

CARRABELLE





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Community Snapshot

VISION: “Carrabelle is a community that cares about our neighbors and our environment. We are committed to protecting, preserving, promoting and enhancing:

- Our cultural and historical resources
- Our waterfront environment
- Our aquatic ecosystem
- Our access to the waterfront
- Our unique history, character and sense of community

We are equally committed to:

- Working to sustain marine industries and
- Enhancing public safety and
- Creating an environment for economic growth and prosperity”

DESIGNATION: 2007

APPLICANT: City of Carrabelle

PARTNERS: Carrabelle C.A.R.E.S.; Friends of the Carrabelle Waterfront.

STATUS: Active; Steering Committee and Sub-Committees meet regularly.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Establishing the Carrabelle Waterfronts Florida Partnership office at the waterfront; wharf-side improvements for accessibility and education; historical resources survey grant

FLORIDA ASSESSMENT OF COASTAL TRENDS DATA:

Number of Active Volunteers:	45
Volunteer Hours Contributed:	11,329
Public Dollars Contributed:	\$1.8 million
Private Dollars Contributed:	\$112,000

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The City of Carrabelle is located in Franklin County, some 80 miles south of Tallahassee and 80 miles east of Panama City. The town of 1,300 is defined by the Carrabelle, Ochlocknee, New, and Crooked Rivers, the St. George Sound and the Gulf of Mexico. The community's way-of-life is tied to its natural resources. The timber industry began to thrive after the Civil War, continuing in some form and varying in intensity into modern times and characterized recently by corporate plans for large scale land development. The City and other parts of coastal Franklin County are known for production of seafood and for easy access to the Gulf for sport and recreational fishing. Carrabelle was known in the 1950s for party boats that carried tourists offshore for day-long fishing expeditions. Carrabelle is the last deepwater port near the eastern terminus of the protected Gulf Intracoastal Waterway that begins at Brownsville, Texas.

Often described as unspoiled, Carrabelle straddles U.S. 98, a designated Scenic Byway that winds its way along the Florida Panhandle in an area known as the Forgotten Coast. The City is situated between Apalachicola to the west and Panacea to the east, both designated Waterfronts communities. Low, single and two-story homes prevail, located near the highway with commercial buildings

or perched atop a series of ancient dunes. Newer structures claimed parts of the waterfront and some off-water locations over the last 10 years, jutting two- to three-stories into the sky to meet flood height restrictions imposed on new coastal construction, providing second homes or short-term rentals for tourists. Three seafood processors remain active in the City, each operating at off-water locations. One packs and ships shrimp and fish, another is licensed to shuck and sell raw oysters, and the third handles clams grown on leased beds at Alligator Harbor at the eastern edge of the County.

Most of the commercial shrimp boats have moved on in recent years as waterfront property once used for tie-ups was sold for marinas and/or housing. An eastside stretch remains home to two or three captains who anchor at abandoned piers. Another shrimper purchased waterfront property to secure a place for his boats, selling seafood nearby at The Fisherman's Wife, a tiny establishment located alongside U.S. 98.

A Coast Guard station sits at the end of Marine Street on the east side of the river, sharing a spit of land with an Air Force defense tracking outpost. Nearby City-owned docks, built in recent years with state grant money, provide landside fishing for non-boaters and tie-up space for sport/recreational boats. Traditional dock space was lost on the west side of the river circa 2004, when state-owned property at Timber Island was sold to a land development company. The remaining island waterfront provides a county boat ramp, condo development with a restaurant, a major marina, landing space for law enforcement and an off-water site for dry stacks and a boat repair yard.

FROM FRIENDS OF THE WATERFRONT TO WATERFRONTS FLORIDA

Carrabelle has faced dramatic changes in recent years. The frenzied pace of real estate development in the early 2000s led to discussions about height restrictions, changes in the zoning codes, and questions about what to do with the waterfront. The local Chamber of Commerce and a developer conducted separate visioning processes within a year or two of one another, neither of which was accepted by the City Commission. The groundwork for a third vision — with a goal fixed on revitalizing the waterfront and the entire local economy — began in 2006 with a group known as Friends of the Carrabelle Waterfront. The 16-member steering committee met every couple of months to consider what could be done. Committee members represented the local Chamber of

Commerce, the library, the historical society, and a non-profit organization known as Carrabelle C.A.R.E.S. In 2007, the group partnered with the City of Carrabelle to apply for — and achieve — designation as a Waterfronts Florida Community. In all, the Carrabelle Waterfront Partnership sponsored three town hall meetings, mailed out questionnaires, and sent retired engineers and boat builders to Carrabelle boat ramps to find out what boaters wanted. The group kept the nautical heritage of the community as it worked toward completing its vision, “Charting a Course for the Carrabelle Waterfront,” which was completed in 2008.

The Partnership shows a strong interest in finding a way to make a place for commercial as well as sport/recreational fishing at the Carrabelle Wharf. Preservation of the commercial seafood industry — or at least its place at the waterside — is a challenge here, where waterfront real estate still commands a price far and above the revenue generated by a food-producing industry. The idea is to make the dock space inclusive, to preserve the fishing heritage and culture and to retain space for other uses including transient boaters and non-motorized water craft such as kayaks, paddleboats, and canoes. The group is also interested in a yacht basin to support the larger boats that ply the Intracoastal Waterway and to integrate the waterfront and off-water economies, perhaps with the brand “Carrabelle by land, Carrabelle by sea.”

THE PRACTICALITIES OF PARTNERSHIP

The Carrabelle Waterfronts Partnership office has waterfront access. The Partnership office, staffed by the program manager and an administrative assistant, is located in a tiny dock master’s house perched over the water alongside a walkway, ramp and dock. The City Commission pays for the rent, water, sewer, and phone. The Carrabelle City Commission contracts with Carrabelle C.A.R.E.S., a non-profit organization, for administration of the Carrabelle Waterfronts Florida Partnership.

The Partnership functions through a set of by-laws designed to make sure that the group’s work is done in the committees. The Board of Directors serves as the strategy team and decision makers, and, just as

importantly, intends to act as a catalyst, convener, and consensus builder for the community-at-large. The Partnership draws volunteers from a pool of long-time residents and newcomers, many of whom are retirees with expertise in research, engineering and/or business. Locals include a banker, a representative from the Chamber of Commerce, and a commercial shrimper who owns waterfront property.

SUCCESSION

As the second year of designation began, the Partnership looked back and saw the future. The group applied for and received grants to upgrade parts of the Carrabelle Wharf to provide accessible dockage, a fish cleaning station, and an historical information kiosk, seagrass restoration along the sea wall and other waterfront amenities. They also won funding to survey and inventory historical and cultural resources within the City.

With those projects funded, the Partnership began looking for financial assistance to purchase and restore waterfront property along Marine Street to develop a working waterfront that includes commercial dockage and exhibits related to the commercial fishing and shrimping industry. The group is also seeking grants to buy an environmentally sensitive and degraded area known locally as “the frog pond,” located within the designated area to restore as conservation wetlands. With the vision and implementation plans in place and active projects on the board, the Partnership expects to work toward the organization’s long terms goals and the question of how to maintain Carrabelle’s Waterfront Partnership beyond the initial two-year designation.

