

Jacksonville City Council Candidate Survey 2019

**JOYCE MORGAN-CITY COUNCIL
DISTRICT 1**



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 believe the most significant threat to the health of the St. Johns River is a lack of respect by most residents. In my second term, I would continue to support efforts with organizations like Groundwork Jacksonville who are on the front line working to restore Hogan's and McCoy's creeks and create clean waterways, parks, and open space in Jacksonville. I appreciate the opportunities I have had to meet with the Riverkeeper to stay abreast on the latest information and trends to help preserve our coastline and other critical issues facing our environment and our river specifically. I look forward to Ms. Rinaman presenting at one of my monthly town hall meetings.

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? Yes. What other measures do you think are necessary to create a more resilient Jacksonville?*

I will follow the lead provided in the research of the Riverkeeper and other environment groups. I believe the action provided on the Resilient Jacksonville pledge is a monumental start to correcting the problem.

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?*

Since serving the past 3 ½ years, I understand more why the port is pushing for expansion but that does not diminish the need for the highest level of mitigation and the need to work directly with the River Keeper and other environmental groups to assure the work is done with the ecosystem as a major part of the work. I believe the best option is to work closely to achieve the optimum blend of industry and conservation.

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 feel very strongly that elected officials and the community must allow conservationists to take the lead when it comes to protecting wetlands. I believe it is vital that the Riverkeeper and other conservation groups remain independent, so they can share protection measures without getting wrapped up political red tape. Elected officials can work directly with developers to ensure that we maintain a balance and don't get rid of a natural protection for our homes, businesses, and environment.

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?

As our Planning Department continues to work with developers on zoning potential sites, Council members can encourage and inquire about use of Low Impact Development practices and Green Infrastructure.

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?

Yes, I would.

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?

In theory I could support a comprehensive plan to restore tributaries to the St. Johns River in Duval County. But deeper for me, I believe its important to always have full knowledge of any legislation before casting a vote.

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?

Long overdue, the problem is now being addressed by JEA, the Mayor, and City Council as they are sharing responsibility in the solution. City Council approved a septic tank phase out program in 2016. JEA and the city allocated 30 Million dollars initially. JEA donated another 15 Million dollars from the sale of the land making up the District. It is still not enough funding to eradicate what could be a billion-dollar-project, so we are continuing to seek grants and other funding to augment what we lack in the budget.

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

I believe it would be best to move away from septic tanks and require hook-up to city services.