

Laura Moss
2024 IRNA Candidate Questionnaire

1. As a County Commissioner, what would you do to significantly improve and restore water quality in County water resources - including the Lagoon, Blue Cypress Lake, groundwater and other connected water bodies?

Serving as a County Commissioner since 2020, I've voted in favor of a number of initiatives to address water quality.

My own initiative to create an educational native plant garden at the County Complex was completed within a year of my taking office with the help of Dr. Richard Baker and Pelican Island Audubon Society. This award winning project is educational for our community-at-large, and it affords government the opportunity to set a good example. Run-off into our Lagoon is a major problem that is amenable to mitigation through such measures.

Within the 2024/25 county budget, I voted to fund a new position: Natural Resources Director. Having a designated, natural resources champion on staff is a huge step forward. The Department of Natural Resources itself is new and a necessary addition that has my full support.

When Commissioner O'Bryan retired in 2022, I gladly inherited the Anchoring Limitations Area (ALA) initiative. Working with Keith Drewitt, our Lagoon-front cities and town, and the County Administrator, it finally came forward in May this year. ALA's will provide a more efficient, cost-effective system for removing derelict vessels from the Lagoon. Derelict vessels can leach chemicals including diesel oil, gasoline, and human waste. Preventing that harm to sea grass, fish, and water quality is a long sought accomplishment.

Last January, I voted to extend the moratorium against dumping biosolids, which especially had negatively impacted Blue Cypress Lake. Before the moratorium prohibited it, counties in South Florida had paid companies to dispose of their biosolids here.

On March 8, 2022, I voted for a Bond Referendum to issue \$50M general obligation bonds to acquire and permanently preserve environmentally significant lands to restore the Lagoon, natural areas, wildlife habitat, and drinking water resources. The referendum passed by a landslide with 78% of the vote.

2. What are your views on the IRC's water supply?

We need further information in order to plan properly and change policies. Now. Specifically, the United States Geological Survey last prepared a Hydrologic Report for Indian River County in 1988. This report is the most comprehensive and specific guide to the water in our County. In April 2021, the Soil & Water Conservation District, an elected body of five members, invited the entire County Commission to its meeting to request that the 1988 Report be updated. All five County Commissioners attended and heard their request. Following this meeting, I placed this matter on the County Commission Agenda: 04/20/2021, 06/08/2021, and 06/16/2021. Unfortunately, the 1988 Report still has yet to be updated. At the 06/08/2021 County Commission meeting, I stated: "Water is going to be key going

forward. It's our most important resource. Everything sits on it - the future of our county. We're going to have to be especially careful with regard to development. And we're going to have to keep good track of our water supply. Quantity and quality both."

St. John's River Water Management District has proposed conservation to address the diminishing water supply. Encouraging widespread use of native plants is a surefire way to do so. Huge quantities of potable water are wasted watering turf-grass lawns. The award-winning native plant demonstration gardens I've pioneered in partnership with Pelican Island Audubon Society at City Hall and the County Complex are tools to educate the community-at-large.

The importance of understanding our water supply and using it wisely is becoming increasingly obvious. This April, Vero Beach asked residents to temporarily stop using drinking water for irrigation. Rob Bolton, Water/Sewer Director, said increasing demands stressed the surficial aquifer so they had to ask the people to refrain. "This was actually a wake-up call that we need to pay attention more," Bolton told CBS12 News.

3. How would you accomplish meeting requirements of 2023 HB1370 which requires within all Basin management Action Plans (BMAPs) septic tanks to be connected to sewer or to nitrogen-reducing systems by 2030?

Having served as a local elected official since 2016, I have witnessed the positive change in the community's understanding of BMAP concerns. It is no longer a matter of environmental groups attending governmental meetings in order to present rudimentary concepts and requirements. While we have come a long way in public understanding of the necessity of changes such as septic-to-sewer conversions, the funding requirements for implementation are astronomical. The questions that I currently receive from our community are in reference to how we are to pay for it, not why it is necessary. Frankly, from where I sit, without the aid of state and/or federal funding, it is questionable that the 2030 deadline can be met though we certainly are working toward that end. Discussions among the County, the municipalities, the State, and environmental regulatory agencies are in progress.

4. Do you support movement of the Urban Service Boundary (USB)?

No.

There already is sufficient capacity within the current USB to meet general population growth to 2050. Only rare exceptions, for example, an area such as that encompassing the new I-95 Oslo Road Exit should be considered.

I spend a great deal of time out in our community, and I meet people who have moved here "recently" (the last few years) every day. Unanimously, they tell me that they are here to escape from overdeveloped, overpopulated areas in Florida and elsewhere. Often, I've heard that our community is what Naples or Boca Raton or even Stuart used to be decade(s) ago. They come here and they are happy with our community "as is". As am I. They appreciate our sense of community, as well as, the natural beauty and social/cultural amenities found here. As do I. Additionally, we already are a well-managed, fiscally-responsible county. Growth and development bring additional tax revenues but also additional budgetary requirements for adding infrastructure and its maintenance.

5. What measures will you advocate for to protect our wetlands and natural habitats from development?

As a County Commissioner, I can vote to protect our wetlands and natural habitats from development, which I've done. All meetings are videotaped with agendas and Minutes available. Visit indianriver.gov.

For example, from the 12/05/2023 County Commission meeting, Agenda Item 12I1 Quay Dock Landing Subdivision: "Lots are proposed approximately 1,000 feet from the banks of the Indian River Lagoon." "Approximately 4.80 acres of estuarine wetlands exist on the project site. The applicant proposes to fill all 4.80 acres of estuarine wetlands, and mitigate the impacts to those wetlands through the purchase of mitigation credits from an off-site wetland mitigation bank."

I voted "No".

12/05/2023 County Commission meeting, Agenda Item 12I2 Hammock Shores Subdivision (103 lots)

"The project is located east of US Highway 1, between 73rd St. and 69th St. Lots are proposed approximately 1,734 feet from the banks of the Indian River Lagoon."

"Hardship. The natural ground elevation poses a problem for this site because much of the existing ground is at or below the seasonal high water elevation requiring the site to be raised significantly to meet the flood protection criteria. Providing additional flood plain storage on the site would cause lots to be lost. If the waiver for a partial 100-Year cut and fill balance is not approved the site would be limited to 69 lots."

I voted "No" waiver.

04/23/2024 County Commission meeting, Agenda Item 10A1 Zoning Change from Agricultural to Single-Family for 19.6 Acres on Jungle Trail for purposes of development.

When I queried Staff, they could not say 1) if wetlands would be effected, 2) if Jungle Trail might become the access road for this development. As we all know, Jungle Trail is an environmentally sensitive area.

I voted "No".

Additionally, I support Indian River Land Trust among others by attendance at their fundraisers.

6. How do you propose to balance economic development with the conservation of natural resources in our county?

That a truly equal balance can exist is unlikely. I'd err on the side of conservation. Watching Martin County struggle with this question and err on the side of "economic development" (more storage units, etc.) while slowly killing its rural-lifestyle designation has become increasingly painful. Martin County Commissioners voted 4-1 in April to redefine "rural lifestyle" land, where homes and other development can occur. The idea brought out opponents because it may change or impact pristine land. "It's a betrayal of the Martin County difference," said Commissioner Sarah Heard, who voted against the change. She warned that the change establishes a precedent from which Martin County won't recover.

That being said, I am optimistic that Indian River County can do better and will. Innovations are in the works. As our County Administrator's 2024/25 Budget message explains, we are creating

an Economic Development Specialist position, as well as, the Natural Resources Director position mentioned earlier. Therefore, both sides of the equation will be represented on staff giving us the best hope of achieving a balance.

Currently, the County contracts with the Indian River County Chamber of Commerce to serve as the County's Economic Development Organization to assist in business attraction, recruitment, relocation, and expansion. The County itself also performs many economic development activities currently and the opportunity exists to expand the role in concert with the Chamber. Additionally, the County is conducting an economic study to develop an Economic Development Plan, which the County's Economic Development Specialist will be responsible to coordinate and implement.

Having an economic development plan that respects natural resources and considers them in new business proposals should help us to balance economic development with the conservation of natural resources.

7. As a County Commissioner, how would you improve County/City relations?

Having served as Mayor of Vero Beach with two terms on Vero Beach City Council and now completing my first term serving on Indian River County Commission, I have the benefit of full understanding of both sides of the equation. Since 2016 as Mayor, I've spent considerable time around the county, which also has given me insight. A fond memory from that time: a woman, who had questions about being mayor, said she thought that I was the Mayor of the County. As Mayor, I inherited the FPL sale at a time when six parties: Vero Beach, Indian River County, Indian River Shores, FPL, Florida Municipal Power Agency, and Orlando Utilities Commission were speaking to each other only through lawyers. Worst case scenario. Yet, I still was able to complete the deal within one year. How? Good communication and good will. Any "deal" has to benefit both parties and be conducted with respect. For the details of the FPL sale, see "How FPL-Vero Deal went from "War" to "Godsend", reprinted with permission of Standard + Poor's Global Market Intelligence at votelauramoss.com.

I've made it a point to know the other local elected officials for many years now. Since serving on County Commission, I've made it a habit to attend reorganization meetings at City Council meetings around the county to congratulate new Mayors, Vice Mayors, and Councilmembers and to attend any other meetings where a county presence might be helpful. I also have participated year-after-year in informal events with our local city officials, e.g., Sebastian's 4th of July Parade, Vero's Downtown Friday, and Sebastian's new Finally Friday monthly event. These informal events give us the opportunity to get to know each other without the constraints of a formal agenda. And, starting last year, County Commission now will be meeting regularly with each of the City Councils.

8. What specific steps will you take to support local environmental initiatives and organizations?

Continue and build upon my existing body of work with environmental organizations. For example, the native plant gardens at Vero Beach City Hall and the County Complex that I pioneered in partnership with Pelican Island Audubon Society resulted in an inquiry to me from

United Against Poverty, which now has its own native plant gardens again in partnership with PIAS. Knowing so many members of our community across diverse categories, I am able to impart new ideas and create new partnerships easily. And frankly, it is a delight to me. Working with Keith Drewitt and Judy Orcutt of Clean Water Coalition put the Anchoring Limitation Areas project on the path to success. Ms. Orcutt has been bringing the BMAP to my attention since my City Council days, and I look forward to her further guidance on it. Working with Barbara Schlitt Ford of Environmental Learning Center to bring their beautiful new dock to fruition with county approval and funding aid. Ken Grudens and The Indian River Land Trust have been an invaluable resource in furthering my knowledge of protecting our natural habitats.

I've attended many of Mike Johannsen's well-run IRNA meetings, which are informative and helpful in keeping up-to-date on environmental concerns. Coastal Connections clean-ups and fundraisers with Kendra Cope Bergman have been a regular stop since City Council days. As a participant year-after-year, I've gladly watched her Topsy Turtle Two-Miler grow exponentially to the point of requiring a larger venue. I encouraged her to apply for Tourist Tax funding years ago. She has since succeeded.

I've been a member of many environmental organizations for years. Environmental Learning Center, Pelican Island Audubon Society, Friends of St. Sebastian River among others. At speaking engagements and on social media, I encourage the community to support environmental organizations through membership or attendance at meetings or fundraisers.

9. What do you think are the county's most important opportunities and challenges?

We have the opportunity to preserve and enhance what we already have including sense of community, small-town charm, natural beauty, open space, social and cultural amenities beyond those usually available in a small county. Among the challenges, we need to absorb the population increase, especially since covid, ensuring that our infrastructure is sufficient to meet the needs. Other important issues include economic growth, continuing viability as an affordable home to our hardworking middle-class, and how best to address our homeless. Keeping our taxes low always is a concern.

I am optimistic that we can handle both opportunities and challenges successfully. To my knowledge, we are in the midst of the most comprehensive re-examination of county practices and policies in the history of the county.

In progress, or completed within the last year, among others:

Strategic Plan

Indian River County Lagoon Management Plan

Evaluation and Appraisal Report that will lead to updating our Comprehensive Plan

Urban Service Area Study

Parks & Recreation Master Plan

Impact Fee Study

Comprehensive Utilities Rate Analysis

Stormwater Master Plan

Vulnerability Assessment

Manatee Protection Plan

Beach Preservation Plan

Economic Development Plan

Organizational Assessment & Reorganization
Improved Intergovernmental Relationships
Customer Service Training

All of the above will either ensure or enhance quality of life in our county directly or serve as tools to do so. The newly-minted mission statement derived from the results of Strategic Planning sessions held with Staff and County Commission is “Dedicated to Indian River County through service excellence.” Making customer service a top priority for all bodes well for our future.

10. What are our biggest hurdles in achieving sustainable growth and development?

Not destroying what we already are and what we cherish: our sense of community, small-town charm, natural beauty, open space, social and cultural amenities beyond those usually available in a small county. We also already are a well-managed, fiscally-responsible county. Growth and development bring additional tax revenues but also additional budgetary requirements for adding infrastructure and its maintenance.

We’ve already experienced growth. Covid and the exodus from more intensely developed places in Florida and elsewhere have seen to that. As I travel around the county at this time, people ask me to slow development. I am in sync with the people.

For example, I voted against the creation of Community Development Districts (500+ acres at a time with financial incentives for developers) in our county in 2022.

Additionally, I’ve requested that the traffic studies for proposed developments be readily available to County Commission and the Planning & Zoning Commission and that a cumulative count be kept of the amount of traffic added any given year. From my perspective, adding a subdivision should be considered within a larger context than several hundred feet from its doors. It takes years for roads and bridges to be added or even expanded. Most of us already have felt that our roadways are unable to keep up with the current increase in traffic. A large project such as the I-95 Oslo Road Exit is intended to make travel easier but the area effected will need to be planned carefully.