

Jacksonville Mayoral Candidate Survey 2019



Threats to the St. Johns River's Health

The *State of the River Report for the Lower St. Johns River Basin* has scientifically tracked and assessed key health indicators for the St. Johns River over the last 11 years. Major findings in 2018 include:

- Wetlands continue to be lost to development, resulting in a loss of crucial ecosystem functions including the assimilation of pollutants, minimization of local flooding, and fish habitat;
- Salinity continues to increase, negatively impacting submerged grasses and the aquatic life that depends on it;
- Invasive species are on the rise, connected to port activity and impacts from storms.

The health of the St. Johns River also continues to be adversely impacted by:

- fecal coliform bacteria pollution from failing septic tanks, leaking sewage pipes, sanitary sewer overflows (SSO's), and animal waste;
- nutrient pollution from wastewater and industrial discharges, failing septic tanks, fertilizer runoff, and upstream impacts like biosolids that trigger algal blooms and fish kills;
- rising water levels from climate change that increase the likelihood of flooding;
- dredging that increases salinity, destroys wetlands, and causes river levels to increase;
- sedimentation from streets, storm drains and construction-site runoff.

1. ***What do you consider to be the most significant threats to the health of the St. Johns River? What do you specifically plan to do to address these problems, if elected?***

I consider the most significant threat to the health of the St. Johns River to be the failing septic tanks. I will establish a program of systematic elimination of failing septic tanks, backed up by ratable funding to ensure we are on a path to meaningfully address this issue. Funding sources will include government funding, as well as the pursuit of grants and other sources (which will be more successful based on the City's funding commitment to the issue).

Rising Waters

As demonstrated by Hurricane Irma and the historic flooding that occurred, Jacksonville is more vulnerable than ever before. Decades of dredging the St. Johns and sea level rise have resulted in higher water levels and storm surge in our river and greater risk from flooding.

Locally, the Northeast Florida Regional Council has recommended that we plan for rising waters of 1' - 3' by 2060 and 3' - 6' by 2110. Scientists are also predicting slower, wetter, and more intense storms, further increasing the risk to low-lying communities like ours.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects that the current plan to deepen the river from 40' to 47' will increase water levels in the river by an additional 3 – 8 inches and by up to 12% during smaller, "high frequency" storms. This dredging project will cost nearly \$700 million with an uncertain return on

investment for local taxpayers. During your term in office, you could be asked to appropriate as much as \$150 million to the project.

Many of Jacksonville's competing cities are aggressively developing and implementing action plans to make their communities more resilient and better equipped to deal with a future of rising waters.

- 2. Would you support the creation of a Chief Resiliency Officer position? What other measures do you think are necessary to create a more resilient Jacksonville?***

I intend to right the wrong that Mayor Curry performed when he took office and returned the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities grant. I will appoint a Chief Resiliency Officer to specifically address the effects to our community of the rising floodwaters due to climate change. I want to learn from those 100 Resilient Cities who have already performed work in this space and understand how we can become a leader in combatting these effects, as well as other cities that have led in the area of resiliency.

- 3. Do you support dredging the St. Johns River from 40-47ft. and contributing significant local tax dollars to the project? If so, would you also support adequate funding to mitigate the damage to the river and low-lying communities that may experience additional flooding?***

I support dredging the St. Johns River to ensure the Port's competitiveness and am determined to protect the local taxpayer. While estimates exist on what the city's future share may be, city council has not been asked about nor consulted on projected costs. In addition, how much jurisdiction Jacksonville's city government has over dredging decisions seems debatable; although, city council certainly has authority should city funding be requested. I absolutely support mitigation efforts to protect our low-lying areas and tax-bases that lie within flood zones.

Wetlands Loss

One of the best ways to prevent flooding is to protect our wetlands and marshes. These areas act as natural sponges that trap and slowly release rain and flood waters, while serving as buffers during major storm events. In addition, wetlands are the kidneys of our river, filtering pollutants from runoff in urban areas. They are also nurseries for fish spawning and a food source for almost every species, directly or indirectly, in our river. Wetlands are critical, yet we continue to allow wetlands and marshes to be destroyed or altered, resulting in a loss of critical biological services for our community and natural systems.

- 4. Some counties, such as Alachua, have adopted enhanced wetland protections. Would you support enhanced local wetland protections to reduce the loss of wetlands in Duval County, such as larger buffer and more stringent mitigation requirements?***

I believe that the wetlands are an important part of our ecosystem and need to be protected. I look forward to understanding more about what city government can do to assist, including creating larger buffers and more stringent mitigation requirements.

Treating Stormwater

Stormwater runoff is a major cause of water pollution in Jacksonville, carrying fertilizer, pesticides, hydrocarbons, and other pollutants into our waterways. Many communities across the country are turning to Low Impact Development (LID) practices and Green Infrastructure (GI) to protect our waterways, such as bioswales, rain gardens, urban trees, created wetlands, and green roofs. During your time in office, Jacksonville will be required to further reduce nutrient pollution in the St. Johns based on the Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) nutrient reduction requirements for its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) permit from the FDEP. However, our community has not made adequate progress in reducing these pollutants since 2015, and may once again look to purchase trading credits to meet our its obligations, instead of investing in pollution reduction projects.

- 5. *What, if anything, would you do to encourage or require Low Impact Development and Green Infrastructure to treat and manage stormwater in Jacksonville?***

Outstanding examples of low impact development and green infrastructure projects to treat and manage stormwater do exist. I will explore how local government can encourage developers to adopt such practices. Admittedly, I need to learn more but I believe that local government must do what it can to encourage these development practices.

- 6. *Would you support investing in projects that will allow us to further reduce nutrient loading into the St. Johns, or buying credits to meet the City's BMAP and permit requirements?***

I would like to better understand opportunities to support investing in projects that will allow us to further reduce nutrient loading into our river, or buying credits to meet the City's BMAP and permit requirements. The health of our river cannot be an either/or question. I look forward to a balanced approach to valuing our river as a prized, precious, and life supporting asset, while also facilitating our growth and development as an attractive city with tremendous quality of life.

Tributary Restoration

Restoring the natural flow of the many tributaries of the St. Johns will remove toxic sediments, restore vegetation and habitat, and enable them to absorb floodwaters. In addition, restoration will make the tributaries more accessible to recreational boating and provide habitat for fisheries. Tributary restoration could also be a critical part of Jacksonville's resiliency strategy and offset some of the negative impacts of the Deep Dredge and sea level rise.

- 7. *Would you support a comprehensive plan to restore tributaries to the St. Johns River in Duval County?***

Yes, I would support a comprehensive plan to restore tributaries to the St. Johns River in Duval County.

Septic Tanks

There are up to 90,000 septic tanks located throughout Duval County. Many of these systems are failing, contributing to high fecal coliform bacteria levels and nutrient pollution problems in our tributaries. The City of Jacksonville and its partners are required under two Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) to reduce fecal coliform counts in twenty-five of the most severely impaired tributaries in the Lower Basin of the St. Johns River. The BMAPs include obligations to phase out the failing septic tanks

contributing to the impairment of these tributaries. However, the BMAPs do not include all of the septic tanks that are potentially failing throughout Jacksonville. Despite the significant problem posed by failing septic tanks, over 1,000 new systems have been permitted in Duval County in the last 5 years.

- 8. What will you do to address this serious ongoing problem of failing septic tanks and to ensure that the City can fulfill its BMAP obligations for the tributaries?***

Promises were made years ago that have not been kept, including bringing water and sewer infrastructure to many parts of town that do not have them currently. I plan to establish a program of systematic elimination of failing septic tanks, backed up by ratable funding to ensure we are on a path to meaningfully address this issue. Funding sources will include government funding, as well as the pursuit of grants and other sources (which will be more successful based on the City's funding commitment to the issue).

- 9. Do you think Duval County should allow permits for new septic tanks, or require the use of performance-based treatment systems?***

When properly maintained — and given the advancement of materials and technology involved in creating septic tanks today — septic tanks can be a bridge to allow time to develop and build new infrastructure. Once again, I do not believe in an either/or approach to septic tanks or performance-based treatment systems and look forward to further understanding how we can create a balanced approach to encouraging behavior that respects and honors the St. Johns River as a prized and precious asset.

Mayor's Environmental Advisory Committee

For over two decades, representatives from local environmental organizations have met regularly with the Mayor of Jacksonville to discuss local environmental issues and potential solutions. However, this committee is no longer active.

- 1. Would you agree to reinstate the Environmental Advisory Committee and meet regularly to discuss the issues impacting Jacksonville's environment?***

Yes, I would agree to reinstate the Environmental Advisory Committee and meet regularly to discuss the issues impacting Jacksonville's environment.