

June 28, 2018

The Honorable Rick Scott  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

RE: Opposition to Development Proposal for Julington-Durbin Preserve

Dear Governor Scott,

We urge you to stand firm in support of our state conservation lands and reject the proposal by a developer to acquire property within the Julington-Durbin Preserve for a private residential development.

Thomas Dodson and Eastland are seeking more than 400 acres in the heart of the Julington-Durbin Preserve to build 1,400 homes in exchange for property on Black Hammock Island. While we support the acquisition and conservation of the Black Hammock Island parcel, we are adamantly opposed to the development of any portion of the Julington-Durbin Preserve.

If approved, this land swap would establish a dangerous precedent, putting additional public conservation lands throughout the state at risk of disposition or private development. The Florida Constitution only allows for the disposition of lands owned by the state if it is no longer needed for conservation purposes or if substituted with property of equal or greater value. The Julington-Durbin Preserve is clearly needed for conservation purposes, and it would be impossible to compare and value the sandhill, mesic flatwood, floodplain ecosystem within the Preserve with the maritime hammock found on Black Hammock Island.

The Preserve consists of 2,031 acres located on a peninsula formed at the confluence of Julington and Durbin creeks, with approximately nine miles of shoreline along the adjacent waterways. According to the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the Preserve "contains extensive floodplain wetlands providing water quality and floodplain protection for both Julington and Durbin creeks and the St. Johns River. The Preserve has a diverse assemblage of upland and wetland natural communities, providing significant habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, including listed species." The Preserve also "protects significant portions of the middle and lower portions of Durbin Creek, adding to water quality and flood protection to the Lower St. Johns River Basin and the Preserve."

When the peninsula was purchased in 2001 as part of Preservation Project Jacksonville by the State, St. Johns River Water Management District and the City, the acquisition was called the most important and significant conservation effort in Jacksonville's history. The Preservation Project Jacksonville was established by then Mayor John Delaney to manage growth, protect environmentally sensitive lands, improve water quality, and provide access to the City's natural areas. Several years later, a Jacksonville Growth Management Task Force unanimously supported protecting Preservation Projects in perpetuity.

Developing a portion of this ecological gem would:

- Destroy critical habitat for plants and wildlife and threaten listed flora and fauna that have returned because of the restoration efforts;
- Degrade water quality in Julington and Durbin creeks and the St. Johns River;
- Reduce flood protections provided by the property;
- Damage the restoration efforts that have been underway for nearly 17 years by preventing the prescribed burns that are an essential tool for restoring and preserving the ecological health and diversity of the site;
- Compromise public access to a popular regional outdoor recreation area;
- **Establish a dangerous precedent that would potentially open up other conservation lands statewide to development.**

With the rapid growth and development occurring in Northeast Florida and throughout the state, our public conservation lands are more important than ever before. We must continue to pursue the acquisition of additional conservation properties, while vigorously protecting the public lands that we are fortunate to already own, like Julington-Durbin Preserve, in perpetuity.

We urge you to oppose the land swap proposal involving the Preserve and ask for your continued support of Florida’s valuable conservation properties and land acquisition programs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The undersigned organizations:

St. Johns RIVERKEEPER  
Public Trust Environmental Legal Institute of Florida  
Duval Soil and Water Conservation District  
Stetson Kennedy Foundation  
Sierra Northeast Florida Group  
Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society

Timucuan Parks Foundation  
Florida Wildlife Federation  
1000 Friends of Florida  
Duval Audubon Society  
St. Johns Audubon Society  
Center for Biological Diversity

CC	John A. Miklos	Fred N. Roberts	Charles Drake
	Ron Howse	Douglas C. Bournique	Douglas Burnett
	Susan Dolan	Janet Price	Allan Roberts
	Dr. Anne Shortelle	Secretary Noah Valenstein	Deputy Secretary David Clark