

OAK HILL





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Community Snapshot

VISION: “An Oak Hill waterfront which promotes/preserves the environmental and cultural/historical resources of the area and where activities maintain a tie to the inherent ecotourism and commercial/recreational fishing and aquaculture opportunities of the Mosquito Lagoon. Oak Hill Waterfront activities will maintain and improve the quality of life while preserving our history, and provide pristine waters for our sport and commercial fishing industries.”

DESIGNATION: 1997

APPLICANT: City of Oak Hill

STATUS: Inactive; member from original waterfront committee trying to bring back community support for program.

PARTNERS: University of Florida; Florida Marine Patrol.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Derelict vessel removal; acquisition of waterfront property; construction of boardwalk.

CURRENT CHALLENGES: Few people left from waterfront committee; no institutional memory; success of aquaculture re-training is questionable.

FUTURE ENDEAVORS: Reactivating local Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program; creating fishing cooperative; acquiring key waterfront property for use by commercial fishermen.

FLORIDA ASSESSMENT OF COASTAL TRENDS DATA:

Volunteer Hours Contributed:	650
Public Dollars Contributed:	\$102,096

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Oak Hill is located in Volusia County, in the northwestern area of Mosquito Lagoon. The area was once known as a thriving commercial fishing industry and has recently transitioned to a small, yet popular, recreational fishing area. The net ban, adopted by Constitutional amendment in 1994, dealt a heavy economic blow to the commercial fisheries-based economy that Oak Hill once relied on. In response, the State of Florida designated Oak Hill as a Florida Enterprise Zone in 1997.

This program provided a variety of tax breaks for businesses and entrepreneurs, including sales tax credits for hiring local residents. Some of the local fishermen were also re-trained in aquaculture — specifically, harvesting hard clams.

HISTORY OF THE WATERFRONTS FLORIDA PARTNERSHIP

With the aid of the Waterfronts Florida Partnership, the City of Oak Hill planned to redevelop the waterfront area in a way that maintained the character of the area while still improving in ways that would attract new water industries, such as ecotourism.

As part of its mission to improve the waterfront, the City removed derelict boats and navigational hazards from Mosquito Lagoon. The City partnered with the

Florida Marine Patrol and other agencies to notify the owners of the vessels, and assembled volunteers and equipment to remove 24 boats from Mosquito Lagoon.

DEVELOPING A VISION

On May 16, 2000, members of the Oak Hill Waterfronts Florida Committee and other citizens of Oak Hill met to discuss several issues as part of the continuing community visioning process and local action plan development for the Oak Hill waterfront area. The objective of this meeting was to have the participants express their views on a future Oak Hill waterfront and develop and agree upon a common vision statement for the area.

Oak Hill began its visioning process by asking participants to share their opinions about the City's needs for the next two to 10 years. They were asked to identify areas that needed improvement, areas that needed to be developed, preserved, or changed in any way. In gathering this information, the hope was to identify common concerns and views from the residents that would provide a clear vision of what the area should become:

- Not built up into a tourist area;
- Beauty of the waterfront preserved;
- Development of a fishing pier out into the Mosquito Lagoon;
- Public access along the waterfront, focusing on nature and the environment;
- Traditional working waterfront with commercial and recreational fishing opportunities; and
- Availability of wetlands as a recreational resource.

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VIEWS AND VISTAS

After the vision was completed, the City began to work on the construction of a fishing pier and bird watching tower. With planning and technical assistance provided by the Waterfronts Florida Program, the City of Oak Hill successfully completed both a fishing dock and a bird watching tower in their community. Both the tower and the pier are easily accessible by the public and have added to the waterfront appeal. They also carried out their efforts to remove derelict boats from the Lagoon. The two main additions to the waterfront area of Oak Hill have created a community gathering place that accents the aesthetics of the waterfront view and invites the community to enjoy both fishing and bird watching.



Today a small group of residents and commercial fishermen is working independently to revive the seafood industry and the once-renowned Oak Hill brand by creation of a seafood cooperative. Still in the fledgling state, the group has identified three waterfront properties for acquisition to provide space for docks, processing, and education; separately, the emerging cooperative hopes to buy or rent property on U.S. 1 to establish a retail seafood market in a highly visible location.

The primary challenge, particularly in the weak economy, is funding. The group is completing a due diligence on the “how-to” of incorporation and business operations. Next, the start-up operation will be looking for support from local

elected officials; money from economic development and other grant agencies, and technical assistance from the Waterfronts Florida Partnership Program. The group knows that waterfront access and visibility are critical, yet it recognizes that education will be of equal importance. The group intends to work with the Oak Hill community to raise awareness about the economic development benefits to reestablishing the commercial fishing in this once-highly productive setting.

