



CONSERVATION



**COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN UPDATE**

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F. CONSERVATION ELEMENT

Goal F.1.

The County shall conserve, protect, and manage the area's natural resources, including air, water, wetlands, water wellhead areas, estuaries and estuarine marshes, beaches, shores, floodplains, fisheries and wildlife, marine habitat, water bodies, soils, minerals, vegetative communities, wildlife, and other natural and environmental resources, to ensure their availability for existing and future generations.

Objective F.1.1. Air Quality

Air quality in St. Johns County shall be suitable to safeguard human health and prevent damage to the natural environment. This shall be accomplished by meeting or exceeding air quality standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Policies

- F.1.1.1. The County shall coordinate with DEP to evaluate the need for additional air quality monitoring stations.
- F.1.1.2. New and existing industries requiring air quality permits from the EPA or DEP shall obtain the necessary permit(s) prior to receiving development approval from the County.
- F.1.1.3. The County shall require applicants for development approval to investigate and incorporate methods to reduce vehicle traffic and promote alternative transportation options, such as bikeways, pedestrian pathways, public transportation, and other means.
- F.1.1.4. The County shall coordinate with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Forest Service to ensure that appropriate fire prevention methods are implemented for the burning of land clearing debris within the rural and silviculture areas.

Objective F.1.2. Groundwater

The County shall coordinate with the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) to protect and conserve groundwater resources, as well as address current and future water use, including both traditional and alternative water supply sources. The County shall implement water conservation strategies while sustaining water quality and quantity and ensuring the protection of wetland and aquatic systems.

Policies

- F.1.2.1. The County shall address groundwater supply, conservation, and reuse through the St. Johns County Water Supply Facilities Work Plan, which shall cover a minimum ten year planning period. The Plan identifies practices for groundwater protection and conservation, along with the traditional and alternative water supply projects necessary to meet existing and future water demands for industrial, agricultural, and potable water use.
- F.1.2.2. The County shall implement reuse regulations to conserve groundwater resources by requiring all new developments within reuse zones to include a reclaimed water irrigation system constructed to applicable standards. The reuse regulations shall define the types and sizes of developments that are appropriate to be served by a reclaimed water irrigation system.
- F.1.2.3. The County shall continue to implement its Land Development Regulations (LDRs) that encourage all development to be designed in accordance with the limitations of the natural environment and require the conservation of groundwater resources. The County shall promote the use of innovative land development techniques to decrease water use. Water conservation standards shall include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - (a) Minimum preservation of at least five percent (5%) of existing native vegetation on site.
 - (b) Minimum of fifty percent (50%) xeriscaping or Florida Friendly landscaping. Plant materials shall be native species or hybrids/cultivars of native species.
 - (c) All plantings shall be selected based on the principles of Florida Friendly landscaping, including planting the right plant for the right location and providing for efficient watering practices. The following are exempt from this requirement: golf courses, sports fields, agricultural uses, and silviculture.
 - (d) High Volume irrigation shall be limited to no more than fifty percent (50%) of the total irrigated landscape area. All plantings shall be grouped according to similar water needs for efficient irrigation zones. The following are exempt from this requirement: golf courses, sports fields, agricultural uses, silviculture, and systems using Reclaimed water.
 - (e) Construction limitations within the 100-year floodplain, Environmentally

Sensitive Lands, and SJRWMD designated significant surficial and Floridan recharge areas.

- (f) Limit the amount of impervious surface, such as parking areas, within SJRWMD's designated significant recharge areas.
- (g) Reclaimed water for irrigation of golf courses and common areas where available.
- (h) The County wastewater treatment facilities shall maximize to the greatest extent possible the creation and use of reclaimed wastewater.
- (i) The use of or the retrofitting of plumbing fixtures that are water saving devices, such as ultra-low flow fixtures, shall be encouraged.
- (j) Implementation of water loss prevention programs.

F.1.2.4. The County shall work with the SJRWMD to educate the public on major groundwater issues and concerns within the County. The County shall cooperate with the SJRWMD during declared water shortage emergencies by implementing measures to conserve groundwater resources and assist with the execution of water shortage emergency declaration orders and plans, as provided in Rule 40C-21, F.A.C.

F.1.2.5. The County shall continue to work with the SJRWMD to identify free-flowing wells and recommend measures to plug the wells. The County shall require all new developments to identify and repair or plug all free flowing wells within the boundaries of a proposed development as a condition of development approval, in order to protect and conserve groundwater resources.

F.1.2.6. Future public water supply wellfields shall be located in areas where development and potential future contamination impacts are minimized.

Objective F.1.3. Surface Water

The surface waters of St. Johns County shall be protected and restored to maintain and improve their quality, ensuring compliance with local, state, and federal water quality standards and the health of ecosystems.

Policies

- F.1.3.1. St. Johns County shall continue to coordinate with governmental agencies and programs, including the St. Johns River Surface Water Improvement (SWIM) Program, the Northern Coastal Basin SWIM Program, the GTMNERR Management Plan, the Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve Management Plan, the Guana River Marsh Aquatic Preserve Management Plan, the Natural Resources of Regional Significance (NRRS), the St. Johns River American Heritage River Designation, , the Habitat Conservation Plan, the Manatee Protection Management Plan, the Estuarine Sanctuary Plan, and any future Management Plan, to ensure that County resource protection measures align with existing resource management and protection plans.
- F.1.3.2. St. Johns County shall continue to coordinate with the SJRWMD and participate in the St. Johns River Surface Water Improvement Management (SWIM) program, the Northern Coastal Basins program, and the long term ambient water quality monitoring program. The County shall also collaborate with the SJRWMD to establish pollutant load reduction goals and monitor freshwater inflows to improve surface water quality.
- F.1.3.3. The County shall collaborate with the SJRWMD and the DEP and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to educate the public about surface water resources and water quality and distribute information to promote conservation stewardship of these resources
- F.1.3.4. The County shall restrict land uses that adversely affect the quality and quantity of water resources, such as natural groundwater recharge areas, wellhead protection areas, and surface waters.
- F.1.3.5. The County Land Development Regulations (LDRs) shall be reviewed and amended, as necessary, based on the findings of the St. Johns County Master Drainage Study, as provided in Objective D.3.1 and its supporting Policies, to ensure that land development practices effectively manage surface water runoff, protect water quality, and support sustainable water resource management.
- F.1.3.6. The County shall enhance or restore the degraded natural areas on County owned properties through the removal of non-native vegetation, revegetation with native species, shoreline or dune restoration, or where feasible, the restoration of the natural hydrology. Non-native vegetative plant materials, including but not limited to Brazilian pepper, Chinese tallow, Australian pine, and air potato, shall be removed and replaced with native species that benefit the local ecosystem and water

resources.

- F.1.3.7. The County shall develop native vegetation restoration plans for park sites within the County, with a focus on enhancing water quality, reducing runoff, and restoring natural hydrological processes. The plans shall prioritize the use of native plants to stabilize soil, reduce erosion, and improve the filtration of surface water
- F.1.3.8. The County shall work to improve the quality of waters that enter the estuaries and the ocean, ensuring that water quality meets the standards established by Chapter 62-302, F.A.C. and the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. 1251.

Objective F.1.4. Stormwater Management

The County shall implement effective stormwater management practices that reduce runoff, prevent water pollution, and protect surface water quality.

Policies

- F.1.4.1. The County shall implement Land Development Regulation standards and procedures, as provided in Goal D.3. and supporting policies, to ensure that stormwater management systems protect the hydrologic conditions of wetlands.
- F.1.4.2. St. Johns County shall support and encourage continued water quality monitoring by local, state, and federal agencies, such as Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the SJRWMD to identify sources of surface water pollution and formulate targeted plans to address point and non-point source pollution.
- F.1.4.3. St. Johns County shall continue to implement the Stormwater Management Ordinance to reduce and eliminate pollutant discharges to the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4).
- F.1.4.4. Storm water ponds should, wherever feasible, be designed to use natural vegetation that creates wildlife habitat and passive recreation areas consistent with Policy D.3.1.18.
- F.1.4.5. The use, storage, transmission, or generation of hazardous substances, or substances which may artificially accelerate the eutrophication of wetlands and water bodies, is prohibited within the wetland systems to prevent contamination through stormwater runoff.
- F.1.4.6. Development within areas designated as regulatory floodway, as updated by FEMA Flood Insurance Studies for St. Johns County, shall be regulated to prevent any reduction in flood storage capacity or the natural functions and values of the floodplain. Encroachments, including but not limited to fill, new construction, and development improvements, shall be prohibited if they result in any increase in flood levels or negatively impact floodplain functions.
- F.1.4.7. The County shall regulate development within flood prone areas to minimize the reduction of flood storage capacity and protect natural floodplain functions.
- F.1.4.8. The County shall seek new funding sources to implement best management practices for stormwater management and the protection of water resources, particularly shellfish harvesting areas.

Objective F.1.5. Wastewater Management

The County shall protect its water resources from contamination through the proper management and treatment of wastewater, utilizing centralized water and sewer systems.

Policies

- F.1.5.1. New On-site Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (OSTDS) shall be inspected and approved by the County Health Department. OSTDS, including their associated drain fields, shall be located as far landward as feasible on waterfront properties to ensure no excess nutrient and pathogen loading into surface waters.
- F.1.5.2. OSTDS shall, at a minimum, continue to be subject to state standards, as provided in Objective D.1.4 and supporting Policies.
- F.1.5.3. OSTDS shall be prohibited within wetland areas.
- F.1.5.4. Pursuant to applicable law, users of OSTDS shall be required to tie into public or private sewer systems once service becomes available in that area.
- F.1.5.5. New developments above the St. Johns County Health Department's thresholds for OSTDS use shall rely upon public or private sewer systems and wastewater treatment plants built to county and state specifications.
- F.1.5.6. The County shall discourage the discharge of any new or upgraded public or private sanitary sewer facility into the estuarine waters of the County.
- F.1.5.7. The County shall actively pursue state and federal funding opportunities to support the planning, design, and implementation of septic-to-sewer conversion projects.

Objective F.1.6. Wetlands, Uplands, and Water Bodies

The County shall protect wetlands, upland communities, and water bodies within the County from development impacts to ensure the maintenance of environmental quality, biodiversity, and wildlife habitats.

Policies

- F.1.6.1. In order to protect the functional viability and productivity of forested wetland systems as natural resources, silviculture activities within forested wetlands:
- (a) Shall not significantly alter overall wetland community characteristics (i.e. hydrology, topography, plant species diversity, wetland forest composition, canopy cover, or average forest age structure).
 - (b) Shall not result in the conversion of historical forested wetlands into either upland systems or other types of wetland systems, except pursuant to restorative silviculture activities.
 - (c) Shall comply with the ACOE's, DEP's, SJRWMD's, the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the Florida Forest Service's Best Management Practices.
- F.1.6.2. The County shall continue to implement guidelines and standards for the preservation and conservation of forested and estuarine wetlands through various land development techniques including, but not limited to, the following:
- (a) The County shall protect wetlands, uplands, and their associated wildlife habitats through the implementation of the Planned Development (PUD and PRD) land development regulations. These regulations shall require twenty five (25%) percent preservation of open space. These preserved open spaces shall be designed to complement the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) wildlife and habitat data and the Florida Ecological Greenways Network to promote connectivity with adjacent ecological areas.
 - (b) The County shall protect wetlands, uplands, and their associated wildlife habitats through the implementation of natural vegetative upland buffers, the preservation of Significant Natural Communities Habitat, and the protection of Listed Species within St. Johns County, as provided in the County Land Development Regulations.
 - (c) In recognition of the many natural functions and values of estuarine wetlands and the need to protect these resources from incompatible land uses, all estuarine wetland habitats shall be deemed as Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESLs), as designated on the County Comprehensive Plan Map series.
 - (d) Wetlands and their natural functions shall be protected and conserved through the planning process, which consider factors, such as the type, value, function, size, condition, and location of the wetlands.

- (e) Consistent with the Recreation and Open Space Element, the County shall participate in various land acquisition programs to acquire important undeveloped estuarine wetlands. The land acquisition consideration shall be based on the Recreation and Open Space Policies G.1.4.2 and G.1.4.12.
- F.1.6.3. Illegal development in wetland areas shall be reported. Consistent with applicable law, it will be required that these areas shall be restored or mitigated.
 - F.1.6.4. The County shall preserve and conserve uplands through various land development techniques, as follows:
 - (a) The County shall require a buffer zone adjacent to jurisdictional wetlands and naturally-occurring open water habitats on all new development sites, as specified in the LDRs
 - (b) The County shall recognize the following vegetative natural communities as Significant Natural Communities Habitat. Due to the rarity and ecological importance of these vegetative communities, a minimum of ten (10%) percent of the total acreage of each Significant Natural Communities Habitat (excluding bona fide Agriculture or Silviculture operations) shall be preserved and maintained by the development.
 - (1) Beach Dune
 - (2) Coastal Grasslands/Coastal Strand
 - (3) Xeric Hammock
 - (4) Maritime Hammock
 - (5) Sandhill
 - (6) Scrub
 - F.1.6.5. The County shall continue to investigate Outstanding Florida Water designation(s) for major stream systems within the County, particularly the Julington/Durbin and Six Mile Creek systems.
 - F.1.6.6. St. Johns County, in coordination with DEP, shall encourage all new and existing Marinas or boatyards to participate in the DEPs Clean Marina Program or the Clean Boatyard Program.
 - F.1.6.7. The County shall coordinate with the appropriate federal and state agencies to place shellfish harvesting area signs at appropriate locations along the Intracoastal Waterway.
 - F.1.6.8. The County shall continue to support the Matanzas River Special Basin and Outstanding Florida Water (OFW) designations by the SJRWMD and DEP for the protection of the Matanzas River by continuing to review the LDRs for compliance with the potential state requirements for the Matanzas Basin.

F.1.6.9. The County shall identify and implement strategies to incentivize the protection, preservation, and restoration of wetlands through financial or regulatory incentives, in order to support ecological integrity, water quality, and flood resilience.

Objective F.1.7. Agriculture and Silviculture Soils

Agricultural and silviculture soils in St. Johns County shall be protected and conserved as essential natural resources that are essential to both the County's economy and ecological health. This will be implemented through the County's Land Development Regulations (LDRs), which promote responsible agricultural and forestry practices and preserve soil health.

Policies

- F.1.7.1. The County shall establish a Rural Lands Conservation Program to protect agricultural and silvicultural lands through conservation easements and financial incentives. This program shall support local landowners in preserving the rural character of the County, maintaining productive agricultural and forestry operations, and safeguarding natural landscapes from development pressures. By balancing agricultural, silvicultural, and growth needs, the program shall promote sustainability, protect local food sources, and conserve open spaces for future generations.
- F.1.7.2. The County shall protect agricultural and silvicultural lands by encouraging growth to remain in and directly adjacent to areas served with existing infrastructure, thereby minimizing pressure on rural lands.
- F.1.7.3. The County shall continue to collaborate with the St. Johns County Cooperative Extension Service (SJCCES), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Florida Department of Agriculture (FDACS), and Florida Forest Service to develop and implement strategies to maintain agricultural and silvicultural activities as viable businesses in the County. These strategies may include, but are not limited to, Best Management Practices (BMPs), conservation easements, tax incentives, and federal and state grants (i.e. forest legacy, stewardship incentive program, farmland protection, wildlife habitat incentive program, etc.).
- F.1.7.4. The County shall provide technical assistance to silviculture operations in implementing BMPs that are consistent with the protection of natural resources, wildlife protection, and stormwater GOPs.
- F.1.7.5. The County shall protect agricultural and silviculture areas through their designation on the Future Land Use Map and through the development and application of Planned Rural Development Land Development Regulations.
- F.1.7.6. The commercial harvesting of trees shall comply with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Best Management Practices (1993), as amended and updated. This includes, but not limited to, the establishment of no-harvest zones within 150 feet of the banks of the St. Johns River and the Intracoastal Waterway, or within 75 feet of the banks of the streams and creeks listed below, whichever is more restrictive.

(a) 75 foot Buffer

- (1) Julington / Durbin Creek
- (2) Cunningham Creek
- (3) Trout Creek
- (4) Six Mile Creek
- (5) Tocoï Creek
- (6) McCullough Creek
- (7) Moccasin Creek
- (8) Deep Creek
- (9) Pellicer Creek
- (10) Cracker Branch
- (11) Moses Creek
- (12) Moultrie Creek
- (13) Pablo/Cabbage Creek
- (14) Sampson Creek
- (15) Orange Grove Branch/Kendall Creek
- (16) Petty Branch
- (17) Turnbull Creek
- (18) Town Branch
- (19) Sixteen Mile Creek
- (20) Paines Branch
- (21) West Run/Cracker Branch
- (22) Smith Creek
- (23) Deep Creek
- (24) Stokes Creek
- (25) East Creek
- (26) San Julian Creek

(b) 150 foot Buffer

- (1) St. Johns River
- (2) Intracoastal Waterway

- F.1.7.7. The County shall continue to protect agricultural lands through the agriculture exemption or "green belt" property tax assessments.
- F.1.7.8. The County shall collaborate with local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices to develop soil conservation methods and educate the agricultural community on soil conservation and erosion control practices, including the implementation of Best Management Practices and erosion control strategies.
- F.1.7.9. The County, in cooperation with the St. Johns County Cooperation Extension Service (SJCCES), Florida Department Agriculture and Consumer Services Forestry Division (DOF), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and SJRWMD, shall provide technical assistance to agricultural operations and other large irrigation water users in designing low-volume irrigation systems.

Objective F.1.8. Energy

The County shall implement cost-effective energy efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption, promote carbon reduction, encourage green building practices, and support sustainable economic development.

Policies

- F.1.8.1. The County shall promote energy saving techniques through the public information program. The County shall continue to enforce the Florida Energy Efficiency Code through the Development permit review and approval process.
- F.1.8.2. The County shall encourage the research, development, demonstration, and application of alternative energy resources, particularly renewable energy resources, by allowing agribusiness renewable energy operations, solar farms, wood and debris recycling facilities related to alternative fuel production. The County shall ensure that the LDRs do not prohibit the operations of alternative energy resources where appropriate, consistent with Policy A.1.7.9
- F.1.8.3. St Johns County public buildings shall be constructed with cost-effective efficiency construction standards and whenever feasible, shall meet or exceed standards set forth by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, the Green Building Initiative's Green Globes rating system, the Florida Green Building Coalition standards or a nationally or state recognized, high-performance green building rating system, as approved by the Florida Department of Management Services.
- F.1.8.4. The County shall encourage that all private buildings constructed in the County be constructed to meet the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system, the Green Building Initiative's Green Globes rating system, the Florida Green Building Coalition standards, or a nationally or state recognized, high-performance green building rating system, as approved by the Florida Department of Management Services.
- F.1.8.5. The County shall promote energy conservation by supporting alternative energy resources including biofuel, solar, and wind and by ensuring that Land Development Regulations (LDRs) do not prohibit their use.
- F.1.8.6. The County shall modify the Land Development Code establishing Low Impact Development standards.
- F.1.8.7. The County shall continue to implement cost-effective energy efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption in the County's fleet management, operations, building construction, and maintenance programs.
- F.1.8.8. The County shall promote energy conservation by supporting alternative forms of transportation through the programs established in Objective B.1.5 and G.1.3.1.

- F.1.8.9. Upon completion, St. Johns County shall investigate the applicability of the Florida Residential Retrofit program for retrofitting older homes in the County to improve energy efficiency. The County may investigate a long term, market-based program that offers a wholehouse approach for reducing energy use.
- F.1.8.10. Consistent with the State’s initiative to improve the sustainability of Florida’s energy production and consumption patterns and to minimize the County’s own carbon footprint, the County shall identify opportunities and funding for local implementation of renewable energy options that apply to the built environment, infrastructure, utilities, and transportation sectors, using the Florida Green Building Council, Green Local Government Standard as a guide.

Objective F.1.9. Mining and Excavation Activities

Mining and excavation activities in the County shall be conducted in a manner that minimizes detrimental effects on groundwater, surface water, wildlife, and habitats, surrounding land use values, and the health, safety, and welfare of the general public. These activities must also ensure the appropriate use and protection of minerals.

Policies

- F.1.9.1. The County shall review and update, as appropriate, Land Development Regulations (LDRs) for excavation activities. At a minimum, the LDRs shall address the regulation of excavation activities including appropriate use, size, roadway use and maintenance, and any appropriate exemptions.
- F.1.9.2. Commercial mining and excavation activities shall be prohibited within areas designated as Conservation on the Future Land Use Map.
- F.1.9.3. Excavations for fish ponds, aquaculture, or pisciculture activities shall comply with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Aquaculture Best Management Practices (January 2005, as amended) and the County LDRs.
- F.1.9.4. Dredge and fill activities shall be reviewed and permitted by the appropriate regulatory agencies to assure that environmental impacts are minimized and that the requirements of the County LDRs are met before final approval is granted.

Objective F.1.10. Acquisition and Protection

The County shall provide technical assistance to other governmental agencies and the private sector in the identification, acquisition, preservation, or protection of areas identified for their ecological significance, including environmentally sensitive lands.

Policies

- F.1.10.1. The County shall actively coordinate with federal, state, and regional agencies, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTMNERR), St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), and other relevant entities, to align with and support ongoing conservation efforts. This collaboration shall ensure consistency across initiatives, enhance resource management, and promote science-based, integrated approaches to protecting the County's natural resources.
- F.1.10.2. The County shall coordinate with the surrounding counties to protect native vegetation, estuaries, surface waters, marine resources, wildlife habitats, wildlife corridors, and to limit armored shorelines, and reduce exposure to natural hazards that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- F.1.10.3. The County shall require the preservation of native vegetative communities and removal of exotic vegetation on County owned land to the maximum extent feasible.
- F.1.10.4. The County shall encourage and pursue the acquisition of ecologically significant land through existing state acquisition programs or through local acquisition programs to be funded through grants, bond issues, land trust funds, or other appropriate local funding mechanisms.
- F.1.10.5. The County shall develop and implement a dedicated funding source to support the acquisition, management, and protection of conservation lands. This strategy shall prioritize maintaining local funding sources while actively seeking additional Federal, State, and Local funding opportunities. Consideration shall be given to implementing a small sales tax as a consistent revenue stream, ensuring long-term financial support for preserving sensitive areas, managing ecosystems, and expanding protected lands for future generations.
- F.1.10.6. The County shall continue to expand efforts by the Land Acquisition Management Program (LAMP) to enhance its effectiveness in preserving natural resources and expanding conservation efforts.
- F.1.10.7. In addition to pursuing acquisition of ecologically significant land, the County shall continue to protect such areas through application and enforcement of the Land Development Regulations (LDRs).
- F.1.10.8. The County shall protect (ESLs) by implementing Land Development Regulations

(LDRs) that address protection for each type of ESL and, at a minimum, address the following issues:

(a) For Wetlands, Outstanding Florida Waters (OFW), and Estuaries:

(1) Maintain vegetated buffers between the wetlands/OFW/estuaries and upland development as stated in the County's Land Development Regulations (LDRs) and as follows:

i. A minimum natural vegetative upland buffer of twenty-five (25) feet shall be required and maintained between the developed areas and the contiguous wetlands to protect the water quality of the wetlands, except where buffer averaging may allow less than the required minimum of twenty-five (25) feet in certain locations while achieving a greater buffer width or where a variance is granted. Except where a variance is granted no buffer shall be reduced to less than ten (10) feet except in circumstances where an unavoidable wetland impact occurs such as, but not limited to, a road crossing. Such upland buffer shall be measured from the jurisdictional wetland line as determined by the SJRWMD and FDEP.

ii. A minimum of a fifty (50) feet natural vegetative upland buffer shall be required and maintained between the development areas and the St. Johns, Matanzas, Guana and Tolomato Rivers and their associated tributaries, streams and other interconnecting water bodies, except where buffer averaging may allow less than the required minimum of fifty (50) feet in certain locations while achieving a greater buffer width or where a variance is granted. Except where a variance is granted no buffer shall be reduced to less than twenty-five (25) feet except in circumstances where an unavoidable wetland impact occurs such as, but not limited to, a road crossing. Such upland buffer shall be measured from the jurisdictional wetland line as determined by the SJRWMD and DEP.

(2) Continue to coordinate with DEP and SJRWMD on the status of the water quality data in all the County's major rivers, especially areas which abut designated shellfish harvesting areas. If the SJRWMD water quality data reveals the need for more stringent stormwater regulations or other water quality standards, the County will work with DEP and the SJRWMD in the development of these regulations.

(b) For Coastal Resources and Beach and Dune Resources:

(1) Coordinate the consistency with Federal and State regulations and requirements applicable to the coastal resources.

(2) Coordinate the consistency with DEP regulations and requirements

applicable to the Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL).

- (3) Prevent development activity which would negatively impact the beach and dune system or the coastal resources, unless such activity is required to protect public health and safety.

(c) Listed Species Habitat:

- (1) Establish criteria that will be utilized in the development review process for the identification of potential habitat areas by proposed developments.
- (2) Establish criteria for those areas of the County with a high probability of listed species habitat for additional review or habitat identification procedures.
- (3) Establish standards and procedures for the protection or acquisition of specific habitat areas which have been identified as necessary for the support of an existing listed species population.

F.1.10.9. The County shall continue to review its land acquisition selection criteria on a regular basis and shall update these criteria, as deemed appropriate. Land acquisition and preservation shall be focused on lands that provide the greatest amount of habitat and wildlife benefit.

F.1.10.10. The County shall consider creating an Environmentally Sensitive Overlay Zone (ESOZ) for ecologically sensitive areas. The ESOZ shall establish standards and procedures to address the following:

- (a) Protection of the County's shellfish harvesting areas and Outstanding Florida Waters.
- (b) Protection of surface water quality.
- (c) Protection of flood storage and floodplain capacity.
- (d) Protection of wetland dependent wildlife, listed species, and unique vegetative communities.
- (e) Protection of environmental scenic views and vistas.
- (f) Provisions for development mitigation, revegetation, buffering, and
- (g) Setback measures within the ESOZ.
- (h) Provisions for building and development practices and techniques which protect the integrity of the ESOZ.

F.1.10.11. The Environmentally Sensitive Lands Map shall continue to be updated. The Map shall include wetlands, estuaries, Outstanding Florida Waters (OFWs), Class II waters, Aquatic Preserves, the National Estuary Research Reserve, Conservation lands, submerged aquatic vegetation, environmentally managed land in public ownership, mitigation banks, and Coastal resources.

- F.1.10.12. The County shall use the Environmentally Sensitive Lands map, as necessary or appropriate, to identify areas for protection or acquisition. Priority areas shall be areas that provide the highest habitat and wildlife benefit.
- F.1.10.13. The County Geographic Information System (GIS) staff computer mapping inventory shall coordinate with the State and Federal agencies on new available vegetative and wildlife data and update the County database as appropriate.
- F.1.10.14. In selecting future park sites for public acquisition, the County shall give full consideration to acquiring new lands according to the Recreation and Open Space Element's Policies.
- F.1.10.15. Environmental surveys shall be required for all development to assess and identify existing ecological resources. The County shall develop and adopt standards for environmental surveys into the LDRs. At a minimum, the focus of these surveys shall be jurisdictional wetland boundaries, existing vegetative communities, the presence and location of existing wildlife habitat, rookeries, listed species, Significant Natural Communities Habitat, historical and archaeological locations, and potential wildlife corridors.
- F.1.10.16. The County shall collaborate with state and federal agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), by providing technical support for the inventory, assessment, and mapping of existing fish and wildlife habitat, significant upland communities, and wildlife corridors.
- F.1.10.17. The County shall continue to enforce guidelines and standards, adopted in 2012 and amended as needed, for the protection of wildlife corridors, such as, but not limited to, wildlife crossings and open space preservation. These standards will prioritize the protection of critical migration routes and ensure that development does not fragment or degrade important wildlife habitats.
- F.1.10.18. The County shall continue to seek support and technical assistance from state agencies, such as DEP, SJRWMD, and FWC, to implement a wildlife corridor plan linking public lands of appropriate size to maintain species viability and diversity.
- F.1.10.19. The County shall coordinate with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Agricultural Extension Service, and others, to provide suggestions and guidance to the agricultural and silviculture communities on methods for incorporating wildlife corridors in the management of their lands.
- F.1.10.20. The County shall continue to encourage cluster type developments to preserve large, contiguous areas of open space and natural habitat through implementation of the development review process.
- F.1.10.21. The County shall implement the County Greenway, Blueway & Trails Master Plan to protect and enhance the natural, cultural and historical resources of the County

while providing interconnecting accessways between public conservation and park lands. The established Greenways/Blueways/Trails shall be coordinated with the surrounding counties and municipalities

- F.1.10.22. Development of vacant lands adjacent to Outstanding Florida Waters, Aquatic Preserves, Wildlife Sanctuaries, State Preserves, Sanctuaries, National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Wildlife Management areas shall be designed to a scale and intensity which is consistent with the existing adjacent uses pursuant to the adopted Land Development Regulations (LDRs) and shall be required, at a minimum, to meet all applicable Federal, State, and Local drainage and water quality standards.
- F.1.10.23. The County shall work with the FWC to educate the public on the value of wildlife, native vegetative communities, and other natural resources through the creation of information flyers, brochures, interpretive displays, and the development of trails at appropriate County park sites.
- F.1.10.24. The County shall encourage public involvement in conservation initiatives by promoting volunteer opportunities and advocacy efforts, building support for future conservation initiatives and fostering a deeper connection to the environment.

Objective F.1.11. Listed Species

The County shall protect and conserve habitats and ensure their long-term survival of listed species by coordinating with state and federal agencies to monitor and safeguard these species and their habitats.

Policies

- F.1.11.1. The County shall work with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and other appropriate governmental agencies in the implementation of the St. Johns County Manatee Protection Plan (MPP) (2005).
- F.1.11.2. Marinas and ports shall not be located in or immediately adjacent to FWC designated manatee sanctuaries.
- F.1.11.3. The County shall work with FWC to monitor applications for Marina construction permits filed with applicable state agencies and shall comment on such applications during the permit review process to ensure that local knowledge of manatee foraging areas is appropriately addressed during such review.
- F.1.11.4. All species of sea turtles nesting on the beaches of St. Johns County shall be protected from human interference including, but not limited to, beach renourishment, beach front lighting, coastal construction, armoring, erosion control structures, mechanical beach cleaning, and unregulated vehicular traffic which could harm sea turtles and their nesting sites during nesting season.
- F.1.11.5. The County shall protect sea turtles by implementing the St. Johns County Habitat Conservation Plan and through coordination with the DEP, FWC, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on the enforcement and protection of sea turtles during their nesting times.
- F.1.11.6. The County shall protect Anastasia Island Beach Mouse (AIBM) by Implementing the St. Johns County Habitat Conservation Plan and through coordination with the DEP, FWC, and FWS on the enforcement and protection of AIBM habitat.
- F.1.11.7. The County shall protect listed species and critical habitats and both shall be evaluated on a site development basis. For developments on property known to support listed species of plants or animals, the developer shall be required to notify the appropriate Federal, State, and Regional agencies and the County and must comply with the appropriate guidelines and laws that protect listed species.
- F.1.11.8. The County shall protect bald eagles through the continued implementation of Land Development Regulations (LDRs) that include bald eagle protection zones.
- F.1.11.9. Recognizing that submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) protects water quality by stabilizing sediments, absorbing nutrients, and providing essential habitats for many species of wildlife, the County shall continue to enforce regulations to protect SAV, as created in 2010 and amended as needed.

Objective F.1.12. Scenic Highway Designations

The County shall continue to support local, state, and federal Scenic Highway designations that promote community pride and self-image, while preserving and protecting unique scenic, historical, archaeological, cultural, recreational, aesthetic, and environmentally significant resources.

Policies

- F.1.12.1. The William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway is designated as a State Scenic Highway and shall be protected through implementation of LDRs and development controls as established in Future Land Use Policy A.1.4.8.
- F.1.12.2. The County and William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway Corridor Management Council (CMC) members shall continue to implement Overlay District regulations that contain architectural, landscaping, buffer, screening, including retention of existing tree canopy, lighting, and, as necessary, additional setback requirements for this state designated Scenic Highway.
- F.1.12.3. State Road A1A from the St. Johns/Duval county line to the St. Johns/Flagler county line is designated as a St. Johns County Scenic Roadway, a state designated Scenic Highway and a National Scenic Byway. The preservation of its picturesque historic architecture, scenic land, and water vistas shall be protected through the implementation of development controls as established in Future Land Use Policy A.1.4.7 and A.1.4.9.
- F.1.12.4. The County shall continue to implement Land Development Regulations (LDRs) for the preservation of Old Brick Road in St. Johns County which is designated as a state Heritage Scenic Highway.
- F.1.12.5. The County shall continue to implement LDRs for the preservation of the portion of International Golf Parkway which is designated as a St. Johns County Scenic Roadway.
- F.1.12.6. The County shall develop a procedure for recognizing and nominating eligible local roads as Scenic Roadways.