

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?*

Human interaction and disengaged leadership who refuse to consider the science have historically been the greatest threat.

What do you specifically plan to do to address these problems, if elected?

As a fourth-generation resident, I understand the importance of the St Johns River to our economy and quality of life experience. As a representative for At-Large Group 5, I will start conversation and seek out opportunities to collaborate advocacy initiatives and appropriations to address rising sea levels, storm water surge, failing septic tanks, and salinity.

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?*

A Chief Resiliency Officer would serve a very important role to collaborate stakeholders to break down barriers to protecting the future of the St Johns River.

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

Electing Leadership who will prioritize the needs of residents and protect our unique Ecological environment, tributaries, creeks, streams, and river region is essential to sustainable an equitable quality of life experience for ALL residents in Jacksonville.

3. *Do you support dredging the St. Johns River from 40-47ft. and contributing significant local tax dollars to the project?*

Yes.

If so, would you also support adequate funding to mitigate the damage to the river and low-lying communities that may experience additional flooding?

Yes, definitely! Providing adequate funding to mitigate the damage to river and low-lying communities; because, we know they will flood.

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 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?***

Low Impact Development (LID) and Green Infrastructure (GI) is necessary to preserve the waterways for future Jacksonville residents. It is unfair for future generations to inherit a polluted environment. In the 1980's, after years of neglect, our community worked together with industry to clean up our act and improve air quality. Project New Ground and Groundworks Jax are working to remediate soil in Super Fund Sites throughout the city. As your elected official, I will work to collaborate stakeholders and maintain a vibrant, informative conversation with stakeholders to create and fund an action plan to effectively address issues caused by development, industry, and residents.

- 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. Providing a grant to help homeowners remove leaking septic tanks and connect to city water and sewer is a great first step.

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.

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?*

It is more fiscally responsible to address the sources of high fecal coliform bacteria levels and nutrient pollution in our tributaries, than purchase water quality credits to satisfy BMAP obligations indefinitely.

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

If city water and sewer are available, no permits should be issued for new septic tanks.