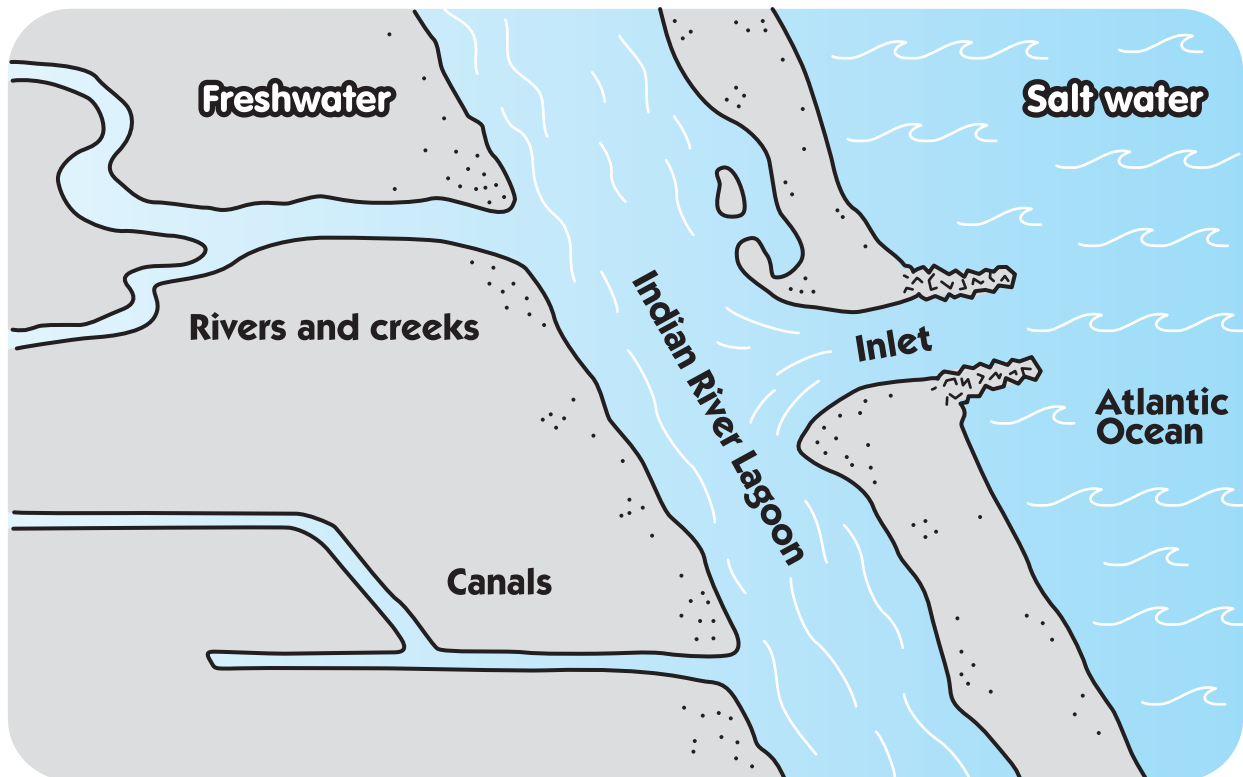


THE INDIAN RIVER – AN EXCEPTIONAL LAGOON

That is quite a title, but the Indian River is quite a place. By studying this unit, you will learn why the Indian River is an exceptional, or special, lagoon and how you can preserve and protect this fragile **coastal** resource.

The Indian River is not really a river. The Indian River is actually a **lagoon** – a shallow body of water protected from the ocean by **barrier islands**.

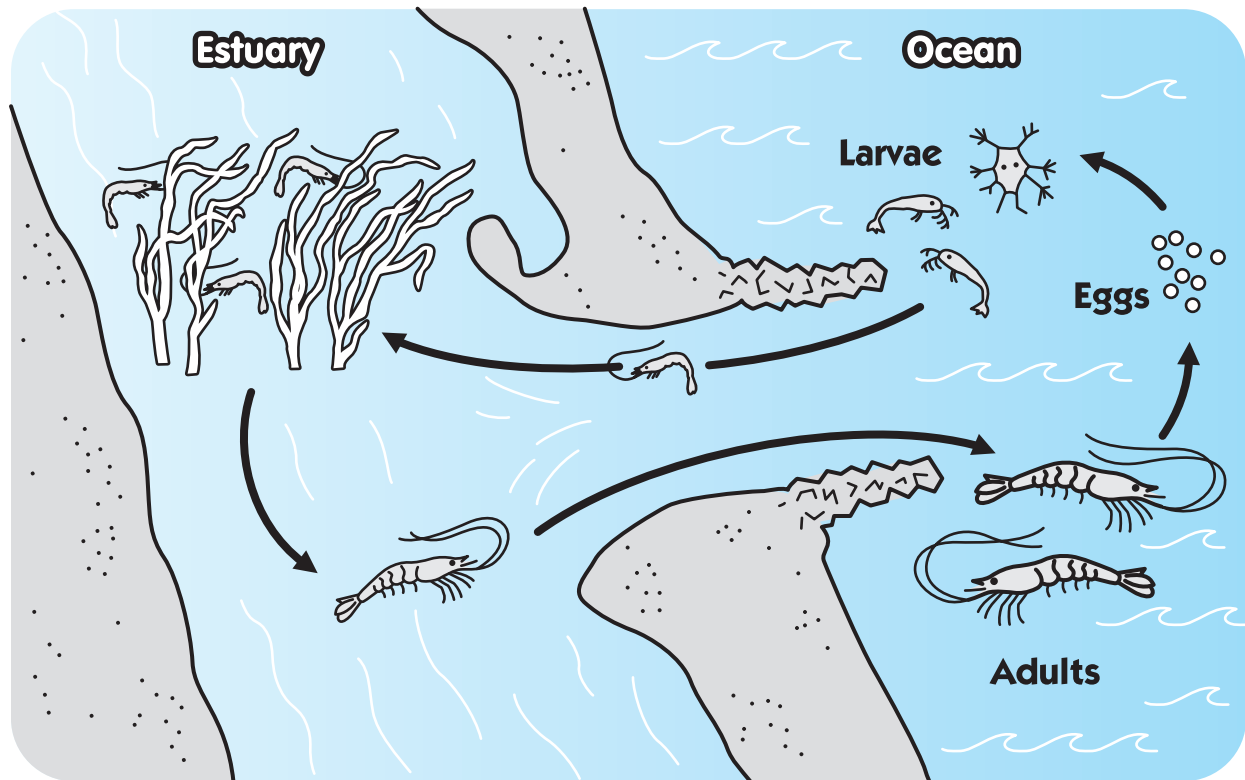


The Indian River Lagoon is also an **estuary**. An estuary is a body of water where fresh and salt water meet and mix. Freshwater enters the estuary through rivers, creeks and canals. Salt water enters from the ocean through **inlets**, or narrow openings between barrier islands.

Estuaries are full of life, and the Indian River Lagoon is no exception. The lagoon mangroves, marsh grasses and seagrasses provide food and shelter for a large variety of **organisms**. More than 4,300 **species** of plants and animals live in the Indian River Lagoon. One-third of all manatees in the United States make their home in the lagoon.

Many of the fish, shrimp and **shellfish** (for example, clams and oysters) that are important to Florida's economy must spend part of their lives in an estuary.

Shrimp, for example, **spawn**, or produce eggs, offshore as adults. The eggs hatch in the ocean and the **larvae** move toward shore. The young shrimp that survive this hazardous journey from the sea enter the estuary and hide among the seagrasses and **algae**. As the shrimp become adults, they leave the estuary and return to the sea, where the cycle begins again.



Striped mullet have a similar **life cycle**. Adults spawn offshore and young (**juvenile**) fish move into the estuary. In the winter they gather in groups called schools and return to the ocean to spawn. During this journey they become food for birds and ocean fish. Thus, the benefits of the estuary are far reaching.

In fact, the value of estuaries has reached all the way to Washington, D.C. Congress has declared it is in our nation's best interest to protect and preserve our estuaries — an important but **threatened** resource.

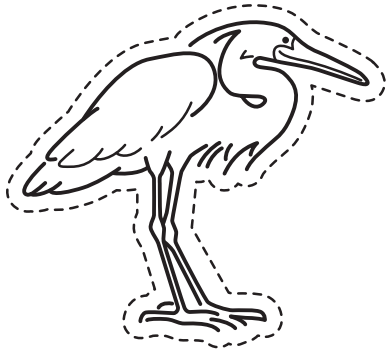
We are fortunate indeed to live so close to a beautiful estuary like the Indian River Lagoon. There are many different ways we can enjoy the lagoon, such as boating, fishing, bird-watching or viewing a spectacular sunset.

Let's take this opportunity to learn more about the Indian River Lagoon and its inhabitants so we will be able to take better care of it.

MAKE YOUR OWN ESTUARY

Materials needed: Scissors, glue and crayons.

Directions: Cut this page out of the book. Cut out each plant, animal and environment. Glue each picture where it belongs on the next page. Color your estuary.



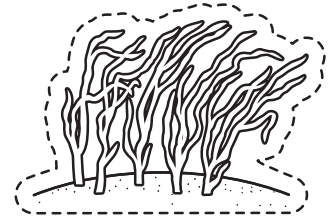
great blue heron



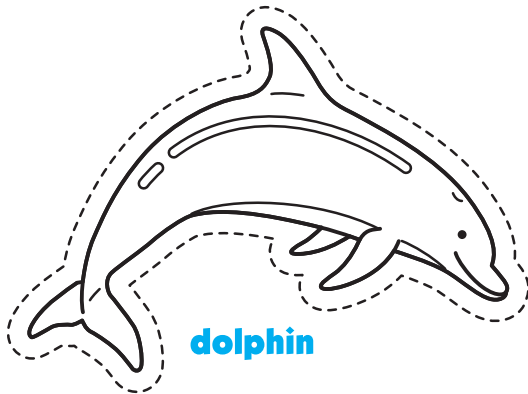
pelican



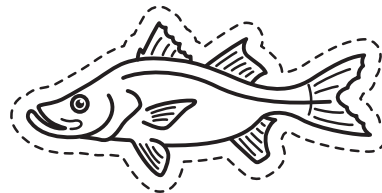
algae



seagrass



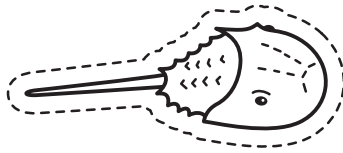
dolphin



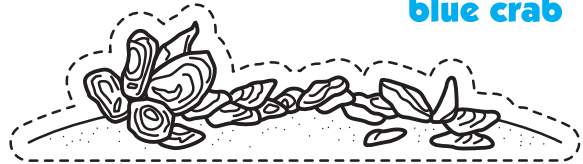
snook



blue crab



horseshoe crab



oyster bar



marsh grass



spoil island

