



Duane E. De Freese, Ph.D., Executive Director
IRL Council & Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program



Look deep into some of Florida's most innovative conservation initiatives, you will eventually run across Duane's name. Over four decades, Dr. De Freese has been a champion of science-based, common-sense, ocean and coastal conservation in Florida. He is recognized for his ability to see and communicate the big picture by integrating environmental, economic and social considerations into a vision for Florida's future.

Duane holds a B.S. degree in Zoology from the University of Rhode Island (1976). He earned his M.S. (1982) and Ph.D. (1988) in Marine Biology from Florida Tech, Melbourne, FL. He holds special course certificates from the Roy E. Crummer Graduate School of Business, Rollins College (mini-MBA, 2002); Duke University, School of the Environment (Conservation Land Acquisition, 1991); and Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, MA. (Mariculture, 1983).

Working with the Marine Resources Council, Duane helped to secure U.S. EPA National Estuary Program designation for the Indian River Lagoon (IRL) in 1990. In September 2015, his career came full circle when he was named Executive Director of a new independent Special District of Florida (IRL Council) to serve as the host agency for the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRLNEP). Duane has guided the reorganization of the IRLNEP with a new unified mission: "One Lagoon - One Community - One Voice". The mission recognized that we must work together as federal, state and local partners with a shared vision to restore and protect the IRL system, one of the nation's most treasured and threatened estuaries.

Previous Career Experience: Sr. Vice President of Science & Business Development, AquaFiber Technologies Corporation (2009-2015). Appointment by the Dean of the College of Sciences, University of Central Florida, to develop a vision for coastal research and technology development in conjunction with the UCF coastal & sea turtle research center located within the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge (2008-2009). First Vice President of Florida Research for Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute (1998-2008). First program director for the Brevard County Environmentally Endangered Lands Program (1991-1998).

Volunteer Service: Appointed by three Florida Governors to serve on statewide advisory boards. 1. Florida Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force administered by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Appointment by Governor Ron DeSantis, 2019 – present. 2. CareerSource Florida Board of Directors. Appointment by former Governor Rick Scott, 2013-2022; and 3. Advisory Board member Nature and Heritage Tourism Committee of Florida Tourism Commission. Appointment by former Governor Jeb Bush, 2001-2005. In 2024, Duane serves on the advisory boards of the Florida Ocean Alliance, Association of National Estuary Programs, Southeast and Caribbean Disaster Resilience Partnership (Chair), Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association, and Campaign Cabinet Member for the Brevard Zoo Aquarium Project.

Recent Recognition: Lagoon Champion Award, Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County, (2025); Environmental Advocacy "Eagle" Award presented by U.S. Congressman Bill Posey (2024); Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast Volunteer of the Year Award (2023); Dedication of the future Brevard Zoo Aquarium conservation building as the "Dr. Duane De Freese Coastal Conservation Hub" (2022); Nominee in the culture section for the East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame (2021, 2023); Junior Achievement SpaceCoast Business Hall of Fame Laureate (2022); Lead Brevard Rodney S. Ketcham Leadership Icon Award (2020).

Duane has published numerous scientific articles, is a highly sought public speaker, and enjoys Florida life as an avid surfer and waterman.