FLORIDA SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM
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FISH Preserve Management Plan

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH, Inc)

The grassroots organization, FISH, was chartered as a non-profit organization by the State of Florida in 1991. The formation of FISH was sponsored and financially supported by the Cortez Village Historical Society (CVHS) and the Cortez Chapter of Organized Fishermen of Florida (OFF). Each contributed $500 and members drafted the Articles of Incorporation, By-Laws, and processed the application for the 501(c)3 designation by the Internal Revenue Service. Members of the sponsoring organizations serve on the Board of Directors of FISH.

The specific purposes of the organization are as follows:

- **Research/identify the saltwater heritage of Florida.**
- **Plan/develop/maintain a museum complex.**
- **Assist in management of the Historic District.**
- **Educate the public about the ancient and present heritage of saltwater fishing.**
- **Work to gain support for conservation and preservation of common resources through management of marine resources.**

FISH Mission Statement

FISH is dedicated to the promotion and preservation of the cultural and environmental integrity of Florida's traditional maritime communities. FISH is committed to conservation of traditional fishing folkways and other marine interests through a living history program and historic preservation planning.

Achievements of FISH

1. **The first action by FISH was salvaging the 1890 Waterfront Store, the east wing of the Albion Inn. Some $12,000 was raised to remove the building from the Inn before the Inn was demolished by the US Coast Guard. The building was placed on mover's blocks and FISH paid the rental fee for the blocks until it purchased them**

from the moving company. Early plans were to include the building in the Maritime Cultural Center.

2. **The second significant action in 1992 was conducting a feasibility study for the establishment of the Maritime Center. This was funded by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and directed by a nationally known consultant, Dr. Ralph Eshelman.**

3. **In 1993, FISH received an $11,000 matching grant from the Florida Humanities Council. Called the *Vanishing Cultures Project*, the work accomplished was significant to documenting the fishing heritage of the village. The products from the Project were: (1) developing oral histories and a photographic and lecture series to record the history; (2) placement of interpretive stations depicting village heritage along the historic waterfront; (3) a poster which was distributed throughout the State; and, (4) a painted mural map on the east wall of A. P. Bell Fish Company depicting the sense of place shared by fishermen of the area.**

4. **FISH assumed ownership of the Volunteer Fire Department building when the villagers regained possession. FISH is responsible for the management of the building now called the Cortez Community Center which provides space for fund raisers, displays, offices, and other projects.**

5. **FISH assumed responsibility for the Annual Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival after the 1995 Net Ban. The event has grown for the past 20 years and is the most significant effort for sharing Cortez's heritage with the many residents and visitors.**

6. **Members of FISH and CVHS cooperated in writing the grant for the acquisition of the 1912 Cortez School House. The community voted that FISH be designated the organization to manage and plan activities for the historic property. The property was acquired by Manatee County with the major funding coming from the Florida Communities Trust.**

7. **FISH agreed to become a partner in the Waterfronts Florida Cortez Project, funded by the Department of Community Affairs and the 1000 Friends of Florida. Members of FISH along with others from the community served on the committee. Project accomplishments were a $10,000 renovation of the Cortez Community Center building, adoption of design standards for future development, and erection of a waterfront memorial to Florida's commercial fishermen. Additionally, the historic Few-Miller dock was marked for restoration.**

The FISH Preserve

The most ambitious undertaking of the FISH organization is the acquisition of the FISH Preserve. As part of the process of acquiring the 1912 Cortez School House, opportunities to acquire the adjacent property with direct access to Sarasota Bay were explored. This led

to discussions regarding the purchase of the adjoining acreage from Mrs. Louise Schewe. It was decided that FISH would purchase the entire property for $250,000. The purchase agreement was executed in December, 2000. The final payment is due April, 2004. The primary source of funding is the proceeds from the annual Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival. Other sources are donations from individuals, organizations and corporations.

FISH Preserve Management Plan Mission Statement

The management plan for the FISH Preserve will be to conserve, restore, and protect this estuarine ecosystem. Of equal importance, will be to preserve the cultural heritage of Cortez Village.

II. DESCRIPTION

Overview-Location/Physical Attributes

The FISH Preserve (approximately 95 acres of upland, mangrove wetland and submerged bay bottom) is located in western Manatee County (Figure 1), a rapidly developing coastal county with a population of approximately 280,000. The metropolitan area of Tampa/St. Petersburg is approximately 30 miles to the north. The site has excellent regional access via Interstate 75, about 15 miles to the east.

The historic fishing village of Cortez lies immediately to the west of the Preserve. First settled by commercial fishermen from the Carolinas in the 1880s, the community includes 97 structures that have been placed on the National Register of Historic places.

Cortez Road (State Road 684) delineates most of the Preserve's northern boundary. Cortez Road is a major east-west thoroughfare in Manatee County and provides one of only two accesses from the mainland to Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key. Over 1,000,000 people annually visit the beaches of these barrier islands.

To the south, the Preserve boundary includes mangrove wetlands adjoining Sarasota Bay as well as intertidal mudflats and submerged bay bottom. Sarasota Bay has been designated as an Outstanding Florida Water and has been recognized as an estuary of national importance by the National Estuary Program. However, the watershed has undergone rapid development in recent decades. During the past 40 years approximately 78% of the native bay shoreline has been altered. The FISH Preserve is one of the last remaining undeveloped parcels on Sarasota Bay.

A notable conservation area, Cortez Key, lies adjacent to the Preserve. Cortez Key, roughly 4-5 acres in size, has been an Audubon bird sanctuary since 1981. Up to 1200 nesting pairs of 13 species of birds occur annually. In 2000, a Roseate Spoonbill nest was found, very likely the first discovered in Sarasota Bay since the 1870s.

Although the FISH Preserve has remained undeveloped, the upland and wetland portions have been impacted and cannot be considered pristine. Tidal flushing of mangrove wetlands has been impacted by mosquito ditching. Wildfires in the 1960s and later, along with land altering impacts created opportunities for Australian Pine, Brazilian Pepper, Melaleuca and Carrotwood trees to become the dominant upland species. Originally the plant palette included species found in pine flatwoods, coastal ridges, coastal plains and salt flats. Invasive species, illegal dumping, etc. have altered native plant communities to the point that a long range restoration/management plan will be required to reestablish native plant communities.

Climate

The climate of the region is subtropical. It has a high relative humidity with short mild winters and long warm summers. Most of the rainfall occurs during the summer rainy season between the months of June and September.

There are few killing freezes to influence the growth and survivability of native and non-native flora and fauna. However, mangrove growth is restricted north of Tampa Bay due to more frequent and severe freezes

Roads/Access

Road accesses to the site are from Cortez Road on the north and 119th Street West on the west. A grid of roads is shown on the Crampton subdivision plan exhibit. These roads were actually cleared in the 1960s, but are difficult to see today. The mangrove edge and the open water portions of the Preserve are accessible by shallow-draft boat from Sarasota Bay.

Easements/Rights of Way

There are no known utility lines or easements on the property. The State of Florida Department of Transportation owns and maintains two stormwater management areas associated with Cortez Road that are surrounded by the Preserve. A limited number of vehicle access and stormwater overflow drainage easements are linked to these areas. These easements are compatible with the Preserve Management Plan. Public stormwater drainage for the 119th Street West corridor, the 1912 Cortez School, and a few outparcels also cross the Preserve.

Cultural Resources

Although there is ample history of native American settlement in the surrounding area, to date there is no evidence of artifacts on the FISH Preserve. There are historical references to Spanish Colonial era fishing camps (ranchos) in the region, but there is no evidence to suggest that such fishing camps were ever located on the FISH Preserve.

The commercial fishing heritage of Cortez Village has been intimately connected to the mangrove wetlands within the property. Healthy, functioning estuarine habitat is critical

for supporting the abundant marine life necessary for supporting a commercial fishing industry. The waters adjacent to the FISH Preserve have been historically referred to as "the Kitchen" because of the abundant marine life that always provided food. The independence and self-sufficiency of the community have been historically tied to "the Kitchen" and the surrounding wetlands.

III. WATER RESOURCES

Over half of the property consists of mangrove wetlands and submerged bay bottom and is tidally influenced by the waters of northern Sarasota Bay. The soil in the mangrove habitat is classified as Estero muck. Slopes are smooth and range from 0 to 1 percent. Tidal exchange throughout the wetland area has been altered by mosquito ditching in the 1950s. Spoil from the ditching has been colonized by Brazilian Pepper. The mosquito control ditches have not been maintained.

The upland area is characterized by Eau Gallie fine sand and Myaka fine tidal sand. The area is nearly level and soil drainage is very poor. The water table is often within 10 inches of the surface except during dry periods when it may be as deep as 40 inches.

A tidal creek and a man-made canal traverse the property and provide tidal flushing to a pond located off property, north of Cortez Road. The canal feature was constructed in the 1950s and has not been maintained.

The FISH Preserve surrounds two Florida Department of Transportation stormwater retention ponds and a mangrove mitigation area. A habitat restoration project, to be completed in 2002, will re-establish tidal flushing of a pond located on the Cortez School House property immediately adjacent to the Preserve.

IV. SOILS

Three types of soil have been identified on the Preserve property. These are:

- Eau Gallie fine sand. This is a nearly level, poorly drained soil in broad areas of flatwoods. Slopes are smooth and range from 0 to 2 percent.

- Estero muck. This is a nearly level soil in tidal mangrove swamps. It is very poorly drained. Slopes are smooth and range from 0 to 1 percent.

- Myakka fine sand, tidal. This is a nearly level, very poorly drained soil in high-lying tidal marshes between the mangrove swamps and better drained upland soils. Slopes are smooth to concave and range from 0 to 2 percent.

V. PLANT COMMUNITIES DESCRIPTION

General Description of Plant Community

The original habitats on the site would have included mangrove forest, pine flatwoods, salt flats, open shallow bay bottom, and salt water pond/creek/lagoon areas. From about 1950 to the present, human impacts altered all of these habitats. In 1951, fill work for raising Cortez Road altered some drainage. Subdivision layout, clearing of roads and digging of the north-south canal caused more drainage changes in the 1950s. This land disturbance also opened the door for invasive exotic plant species. In the early sixties a network of mosquito ditches was dug through a variety of areas. This again altered tidal flow, drainage, and opened new areas to invasive plants. Fire swept through portions of the property in the 1960s and 70s. During the 70s, 80s and 90s, illegal dumping and use of off-road recreational vehicles impacted most of the upland areas. The bay bottom portions of the site appear to have been impacted the least. Bay-wide nutrient enrichment has produced more algal growth with its associated problems. Also, a few propeller scars exist.

Today the mangrove wetland areas, which comprise about 30 acres, are generally healthy. Some areas appear weakened because of restricted tidal flushing. Dozens of mosquito ditch spoil piles, each about the size of a car, support Australian Pine, Brazilian Pepper, and Carrotwood trees. The 23 acres of upland are the most altered. About 6 acres of remnant pine flatwoods exist. These areas are also dominated by invasive exotics. The other 17 acres of upland are nearly completely covered with Australian Pine, Brazilian Pepper or Melaleuca. A few Live Oaks, Sabal Palms and Buttonwoods exist, but most of these are not healthy specimens. Some transition zones support Sea Ox-eye Daisy, Marsh Elder, and other salt flat species in very small pockets.

Extensive habitat restoration and management will be required to re-establish native plant communities.

Plant Species

Invasive Exotic Plants

Brazilian pepper (*Scinus terebinthefolius*)
Australian pine (*Casurina equisetifolia*)
Punk tree (*Malaluca leucadendra*)
Carrotwood (*Cupaniopsis anacardiopsis*)
Cuban laurel (*Ficus nitida*)

Native Species

Cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*)
Saw palmetto (*Seronoa repens*)
Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*)
Slash pine (*Pinus elliottii*)
Long leaf pine (*Pinus palustris*)

Red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*)
Black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*)
White mangrove (*Languncularia racemosa*)
Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*)
Giant leather fern (*Acrostichum danaeifolium*)
Myrsine (*Myrsine guianensis*)
Strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*)
Beach elder (*Iva imbricata*)
Sea purslane (*Sesuvium portulacastrum*)
Seashore drop seed (*Sporobolus virginicus*)
Seaside goldenrod (*Solidago sempervirens*)
Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamome*)
Coin vine (*Dalbergia ecastophullum*)
Wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*)
Wild grape (*Vitis* spp)
Cat brier (*Smilex rotundifolia*)
Shining sumac (*Rhus copallina*)
Saltbush (*Baccharis halimifolia*)
Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*)
Beauty berry (*Callicarpus americana*)
Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)
Southern red cedar (*Juniperus silicicola*)
Braken fern (*Pteridium aquilinum*)
Wild lime (*Zanthoxylum fagara*)
Bear grass (*Yucca filamentosa*)
Florida private (*Forestiera segregata*)
Bay cedar (*Suriana maritina*)
Salt grass (*Distichilis spicata*)
Salt jointgrass (*Paspalum ditichum*)

Landscape Plants

In addition to the native plants and the invasive exotics there are also scattered patches of naturalized landscape plants. These are probably the result of previous yard debris dumping. Species noted include: St. Augustine grass, Sansevaria, and some of the Phoenix palms.

VI. ANIMAL SPECIES

Coastal Upland and Mangrove Animals (Non-bird)

Alligator (*A. mississippiensis*)
Bird voice tree frog (*Hhyla avivoca*)
Black swamp snake (*Seminatrix pygaea*)
Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*)
Cotton mouse (*Peromyscus gossypinus*)

Cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorous*)
Gray fox (*Urocyron cinereoargenteus*)
Gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
Gray treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*)
Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)
S.e. five lined skink (*Eumeces inexectatus*)
Southern toad (*Bufo terrestris*)
Wood rat (*Neotoma floridana*)
Mud turtle (*Kinosternon* sp.)
Banded water snake (*Nerodiafasciata*)
Florida water rat (*Neofiger alieni*)
Green tree frog (*Hyla cinerea*)
Black racer (*Coluber constrictor priapus*)
Box turtle (*Terra pine carolina*)
Coachwhip (*Mastcophus flagellum*)
Eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*)
Gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*)
Red ratsnake (*Elaphe guttata*)
Florida mouse (*Podomys floridanus*)
Indigo snake (*Drymarchon corgis*)
Sand skink (*Neoseps reynoldsi*)
Eastern diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*)
Armadillo (*Dasypodidae*)
Opossum (*Didelphus virginiana*)
Otter
Gopher tortoise
Swamp rabbit
Cottontail rabbit
Pygmy rattlesnake
Coral snake
Scarlet king snake

<u>Common birds (native and seasonal)</u>

Common loon (*Galvia almek*)
Pileated woodpecker (*Picus pilateus*)
Barred owl (*Strix varia*)
Mangrove cuckoo (*Coccyzus minor*)
Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
Black skimmer (*Rhynchops niger*)
American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*)
Red shoulder hawk (*Butea lineatus*)
Turkey vulture (*Cathartesaura*)
American anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*)
Magnificent frigate bird (*Fregata magnificens*)
Little blue heron (*Florida caerulea*)

Snowy egret (*Egretta thula*)
Wood stork (*Mycteria americana*)
Roseate spoonbill (*Ajaia ajaja*)
American crow (*Corvus americana*)
Downy woodpecker (*Picus pubescens*)
Boattail grackle (*Cassadix major*)
Hairy woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*)
Red cockaded woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*)
American white pelican (*Pelicanus erythrorhynchos*)
Belted kingfisher (*Alcedo alcyon*)
Chuck-wills-widow (*Caprimulgus carolinensis*)
Mourning dove (*Columba*)
Royal tern (*Sterna maxima*)
Laughing gull (*Larus atricilla*)
American coot (*Fulica americana*)
Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)
Brown pelican (*Belcanus occidentalis*)
Double crested cormorant (*Phalacrocrax auritus*)
Great blue heron (*Ardia herodias*)
Great egret (*Casmerodius albus*)
Yellow crowned night heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*)
White ibis (*Eudocimus albus*)
Chimney swift (*Chaetura pelagica*)
Fish crow (*Corvus ossifragus*)
Mockingbird (*Minus polyglottos*)
Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)
Red wing blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
Eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*)

<u>Common Marine Animals (Fishes)</u>

Common snook (*Centropomus undecimalis*)
Redfish (*Sciaenops ocellatus*)
Gulf flounder (*Paralichthys albigotta*)
Black drum (*Pogonias cromis*)
Pinfish (*Lagadon rhomboides*)
Inshore lizardfish (*Synodus foetens*)
Gray snapper (*Luatjanus grixus*)
Gaffiopsail catfish (*Bagre marinus*)
Sheepshead minnow (*Cyprinidon variegatas*)
Lined seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*)
Atlantic bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatas limbatus*)
Bonnethead shark (*Sphyrna tiburo americana*)
Spotted eagle ray (*Aetobatus narinari*)
Cow nose ray (*Rhinopterabonasu*)
Striped mullet (*Mugil cephalus*)

Spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosis*)
Sheep shead (*Arcosargitus probatocephalis*)
Pompano (*Trachinotus carolinus*)
Lady fish (*Elops saurus*)
Killifish (*Adinia xenica*)
Hard head catfish (*Arius felius*)
Jack crevalle (*Caranx hippos*)
Gulf pipefish (*Synbnathus scovelli*)
Needlefish (*Strongylura marina*)
Southern stingray (*Dasyatic* sp.)
Grunts (*Haaemulidae*)
Stripped mojarra (*Gerreidae*)

Others
Jellyfish
Inkfish
Sea squirts
Crabs horseshoe
blue
stone
fiddler
oyster
spider
Bay scallop
Oysters
Clams
Shrimp
Whelks
Sponges
West indian manatee
Urchins
Starfish
Seabiscuits

VII. MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1 **Manage and protect the estuarine resources of the Preserve.**

Objective 1.1 Insure uses and activities that minimize degradation to the preserve and surrounding ecosystems.

Objective 1.2 Maintain and protect native plant and animal communities.

Objective 1.3 Control non-native species to minimize damage to natural and cultural resources.

Objective 1.4 When tree planting is necessary, trees should be planted to simulate natural regeneration patterns.

Objective 1.5 Re-establish and maintain tidal flow.

Objective 1.6 Improve, restore and manage degraded upland areas.

Objective 1.7 Utilize best management practices to minimize pollutants (fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides).

Objective 1.8 Eliminate dumping.

Goal 2 Utilize the FISH Preserve to support the working waterfront heritage of the village.

Objective 2.1 Provide access for promotion and support of community events.

Objective 2.2 Provide for the promotion and preservation of Cortez maritime activities.

Goal 3 Develop and manage the FISH Preserve for appropriate recreational opportunities.

Objective 3.1 Develop recreational opportunities on the Preserve that minimize adverse effects on the native ecosystems.

Objective 3.2 Identify/select recreational programs which are compatible, ecologically benign, and resource based.

Objective 3.3 Develop recreational trails and interpretive facilities.

Objective 3.4 All recreational and cultural programs and activities shall be administered and controlled by FISH.

Goal 4 Utilize the Preserve to promote environmental and ecological awareness.

Objective 4.1 Make the Preserve available to local environmental and educational groups for nature walks and seminars.

Objective 4.2 Develop a trail system and interpretive facilities highlighting the Preserve's ecological value.

Objective 4.3 Make the Preserve available for relevant research opportunities.

Goal 5 **Support the acquisition of lands contiguous to and consistent with the criteria and processes developed by FISH.**

Objective 5.1 **Encourage and support uses and management techniques which contribute to the overall reduction of pollution to Sarasota Bay.**

VIII. LAND MANAGEMENT

A. Water Resources

Goal 1 **Restore tidal flushing and ecological functions impacted by mosquito ditching and other past environmental insults.**

B. Cultural Resources

Goal 1 **FISH retains the right to identify and set aside parts, not to exceed 6.5 acres, of the disturbed upland 23 acres for certain uses that would preserve the cultural heritage of Cortez. These uses would include the following:**

- **provide for cultural heritage facilities and preservation of historical structures and artifacts;**
- **marine research and education;**
- **nature trails and interpretive signage and facilities;**
- **staging and storage area for commercial fishing gear;**
- **temporary uses (i.e.; festival parking, special events, etc.);**
- **relocation of soils to facilitate restoration.**

For all uses, efforts must be made to minimize environmental impacts and maximize environmental quality of the property. The only permitted use of the remaining 16.5 acres will be habitat restoration.

C. Ecosystems

Goal 1 **Preserve and enhance mangrove wetlands.**

Goal 2	**Restore and enhance native upland plant communities.**
Goal 3	**Preserve adjoining bay bottom habitats.**
Goal 4	**Promote connectivity with adjacent and nearby habitats and wildlife preserves.**

D. Wetlands Summary

The FISH Preserve includes productive mangrove wetlands, tidal and submerged bay bottom, seagrass beds, oyster bars and mud flats. However, tidal exchange on the mainland portion has been impacted by mosquito ditching and other human activities. Significant restoration work will be required to restore and maintain a fully functioning mangrove wetland ecosystem. A major
Audubon bird sanctuary, Cortez Key, is adjacent to the Preserve.

E. Uplands Summary

The upland area can be considered an area that transitions from wetlands to pine flatwoods. Much of the area has been disturbed and exotic vegetation is a major problem. Restoration and long-term management will be required to remove invasive exotic plants and re-establish native plant communities. Illegal dumping has impacted the Preserve. Removal of trash and construction waste materials will be needed.

IX. APPENDIX

History of the Area

Pre-European

Early Florida inhabitants probably arrived sometime in the Paleo-Indian cultural period, around 10,000 years ago. They lived in small nomadic bands of hunters and gatherers following large game. During the Archaic Period (9000 to 2,500 BP) the large animals, such as mammoths, horses and large bison became extinct. Evidence exists suggesting the early Florida inhabitants adjusted their hunting skills to deer, raccoon, opossum, turkey and other small game. It was also during this time period that they learned to use fish and shellfish as a food source.

The Perico Island period is dated at 700 A.D. to 1000 A. D. By this time the natives had become hunters and gatherers, producing ceramics, shell tools and bone artifacts.

The first inhabitants to modify the land were those during the Weeden Island period. There is evidence that they grew some small crops and constructed burial mounds. It is unlikely that these small areas of cultivation and construction had any significant impact on Florida's environment.

European Exploration

Historians say Spanish explorers led by Hernando DeSoto anchored offshore of the west coast of Florida somewhere in the Tampa Bay area in 1539 and ventured inland from there heading north. There is no indication that they set foot in the Preserve area. By all accounts they traveled north in search of gold.

The early English and French explorers, who explored the area documented sighting and investigating the Manatee River, but write only of traveling along the easily navigable portions of the river and onto its immediately adjacent lands.

Modern Settlers

Due to the abundance of fishery resources, the area surrounding the Preserve has attracted commercial fishermen for the past two centuries. Initially, the area was visited by Cuban and Bahamian fishermen. These seasonal visitors would establish "ranchos" -temporary fishing camps. Fish, primarily mullet, would be salted or smoked for transport back to the Bahamas or Cuba.

In the 1880s the first modern day permanent settlers arrived at Perico Island to the north at the mouth of the Manatee River. Within a few years these original pioneers moved to Hunters Point, established homesteads, and in 1896 the settlement came to be known as Cortez. Situated at the western boundary of the Preserve, Cortez Village is at the tip of a long narrow peninsula between Palma Sola Bay and north Sarasota Bay.

The handful of families that settled here were from Carteret County, North Carolina. There were also families of Spanish descent. All were commercial fishermen and eventually established a thriving fishing industry which still exists today. In the beginning, the settlement was very remote from other settlements to the east and most commerce was conducted by water. Fishing, crabbing, boat building, and related industries have continued in Cortez without interruption for over 100 years.

Although hard times, hurricanes, and regulatory changes in the industry have come and gone, many residents of the village, including descendants of the original families continue to earn their living through fishing and maritime pursuits. The commercial fishing heritage of Cortez has been widely recognized and documented. In 1987, Cortez was designated as an Historic Neighborhood in the County Comprehensive Plan. Listing on the National Register of Historic Places occurred in 1995. Most recently (2000) the Village of Cortez was listed in the Library of Congress as a Local Legacy of Manatee County and the State of Florida.