

## **The Indian River Lagoon: From Sandy Beach to "Black Mayonnaise"?!**

Imagine this: The bottom of our Indian River Lagoon used to be beautiful, clean sand! No gross muck, just clear water and sandy toes when you stepped out of a boat. Seriously!

But then, things changed...

The Problem: Too Much Food for Tiny Plants!

We humans accidentally dumped too much "food" (nitrogen from things like fertilizers and leaky septic tanks) into the lagoon. This made tiny green plants called algae go crazy and grow super fast! Think of it like a giant green slime monster taking over the water.

This "algae monster" did two bad things:

- \* It blocked sunlight, killing the important seagrass that many animals (like manatees!) eat and live in.
- \* When the algae died, it sank and turned into "black mayonnaise" – a stinky, gooey muck that covered the lagoon bottom. Gross!

Why "Black Mayonnaise" is the WORST:

- \* It smothers everything: seagrass, oyster reefs – like a blanket that stops things from breathing.
  - \* It keeps feeding more bad algae, causing even bigger "slime monster" blooms.
  - \* It steals oxygen from the water, creating "dead zones" where fish can't breathe and literally suffocate.
- Imagine trying to breathe without air!

## **The Big Fix: Billions to Bring it Back!**

Getting rid of this "black mayonnaise" and cleaning up the lagoon is a huge job, costing billions of dollars!

We're talking big money to:

- \* Scoop out the muck.
- \* Fix septic tanks.
- \* Stop pollution from storm drains.
- \* And help grow back seagrass and oysters.

## **Good News! The Lagoon is Fighting Back!**

It's not all bad news! The lagoon is slowly starting to heal:

- \* Seagrass is returning in some areas!
- \* We saw fewer huge algae blooms last year.
- \* People are working hard on hundreds of projects to clean it up.

It's a tough fight, especially in the middle of the lagoon, but with everyone's help, we can bring back that beautiful, sandy bottom and make the Indian River Lagoon awesome again for animals and for us!

**Your mission, should you decide to accept it:**  
**Discover, Enjoy, Protect!**

When you're out on your tours, remember this: Your guests don't need to write politicians or make phone calls to help.

All they need to do is find a refuge near their home, use it, enjoy it... and then they will fight for it the way we're fighting for the Indian River Lagoon!

**Their love for these wild places is the most powerful protection they can have.**