

# Jacksonville City Council 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?***

**The most significant threat to the health of the St. Johns River is the willful neglect of policymakers who, in the name of "progress" have allowed the mighty river and the surrounding ecosystems to become toxic and wildlife to become endangered. Specifically, I will become a guardian and proponent of cleaning up the river support climate change initiatives as they reflect our tributaries and waterways.**

## 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 was dismayed to learn recently that Jacksonville has discontinued its participation in the Rockefeller Climate Change Resiliency Initiative. If elected to the City Council, I will write legislation to restore the initiative and moving beyond that, support legislation for projects that will address storm surges and flooding due to intense hurricanes. Rising water levels threaten livability along the eastern seaboard and should be addressed immediately.**

- 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?***

**While I do support dredging the St. Johns River to support increased container activity, I also support adequate funding to mitigate the damage to the river and low-lying communities that may experience additional flooding and increased river salinity. It is very important that we protect water life that inhabits the river and surrounding waterways.**

## **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?***

**There is no better example of the threats posed by flooding than the absence of wetlands and marshes than along the Louisiana coastline. We must protect our ecosystems from wetlands and marsh encroachment by developers and maritime speculators.**

## **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?***

**Stormwater runoff is a major problem in Jacksonville and it is very important that we must employ low impact development and green infrastructure for stormwater management. There are sterling examples of low impact development in cities such as Prince Georges County, MD; Redmond, WA; and Beltsville, MD.**

**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 support projects that would allow the further reduction of nutrient loading into the St. Johns River. Also, I would support buying credits to meet the City's Basin Management Action Plan. In researching, I discovered that there was a goal of reducing tonnage of nitrogen gas by 50% by 2015. I will research additionally to see if that goal was achieved.**

## **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?***

**I would vigorously 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?*

**My City Council district is rife with septic tanks. One of my major priorities is to address the septic tank problem in district ten. As previously stated, I will research to see if the City is on target with achieving its stated goals and objectives regarding the removal and replacement of septic tanks throughout Duval County.**

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

**The City of Jacksonville should discontinue the issuance of septic tank permits and speed up its efforts to ameliorate the existing failing septic tank problems in Duval County. This is not a nuisance. It is a very serious problem with equally serious health implications. It has negative health and environmental implications.**