



Jekyll Island Environmental Assessment Procedure (EAP):

Summary findings of the EAP Committee considering a proposal from Jekyll Harbor Marina to underbrush approximately 5-acres of wooded, leased land

Date of EAP Committee meeting: 4/20/2016

EAP Committee members

Ben Carswell, Director of Conservation, Jekyll Island Authority - JIA (chair, present)
Kimberly Andrews, Research Coordinator, JIA (present)
Cliff Gawron, Director of Landscape and Planning, JIA (present)
Noel Jensen, Senior Director of Facilities and Public Services, JIA (present)
John Marr, General Manager of the Georgia Sea Turtle Center, JIA (present)
Alice Keyes, Associate Director, One Hundred Miles (present)
Sheldon Leiker, Coastal Permit Coordinator, GADNR/CRD (present)
Dave Smith, Jekyll Island Resident, Project Consulting Associates, LLC. (present)

Others in attendance

Yank Moore, Conservation Coordinator, JIA (note taker)

Project under consideration

Jekyll Harbor Marina seeks to have a contractor utilize a brush cutter to mow palmettos and trees under two-inches within approximately five-acres of leased property that has not been utilized to date since the inception of the original lease in 1990. The purpose of this request is to “explore the development of a to-be-determined residential project that for planning purposes has been titled “Mariners walk”, a community that would enjoy pedestrian access to the village shopping area and beach-front park. The applicant proposes to “probably continue to have the (area concerned) bush hogged on a scheduled basis” if development does not go forward in the near term. The land in question is classified as “Developed” for the purposes of the 2014 Jekyll Island Master Plan. However, the land is currently in a natural state and is not known to have been previously developed. The applicant recalls that the land was under-brushed at the time

Assessment

This part of the response focuses exclusively on the under-brushing proposal. Comments follow in a subsequent section that concern the anticipated development project and fate of the dredge spoil material currently occupying one-half acre of the southern part of the leased area.



The committee finds that the under-brushing proposal would not be in conflict with the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan, if, **and only if**, carried out in a manner that strictly adheres to the following conditions of approval.

- Tree protection
 - No clearing around live oak trees within a circular perimeter defined by the, *crown drip line*, a vertical line extending down to the ground from the ends of a tree's longest branches.
 - The JIA will access to the site in advance of the under-brushing work to flag trees under 2" diameter for protection. These may include magnolias, small oaks, small pines, hackberry, red bay, or any other native species encountered that JIA staff shall deem to have value to the natural integrity of the site. During this time small areas may also be flagged off to allow for the protection of small patches of undergrowth and associated small trees or shrubs (such as devil's walking stick and yaupon holly). Such protected patches will be limited to no more than 35 feet in diameter and will not exceed a total area of 0.1 acres.
- The brush-cutting equipment must not be designed or otherwise used to disturb the soil or to cut or remove roots. All cutting and grinding must be done above the soil surface.
- Any large debris left behind after cutting should be either chipped and distributed on site or removed from the site.
- As the applicant stated in the request letter, a 25-foot undisturbed buffer will be maintained along any part of the property which borders salt marsh. The salt marsh jurisdictional boundary must be determined in advance in coordination with the Georgia DNR Coastal Resources Division.
- A minimum 10-foot set back must be maintained around the perimeters of the property. Vegetation within this set back should not be cut.
- JIA Conservation and/or Research staff will survey the area in advance to search for any wildlife that may be relocated prior to the work commencing.
- The JIA Director of Conservation and the Director of Landscape and Planning should be notified prior to work commencing and will meet with the contractor on site to go over the conditions described here.
- Future scheduled maintenance cutting will not require additional formal EAP review. However, the applicant should notify and consult with the JIA Director of Conservation and the JIA Director of Landscape and planning prior to any repeat cutting and be responsive to any requested adjustments in cutting practices.

The purpose of these conditions is to ensure the ongoing ecological integrity of the area as a forest until such time as development of the area is proposed to the JIA Board. If development does not ultimately come to pass, the environmental value of the area will have been sustained through a strategically planned and adaptive approach.



Note that undergoing this EAP review does not release the applicant from any other regulatory or permitting requirements that may be required by county, state, or federal authorities. Contact Ms. Skye Stockel (skye.stockel@dnr.ga.gov) with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Resources Division, to make arrangements to have the Marshlands Protection Act (MPA) Jurisdiction Line marked and to confirm any further requirements related to compliance with the MPA.

Statement of concern regarding anticipated development proposal

The EAP Committee expressed serious concerns about the potential for conflicts with the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan and the broader mission of the JIA that could arise depending on the specifics of the anticipated development proposal. These concerns do raise the question as to whether or not it could be possible to develop this site without significant compromises to goals stated in the Conservation Plan. However, without more information about what is to be proposed, that question cannot be definitely answered. The committee's concerns are summarized below. Any future proposal that the applicant chooses to bring forward to the JIA concerning development should seek to address these concerns.

- Low elevation and tidal flooding

The elevation of the currently un-utilized area of the property varies between about 3.5 feet and 6.5 feet above mean sea level according to Lidar-derived digital elevation models. These are significantly lower elevations than any of the existing residential developments on Jekyll Island. The frequency of occurrence of extreme high tide events is already known to be increasing along the Georgia Coast (Figure 1). Furthermore, the 2014 Jekyll Island Master Plan states that precautionary planning “should account for not less than 0.5 feet of sea level rise by 2060 and the strong possibility of sea-level increases between 1.3 feet and 2.3 feet during that period. A two-foot increase in sea level would result in tidal inundation of portions of the eastern side of the property during at least some high tides. Additionally, the JIA is in the process of planning for marsh-restoration work that could result in increased tidal range within the marsh to the east of the property. This outcome would be expected if we decided to clean-out or otherwise increase the volume capacity of the culvert under the east end of Harbor Road. Bottom line, the applicant should anticipate marsh encroachment over time, and movement of associated legal boundaries, particularly along the southeastern perimeter of the property,

While there may be engineering options to allow for raising the elevation of the development, either through fill-material, structural elevation, or a combination. Bringing



in significant amounts of fill material would make it even more challenging to develop the property and retain any of the current environmental value.

- Landscape/habitat connectivity for wildlife

An overarching, island-wide objective of the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan is minimization of habitat fragmentation and loss. The area around the central entryway to the island, Ben Fortson Parkway, is unfortunately already very fragmented. In fact, other than the dunes and beach, the un-used area of the marina's lease is the only place where terrestrial wildlife can move from the south end of the island to the north end of the island without crossing a busy roadway or moving through a densely developed area. This connectivity would be severely impacted by a high density development in this location and could be a serious challenge to preserve even at modest densities.

- Jekyll Island visitor arrival experience

The visitor experience of Jekyll Island is extremely important to the JIA. The perception (and reality) that Jekyll Island is a mostly natural place that allows for the comforts of accessibility and development through careful balance, is extremely important to the uniqueness of the Jekyll Island experience and is our primary attraction. Thus, the visibility and appearance of any development that may be visible immediately upon arriving on Jekyll Island would be extremely important. Like any structural development proposal, a proposal for residential development on the marina's lease would require review through the Jekyll Island Design Process, which would include further EAP review specific to such a proposal.

Comments on the use of dredge spoil on property

In response to prior request, the applicant's letter describing the under-brushing proposal also mentioned that the applicant is attempting to treat the dredge spoil material on site to try to reduce the salinity of the soil with the intention of spreading it in unspecified locations elsewhere on the leased land. Please note, by way of this response, that use of the spoil material elsewhere on the property would require separate approval and further soil analysis to test for specific contaminants.



Figure 1.

Number of tide events per year exceeding 5 feet above Mean Sea Level (MSL) as measured at the NOAA Tide Gauge at Fort Pulaski, 1940 – 2015 (provided by GADNR/WRD Nongame Conservation Section).

