

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 bio-solids 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? Septic Tanks, pesticide laden runoff and yard clippings, and industrial waist What do you specifically plan to do to address these problems, if elected? I would support efforts to educate, seek funds to mitigate, and be an informed regular voice for our river.***

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? Staffing concerns will be looked at – if it is found that this position is necessary to protect the river, this position will be created. At this time, adding a single position seems to be a bureaucratic answer and not a common sense answer. What other measures do you think are necessary to create a more resilient Jacksonville? I would be more in favor of a shift in culture when it comes to all city employees and departments.***

- 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? Further review is required. I have seen impact already from the dredging and am in favor of locating and allocating funding for mitigation when necessary.***

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? Yes.***

Treating Storm-water

Storm-water 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 bio-swales, 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 storm-water in Jacksonville? This is a scenario that needs attention. But as with most issues of this nature, education and an attempt to change behavior is the key. I would support these measures.***

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? Nutrient loading, in my opinion, is the St Johns River's biggest problem. I am committed to affectively reducing the nitrogen levels in the St Johns River's basis to acceptable levels.***

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, especially in the urban core.***

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? I will always favor local solutions. Septic tanks should be eliminated when possible. Jacksonville has a lot of work to do in this area and I am favor of moving Duval County forward toward modern methods to managing sewage issues.***

9. ***Do you think Duval County should allow permits for new septic tanks, or require the use of performance-based treatment systems? Completely eliminating septic tanks is a worthy goal. The financial side of this issue requires a realistic approach that allows us to move forward.***

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.***

There is no other candidate in this race that better understands the St Johns River and it's environmental concerns. There is no other candidate in this race committed to addressing these issues as aggressively as I would be for the community. I look forward to working with and assisting River Keepers as I have done for many years.

Can someone please contact me to further discuss water rise as it relates to dredging. I have concerns with the understanding of basic hydraulics on this issue. I can be reached at 9047592758.