



TURTLE TRACKS

FALL 2026

2025-2026 Scholarship Winner



Each school year, the Council awards a scholarship to a deserving Martin County high school senior who is pursuing an education in an environmental or marine-related field. Congratulations to our 2025-2026 Environmental Studies Council Scholarship winner, Henry Baker, a student from Jensen Beach High School. Henry has spent many years learning about our environment and believes it is our responsibility to take care of it for now and the future. He volunteered at the ESC, was a member of our Earth Saver's Crew and a summer camp counselor. We know he will excel in his college endeavors and that he has a bright future ahead. We wish Henry the best and look forward to his return visits to the ESC to let us know how he is doing.

Thank You Impact 100!

A heartfelt thank you to Impact100 Martin for helping make the River Scout II dream a reality! We are incredibly grateful to have recently received a \$100,000 grant from Impact100 Martin, whose generosity is helping bring this exciting floating classroom to life and inspiring environmental education for generations to come.

For more information: <https://impact100martin.org>



Thank You Jensen Beach Garden Club!

Thank you to the Jensen Beach Garden Club and an anonymous Garden Club member for their generous donations to our summer camp program. More students were provided an opportunity to attend camp thanks to their generosity.



Please consider leaving a legacy by naming the Environmental Studies Council in your estate plans.



The Environmental Studies Council, Inc.

2900 NE Indian River Drive
Jensen Beach, FL 34957
Council Office: (772) 219-1887 x 121
Center Office: (772) 219-1887

Mission Statement

To protect and enhance the education programs of the Environmental Studies Center and to promote and extend environmental awareness through community education.

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Many thanks to **southeastern**
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From the desk of the Presidents

It's mid-summer here in Martin County, and as we're sure you're well aware, the Florida heat and humidity are in full effect. Every winter we conveniently forget just how "sauna-like" it can feel, and then June's weather rolls around to remind us. The good news is, if you know how to handle it (as we Floridians do), there is plenty of fun to be had and activities to partake in. And let's be honest, despite all the sweat, we think Florida summers actually hold a special place in our hearts.

One of things that makes our Sunshine State so special is our unique environment and the treasures it holds. The Environmental Studies Council hosted two turtle walks in June. The chance to witness a mama sea turtle lay her eggs in the wild is an amazing experience, and judging by the way these walks sell out, that is a popular opinion.

Another amazing experience for the younger set of Martin County is the Environmental Studies Center's summer camp, which wrapped up at the end of June. Between the traditional ESC Summer Camp and Camp WET, kids ages 7-13 boated, seined, snorkeled and got hands-on education about our environment and its stewardship. The Camp WET attendees took it to another level — campers were taught a specific Indian River Lagoon-based curriculum concerning habitats, waterway issues and more, while also making sure to include some favorite local outdoor activities like fishing and boating.

Speaking of warm-weather activities, the Environmental Studies Council is again participating in the upcoming Michael Shields Memorial Inshore Fishing Tournament. This annual favorite has been raising money for non-profits for many years. Several years ago the Environmental Studies Council was lucky enough to collaborate with the tournament committee and become the beneficiary of the event's proceeds. We are grateful for this partnership, and look forward to another fun-filled weekend of good fishing and great friends. The tournament takes place September 25th and 26th at River Palm Cottages in Jensen Beach. For details please see their website at fishforthechildren.org.

Alas, as the days gradually grow a bit shorter, the kids will be back at school, and all the hustle and bustle that goes along with the academic year will be upon us. We hope you had a lovely summer and found some time to relax and enjoy the beautiful gifts that Florida and Martin County have to offer!!

Warmly,
Kaija + Kari

Did Your Membership Expire?

Have you renewed your membership to the Environmental Studies Council? We need your support!

To sign up, log on to www.escmc.org or call (772) 219-1887 x 121

Save the Date

Our Fall Open House is coming up on October 10th from 10am - 1pm

Summer at the Environmental Studies Center!

What a June! We welcomed over 800 campers who spent their days exploring our local waterways, discovering marine life, making new friends, and creating memories that will last a lifetime. It was a month full of learning, laughter, seining, boating, snorkeling, and so much fun.

A HUGE thank you to our incredible staff and volunteers who poured their hearts into making Day Camp and Camp WET such a success. Your energy, dedication, and teamwork made all the difference, and I could not be more proud of what we accomplished together. We also celebrated a bittersweet milestone as Gus was released back into the wild where he belongs! Watching our education sea turtle head home is always a reminder of why we do what we do.

And the excitement doesn't stop there... River Scout II has officially been ordered! We can't wait to welcome our brand-new floating classroom and get students out on the water beginning this spring semester.

Thank you to everyone who supports the Environmental Studies Center. Here's to an incredible summer and an even more exciting school year ahead!

-Valerie Gaynor, Center Coordinator

Bio Corner

by Jeff Guertin

What is that brown stuff on the beach?

You may have recently noticed large patches of seaweed washing up on our coastal beaches. Do you know what it is? It's not kelp, it's Sargassum!

Sargassum is not a rooted seagrass or a land plant; it is a type of large, brown macroalgae that floats at the ocean's surface, kept afloat by gas-filled structures called pneumatocysts. It is a natural part of the Atlantic Ocean and, in moderate amounts, plays an important role in marine life. Winds and ocean currents often form clusters of this seaweed into large mats. Historically, these currents have pushed the mats north and east into an area known as the Sargasso Sea.

These floating patches of Sargassum provide food, shelter, and nursery habitat for many animals, including fish, crabs, shrimp, and especially sea turtles. The large mats serve as a nursery area for many commercially important fish, such as mahi-mahi. For young sea turtles, Sargassum can be a vital place to hide from predators and find food during the earliest stages of their lives, often called the "lost years".

In recent years, however, Sargassum has changed in ways that have made it a growing concern for Florida. Since 2011, scientists have observed much larger blooms across the Atlantic, including a vast stretch now often called the Great Atlantic Sargassum Belt. Currents can carry this alga westward into the Caribbean, the Gulf, and onto Florida beaches, where it can arrive in thick piles rather than small, scattered amounts. Scientists have attributed the large uptick in Sargassum to nitrogen and phosphorus runoff, as well as changes in weather and wind patterns driven by climate change.

When Sargassum washes ashore in large quantities, it becomes more than a beach nuisance. As it decomposes, it can produce a strong rotten-egg smell and release gases such as hydrogen sulfide and ammonia, which can irritate people and ruin the beach experience. Heavy buildup can also interfere with tourism, make beach access more difficult, and create extra cleanup costs for coastal communities.

The impact is not only felt by people. Large accumulations of Sargassum can smother seagrass and coral habitats, reduce oxygen in the water, and make it harder for hatchling sea turtles to reach the ocean. For Florida residents and visitors, the best way to think about sargassum is as a natural part of the marine environment that has become unusually abundant in recent years, largely due to human activities. Offshore, it supports a lively ecosystem; onshore, it can create messy and costly problems. Understanding both sides of the Sargassum story helps explain why it matters so much to Florida's beaches, wildlife, and coastal communities.



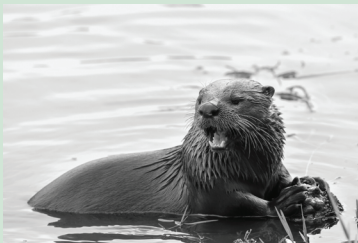
Save the Date!

Michael Shields Memorial Tournament

September 25-26
FishForTheKids.org

Fall Open House

October 10, 2026
10 am - 1 pm
Free admission - donations welcome!



Animals in the Wild

Photo by Erik Martin

Wish List

The Environmental Studies Center needs your support! The Center has a current need for:

- Batteries- various sizes
- Paper Towels
- Tissues
- Quart size plastic ziploc bags
- Dawn Dish Soap

If you are interested in supporting any of the above opportunities, please contact us at info@escmc.org or by calling 772-219-1887 x121. Or stop by the Center - we'd love to see you!

Environmental Studies Council, Inc.
2900 NE Indian River Drive
Jensen Beach, FL 34957

FALL 2026

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Michael Shields Memorial Fishing Tournament September 25 & 26

The Environmental Studies Council is proud to be the beneficiary of the 17th annual Michael Shields Memorial Fishing Tournament Series. This tournament was founded 17 years ago to in memory of Michael Shields, a cherished member of the Martin County community whose love for fishing on the St. Lucie and Indian Rivers continues to inspire anglers and conservationists. This partnership is in its third year, and the Council is so happy to be part of such a wonderful organization that helps to support the essential education and work that the Environmental Studies Center provides to our community.

The tournament will take place at River Palm Cottages & Fish Camp in Jensen Beach on September 25 & 26, 2026. It kicks off Friday September 25 with an eventful Captains' Party featuring dinner, drinks, dancing and a fantastic silent auction. On Saturday September 26, registered anglers will partake in a catch and release contest with divisions for snook, tarpon, trout, and redfish, open to both guided and unguided anglers. The unguided Open division is only \$35 to register and anglers can fish from anywhere in Florida with chances to win many prizes, including a Crowder Rod combo. This is an excellent opportunity for kids of all ages to fish in a fun and low-pressure tournament setting. We'd love it if you would help the ESC celebrate Michael's enduring spirit and make a difference through the pastime he adored. For more information, to buy party tickets, register for the Open division, or to make a donation please visit www.fishforthekids.org.

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