagler counties with the Halifax River in the northern part of Volusia County. Another step came in the late 1820s when the Florida Territorial Legislative Council chartered the first of what would become a group of companies created to
construct canals on the east coast and in other areas of what was then the Florida Territory. It was not until the 1850s, however, that any digging began (the canal at a haulover between the Mosquito Lagoon and Indian River, a $5,000 initiative led by an engineer with the U.S. Army).

After the Civil War, the relatively new State of Florida took two steps that would shape the future development of the state’s east coast. In 1874, the same year that U.S. Army engineers started work on a channel connecting the St. Johns River and the Nassau Inlet, the legislature approved the private incorporation of canal companies. A few years later, the state decided to incentivize canal and railroad building by using a common practice of that time – granting large tracts of land (for right-of-way), instead of public funds, to private entrepreneurs willing to build the country’s burgeoning transportation network of canals, railways, and highways. As noted by William Crawford in A History of Florida’s East Coast Canal, companies building the canals were granted “alternate sections of state lands on either side of their proposed railroads or canals for a distance of six miles upon completion of each six-mile section.” That action firmly linked the ICW to the future development of the land adjacent to it.

The construction of an East Coast Canal was viewed as critical for shipping fruits and vegetables and encouraging settlers to move to the southern part of the state, primarily to farm. The result was the reverse of what we see today in real estate values: agricultural lands to the west (in Palm Beach County - its muck lands) were the most valuable, not the land along the soon to be railroad and ICW. In-town lots were often thrown in for free or for a great discount when agricultural lots were purchased. Beach lots were not considered valuable because nothing would grow there.

1881-1912: Canal Construction Takes Off and Palm Beach County Becomes a Destination

1880s: The Jupiter-Lake Worth Canal Link Gets the Okay
A new period of investments began in 1881 that focused on the creation of a protected east coast
north-south waterway. In that year, the Florida Coastline Canal and Transportation Company was incorporated as a private canal company, and the Florida legislature awarded the Canal Company the authority to start dredging a canal that would extend from the Matanzas River (extending 20 miles through St. Johns and Flagler Counties) to the Indian River. The legislature also granted the Canal Company “3,840 acres of state land for every mile of canal constructed and further gave the company the right to collect tolls,” Crawford notes. Ultimately, there were a total of six toll collection points between Jacksonville and Biscayne Bay, two of which were on Lake Worth. The Canal Company-maintained chains crossed the canal below the water surface, thus preventing passage until the toll was paid. The Canal Company was allowed to extend the canal further south to Lake Worth (1881), Biscayne Bay (1885), and ultimately Key West. As noted by Crawford in the Big Dig, in 1885 the state facilitated the extension by utilizing the Internal Improvement Fund to set aside large areas of reserve lands on both sides of the canal.

Eighteen eighty-six was an important year for future real estate development along the ICW, particularly in Palm Beach County. George L. Bradley joined a group of wealthy industrialists from the northeast who invested in the Canal Company. Bradley, the first treasurer of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, was later involved in creating the Boston and Florida Atlantic Land Company, a new real estate development company that in 1892 purchased 100,000 acres from the Canal Company, giving it a much-needed cash infusion. The Land Company’s holdings generally bordered the canal and extended from Titusville to the north and Miami to the south. Flagler was eventually given an interest in the Land Company’s planned communities.

Prior to the arrival of the canal and railway, the early settlements in Palm Beach relied on steamboats for transportation. The Indian River Steamboat Company brought passengers and freight from Titusville south to Jupiter. After a rough overland freight wagon ride from Jupiter to Juno (a section that would later prove a challenge when constructing the East Coast Canal), travelers had to board another steamboat (the “Lake Worth”) to reach Palm Beach and points further south.

Throughout the decade, the principal settlements in what was then Dade County (of which today’s Broward and Palm Beach Counties were part) were on Lake Worth and Biscayne Bay. From 1890 to 1900, Juno (now known as Juno Beach) served as both the county seat as well as the transportation terminal linking northern Florida to its southern lands by way of the Indian River, and Jupiter to Lake Worth.
In order to create a rail link from Jacksonville to the new county seat, a rail line was planned to make the 7.5 mile connection between Jupiter and Juno. In 1887, that led to the creation of the Jupiter and Lake Worth Railroad that traveled through the way stations of “Venus” and “Mars.” (Those town names, along with Jupiter as the beginning point and Juno as the end, resulted in its being called the Celestial Railroad.) As the southernmost railroad in the country, the Celestial gained some national recognition, but after a period of hauling materials for the construction of Flagler’s Royal Poinciana Hotel in Palm Beach, the railroad was later eclipsed when Flagler built his railway, leaving a few rail spikes that remain today in the beaches of Juno and Jupiter.

In 1889, a new standard emerged: the Canal Company was to maintain a canal from the St. Johns River to the Biscayne Bay that was not less than five feet deep at the mean low water and not less than 50 feet wide.

**1890's: The Canal Reaches Palm Beach and Flagler's Railway**

The 1890s began with the canal reaching what is today Palm Beach County. The 134 mile long-waterway from the Haulover Canal to the Jupiter Inlet (where the Loxahatchee River empties into the Atlantic Ocean) was completed in the fall of 1890. The push south of Lake Worth, which began in 1894, went fairly quickly because the route only had to connect a series of existing natural waterbodies. By 1895, the canal had been completed (through Lake Wyman and Lake Boca Raton) to the New River in what is now Fort Lauderdale. Dredge operators started at both the Lake Worth and New River ends, completing the work when they met. The stretch consisted of two sections: a fourteen-mile section through Lake Wyman and Lake Boca Raton to the Hillsboro River at the Hillsboro Inlet and a narrower section extending another ten miles to the New River Inlet at Fort Lauderdale. By 1910, the canal dredging had reached Key Biscayne, creating 77 miles of waterway between Juno and Miami.

Although the work began in 1891, the last mile of the final and very difficult eight-mile cut between Jupiter and Juno (what some called the Jupiter-to-Lake Worth divide) would not be completed until 1898. The Jupiter to Lake Worth cut, as described by Crawford in The Big Dig, involved some dredge cuts that were as much as 22 feet deep, resulting in so much dredge material that a temporary railway line
had to be built. The dredging to create the final section extended along the watershed of Lake Worth Creek and cut through to Lake Worth, creating the barrier island that is now Juno Beach. It was the Jupiter to Lake Worth cut, Crawford notes, that finally made an unbroken inside water passage from Titusville to Key West possible, thereby providing easier access to areas along Florida’s southeast coast. That safe passage along with the parallel extension of Flagler’s railway opened up what some called the last frontier: southern Florida. It also linked three of Florida’s great waterbodies – the Indian River, Lake Worth Lagoon, and Biscayne Bay.

The 1890s was also when the future of the canal became linked to Henry Flagler through a mutually beneficial relationship. Flagler wanted to extend his railway further south (from Rockledge, the oldest city in Brevard County) but could not because the Canal Company had been granted most of the available land within six miles of the canal. (Originally Flagler planned to stop his railway at Palm Beach, but because of crop-freezing weather and urges from Miami, he decided to extend the railway south.) To solve the problem, Flagler proposed that in exchange for extending the railway 104 miles south of Rockledge, he would be granted a share of the Canal Company’s land grant. Recognizing the benefits of extending the railway further south (the Canal Company was in need of a cash infusion and the canal was used to haul supplies used in building the railway), in 1892 the Canal Company approved Flagler’s proposal, granting what ultimately became one-quarter of its land to Flagler. He, in turn, invested $500,000 in the Canal Company and served as its president from 1893 to 1896.

It [the Florida ICW] provides a broad, deep, well-marked and sheltered passage down Florida’s picturesque east coast to the recreational rendezvous of the American Riviera. With this new facility for safe, speedy voyaging, Florida beckons more alluringly than ever to yachtsmen. We invite you to answer our call: Come to Florida in your own boat. Enjoy the romance, the glamour and the colorful gaieties of Florida life.

The Commission of the Florida Inland Navigation District – Announcing the Completion of the Florida ICW Jacksonville to Miami, circa 1935

The combination of a completed railway along with a fully navigable waterway extending the full length of Florida from St. Augustine to the Biscayne Bay were heralded at the time as vehicles to make Florida a desirable destination (praise that later proved to be correct during the 1920s’ Florida land boom). In
1892, the Lake Worth Land Trust was established by Bradley and others and began to purchase land from the Canal Company, which needed more cash. The Lake Worth Land Trust purchased 2,200 acres of land from the company, including land in Palm Beach County.

Flagler’s railroad reached what he called the Lake Worth region in 1894, and Flagler decided to turn Palm Beach into a resort and West Palm Beach (originally called Westpalmbeach) into a commercial city where his workers could live. To create the latter, he purchased a strip of land from Lake Worth to Clear Lake for a sum of $45,000 and proceeded to lay out the city’s streets. One of those streets (Clematis) evolved into the downtown’s main street, connecting the historic Harvey and Clark Seaboard Train Station (to the west) to the ferry launch (to the east) that transported passengers to Palm Beach. In 1923, the well-known John Nolen prepared a plan for West Palm Beach.

Flagler’s first hotel in Palm Beach (1894) was the Royal Poinciana Hotel, which overlooked Lake Worth and began to attract the country’s wealthy elite. When the hotel was later expanded from approximately 540 to 1,100 rooms, it was considered the largest wooden structure in the world. Two years later, Flagler built the Palm Beach Inn on the beachfront of the Royal Poinciana— a location that later earned its name the Breakers (because guests requested rooms “by the breakers”). Flagler would also build his home, Whitehall, in Palm Beach, securing its status as one of the preferred winter resorts of the era’s wealthy population, many of whom would arrive via a cruise down the ICW.

Reinforcing his link to the development of the ICW, Flagler created the Model Land Company in 1885 to hold title to his Florida East Coast Railway state-granted lands, as well as lands (Crawford notes in The Big Dig) held by the Florida Canal Company and the Boston and Florida Land Company. A year later, the Model Development Company joined with the Canal Company, the Boston and Florida Land Development Company, and others to market their land holdings through the same real estate agent. Those land holdings in Palm Beach County included Boynton (now Boynton Beach) and Linton (now Delray Beach), which had their beginnings in 1894 when U.S. Congressman William S. Linton (Michigan), Civil War Major Nathan Boynton, and David Swinton traveled to the area on a sailboat via the newly dredged East Coast Canal to find a winter retreat from Michigan’s harsh winters.
from Michigan who came with their families and settled in the area. Flagler’s railway was to come a year later, followed by the completion of the hotel in 1897. The hotel attracted visitors to the growing community and provided an outlet for winter vegetables and fruits grown by local settlers for northern markets. To get travelers from the train station to the hotel using a mule-drawn surrey, Boynton constructed a shellrock road (later called Ocean Avenue) from the hotel to the East Coast Canal. A wooden hand-pull toll bridge was constructed at the canal. In 1911, the first bridge was completed over the East Coast Canal at Ocean Avenue, and by 1926 the South Lake Worth Inlet was opened to relieve water from the East Coast Canal by connecting Lake Worth to the ocean.

During that same period, Linton purchased land south of Boynton from the Model Development Company, the Lake Worth Trust, and others. He and the Model Land Company recorded his plan for what would be the town of Linton (another farming community) in 1896, the same year that Flagler’s railway reached Linton. The town was located on a higher dry prairie a short distance from a swampy area that locals called the morass – an area that was made deeper and wider to create a navigable portion of the East Coast Canal. The canal, along with the arrival of the railway, gave settlers a better transportation system for shipping winter crop fruits and vegetables to northern states. Before the canal, travelers had to use the Orange Grove Haulover. After a hard freeze destroyed crops in 1898, Linton defaulted on his land payment, leading settlers from Michigan to change the name of Linton to Delray (named for a Detroit neighborhood).

The 1890s also saw the U.S. government take over the responsibility of maintaining the Indian River portion of the canal between Titusville and Jupiter. Toward the end of the 1890s, the East Coast Canal experienced two historic events: the Canal Company granted rights for the first steamers to operate on the waterway and the waterway was used to ship munitions during the Spanish-American War.

**1900-1912: Completion of the East Coast Canal**

After several years of litigation and construction delays, the 370-mile long canal was completed in 1912 when the last section between St. Augustine and the St. Johns River was finally finished. The final cost was approximately $3.5 million. With that final land conveyance, the privately-owned Canal Company had received just over a million acres of public land (1,030,128 to be exact) for 268 miles of canal construction. As an incentive to complete the work, the Florida legislature provided that the Canal Company would not receive land grants for any sections of the canal completed after 1912.

Nineteen twelve also saw the official founding of what is now the City of Lake Worth (then called Jewel and later the Townsite of Lucerne). The result of another Canal Company real estate transaction, the area was a part of a much larger landholding called the Palm Beach Farms, a 234-square mile tract of land extending from West Palm Beach some 30 miles south to Boca Raton. According to Crawford, John Barrs, a friend of then-Broward County sheriff and later Florida Governor Napoleon Broward, subsequently purchased that area of land from the Canal Company.
Lake Worth quickly grew when real estate agents offered a free in-town lot for each five-to-ten acre tract of fruit and truck land purchased for the price of $250 in an area known as Greenacres City. The giveaway lots were so successful and the ICW location so desirable that, between April and December 1912, the small settlement increased from 38 to 308 permanent residents, resulting in the name “Wonder City”. As the town grew, many of its houses and public buildings, including what today is City Hall, were designed by the well-know architect G. Sherman Childs.

1913-1926: Florida Land from Boom to Bust and Private to Public Canal

In the 1920s, real estate development in Florida took off. Once only accessible to the rich or the focus of settlers interested in farming, Florida was now the focus of real estate speculators and middle class vacationers seeking a warmer home or warm place to vacation. Another Palm Beach link to the East Coast Canal materialized in 1925, shortly before the 1920s’ Florida land boom burst, when Harry Kelsey, a West Palm developer who had been buying land from the Boston and Atlantic Land Development Company, purchased the canal for $550,000 and invested in making improvements to the deteriorating and, in places, impassable canal.

By 1920, Mr. Kelsey had contracted with Dr. John Nolen, who also prepared a design plan for West Palm Beach, and the Olmsted brothers (the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted) to design Kelsey City in northern Palm Beach County. In 1923, the community incorporated making it the first planned municipality in the state. However, events of the 1920s (the bust of the Florida land boom and the...
1928 hurricane, which destroyed most of the city), and the 1930s (the stock market crash) led to City becoming defunct and the state nullifying its charter. In 1939, the city was officially renamed the Town of Lake Park. In the mid 1950s John D. MacArthur paid $5.5 million for 2,600 acres of land in northern Palm Beach County that had been owned originally by Kelsey. That land area included portions of today’s Lake Park, North Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens and Palm Beach Shores.

In 1925, the Town of Boca Raton was incorporated at the height of the Florida land boom as a mostly agricultural community. The original town was platted by Flagler and the Canal Company. The town council commissioned noted architect Addison Mizner, who had arrived in Palm Beach a few years earlier and designed many of the town’s buildings, including the Everglades Club overlooking Lake Worth, to plan a world-class resort community. His centerpiece on the Intracoastal, the Cloister Inn, was completed in 1926, the year the land boom ended, and continues today as the Boca Raton Resort and Club. Unfortunately, the development company that Mizner created in 1925 to transform Boca Raton soon came upon hard times when the speculative land boom that had begun in 1922 began to deflate. However, Mizner’s Mediterranean Revival style of architecture left a stamp on south Florida that remains today.

Even while the land boom was at its height, discussions that began as far back as 1913 were underway about turning over control of the canal over to the U.S. government. In 1922, the U.S. Corps of Engineers held four hearings, including one in West Palm Beach, which was attended by some 50 community leaders, to solicit views about a possible federal government takeover of the deteriorating privately-owned canal. By 1926, discussions of a federal takeover intensified with the collapse of the Florida land boom, which led to a dramatic drop in toll income and a rise in maintenance problems along the canal. Those factors exacerbated complaints about the failure to maintain the canal at the required 50-foot width and 5-foot depth. Nineteen twenty-six ended with a report to Congress recommending that the canal and necessary right-of-way be turned over to the federal government. Also suggested was widening the East Coast Canal to 75 feet and increasing its depth to eight feet, at an estimated cost of $4.2 million.

The early 1900s were also important for the Lake Worth Lagoon (named for William Worth, commander of the Eighth Infantry Regiment in the Second Seminole War). It was originally a fresh water lake with drainage from swampy areas along its western edge (an area that became the Lake Worth Creek as it approached the Loxahatchee River and Jupiter Inlet), and efforts to create an inlet began as early as the 1860s. Following Flagler’s enlargement of the inlet during the 1890s, 1915 saw the creation of the Lake Worth Inlet District and action by the Port of Palm Beach to create a permanent four feet deep inlet. Dredging in the early 1920s led to an inlet depth of 12 feet in 1920, 16 feet in 1923, and 18 feet in 1926. The same period also saw extension of the jetties.

During that time period, discussions were underway related to creating another inlet in the southern part of Lake Worth, leading in 1915 to the creation of the South Lake Worth Inlet District to construct and maintain an inlet connection from the southern end of the lake to the ocean. The intent was to improve
the declining water quality of the lake and to provide for shipping and transportation. In 1917, the South Lake Worth Inlet was created in what was later considered a failed effort to improve tidal circulation and provide flushing to the south end of the lagoon. The 1925 completion of the West Palm Beach spillway led to the inflow of needed freshwater and provided for the development of the west shore of the lagoon.

The 1920s also saw the creation of today’s Peanut Island, a spoil island that resulted from dredging. Today the 79-acre island is owned by the Florida Inland Navigation District, the Port of Palm Beach, and Palm Beach County and is home to the Palm Beach Maritime Museum. It has also been the focus of major habitat restoration and construction investments. Sites on the island help tell its history: John F. Kennedy’s bunker (a reminder of the Cold War) and a U.S. Coast Guard ‘Ready’ House.

1927: Contemporary Times – The New Era of the Florida Inland Navigation District Begins

A new era began in 1927 when the U.S. Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act, thereby ending the privatization of the ICW which turned out not to be a profitable venture. That act assigned the federal government the role of constructing and maintaining the navigation channel of the ICW and authorized establishing and maintaining an inland waterway that in most parts was 75 feet wide and eight feet deep at mean low water. In response, the Florida legislature created the FIND, which was established as an independent special district.

The District was authorized to purchase the existing canal from its private owners and subsequently convey it to the U.S. government. FIND helps to acquire and maintain necessary rights-of-ways and land for dredged material management to the federal government. FIND is composed of twelve Florida east coast counties: Nassau, Duval, St. Johns, Flagler, Volusia, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade. The district is governed by a twelve-member Board of Commissioners, one from each county in the district, who are appointed by the Governor.

Later, voters in the District approved a $1.8 million bond issue to purchase the Coast Line Canal and undertake the expanded right-of-way and spoil areas needed to enlarge and improve the waterway, including the smoothing of the canals’ sharp turns. By the end of 1929, title to the waterway had been transferred to the U.S. government. Use of the waterway was free (symbolized by dropping the toll
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: PROLOGUE FOR THE FUTURE

In 1927, the Florida Legislature created the Florida Inland Navigational District to be the local sponsor of the ICW. Its first board of commissioners is pictured above.

During World War II, it provided a safe, protected route for cargo ships that were being torpedoed by German submarines off the east coast of the U.S. By 1965, the section of the waterway from Jacksonville to Ft. Pierce was expanded to 12 feet deep and 125 feet wide, and from Ft. Pierce to Miami, 10 feet deep and 125 feet wide.

The Navigation District has continued to enhance the waterway. In the 1980s, for example, in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers, Palm Beach County’s Department of Environmental Resources Management, and the State of Florida, it began a series of projects to inventory and improve existing spoil disposal sites, the majority of which were found to be unusable because of their small size or environmental sensitivity. Since that time, studies have been completed for six counties, including Palm Beach County. Major restoration activities have been initiated at several Palm Beach County spoil islands (created or expanded by depositing spoil from waterway dredging), including Peanut Island, Munyon Island, John’s Island, and the Snook Islands in the Lake Worth Lagoon. Those and other restoration activities have continued through the 1990s.

In 1927, the Florida legislature authorized the District to expend funds for publicizing the completion of the waterway and promote its use to all types of watercraft. Palm Beach County’s D.H. Conkling (a founder of the Palm Beach Post and Commodore of the Palm Beach Yacht Club) served as the secretary of the district. The 1930s also saw expansion of the canal to a 100-foot channel with an eight-foot controlling depth in order to enhance the operation of both commercial and pleasure boat traffic. The expanded waterway was completed to Miami in 1935.

Harry Kelsey. Photo courtesy of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

Pictured above, Peanut Island was created from the spoil that resulted from dredging the waterway.

Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council
Indian River - St. Lucie - Martin - Palm Beach

FINAL
efforts are detailed in the Natural Resources chapter of this report. In 1985, the Florida legislature created a District Assistance Program to help state, regional, and local governments with waterway improvement projects in the areas of navigation, waterway access facilities, boating safety, and recreation and environmental education. Through that program, the District has assisted 290 projects, contributing $32.2 million that led to $97.7 million in waterway improvements and related benefits.

The ICW has come a long way since it carried early settlers south and locally-grown produce north. In 2008, Palm Beach County had more than 38,000 registered vessels, including freight, commercial vessels, and recreational craft. Recreational vessels, which average one vessel for every 33 county residents and account for a $1.42 billion total economic output, generate more than 600,000 yearly boating trips. Those trips do not include hundreds more trips by visiting boats and commercial vessels that contribute another $503 million in total economic output. Boaters are supported by 1,000-plus businesses (40 percent of which are located on or adjacent to the waterway) that generate some $1.29 billion in estimated annual revenues. Details of the development patterns along the waterway, restoration efforts within the waterway, and access to and from the Intracoastal are detailed in the balance of this report.

[Resource documents for this overview of the ICW in Palm Beach County include the following: Florida’s Inland Navigation District: History Background <www.aicw.org/history.htm>; A History of Florida’s East Coast Canal: The Atlantic ICW from Jacksonville to Miami by William Crawford, Jr.; Broward Legacy (published by the Broward County Historical Commission), Summer/Fall 1997; History of Island Estates and the Surrounding Waterways <www.aicw.org/island-estates.pdf>, assembled through resources provided by Catherine Wilson of the Flagler Beach Historical Museum and comments by the Florida Inland Navigation District, Gail Wadsworth, and several old time residents; and Florida’s Big Dig: The Atlantic ICW from Jacksonville to Miami 1881-1935 by William Crawford, Jr., copyright 2006.]

With nearly 40,000 registered boats in Palm Beach County today supported by more than 1,000 businesses, the ICW has come a long way since it carried early settlers south and winter fruits and vegetables north.