

SAVE OR PAVE?



You're looking at the tip of the Outpost – a 100-acre parcel of private property that is almost completely surrounded by Guana Research Reserve. The Outpost is owned by the Ponte Vedra Corporation, which has plans to build 66 homes on it even though this land was designated conservation 29 years ago.

PVC and its parent company Gate Petroleum now claim the conservation designation of 74 upland acres of the Outpost is “erroneous.” At the upcoming public hearing, they will try to convince St. Johns County commissioners to amend the Comprehensive Plan to allow a Planned Unit Development there. We can't let this happen.

If a substantial number of people write emails to the county making a case for keeping the land in conservation, and if the hearing is well-attended by the public on September 17th, then there's a good possibility the entire property will remain in conservation, as it should.

The environmental significance of the Outpost is undeniable. It contains closed canopy hammock that supports hundreds of animal species. Development would eliminate most of the hammock that is increasingly rare on our coast. Many protected species are seen in the immediate vicinity of the Outpost and would be impacted by loss of habitat.

Importantly, the Outpost is 97% surrounded by Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTM-NERR) – the only reserve of its kind on Florida's east coast. Fracturing of wild spaces is a leading cause of decline of animal populations. The effects go beyond the Outpost; development would also alter habitat quality and use in adjacent conservation lands. This adds up to large impacts on wildlife populations we are trying to conserve.

Impact on water quality in the Research Reserve is also a serious concern. The Outpost borders Guana Lake for nearly a mile. Storm water run-off would send fertilizer, pesticides and other contaminants into the Guana River Marsh Aquatic Preserve, an Outstanding Florida Water.

The Department of Environmental Protection has expressed concern about the impact of development of the Outpost on water quality of Guana River. Current water quality data shows it is not meeting state water quality standards and will likely be declared impaired for nutrients.] Imagine the impact of an additional 66 homes – with 26 on the waterfront.

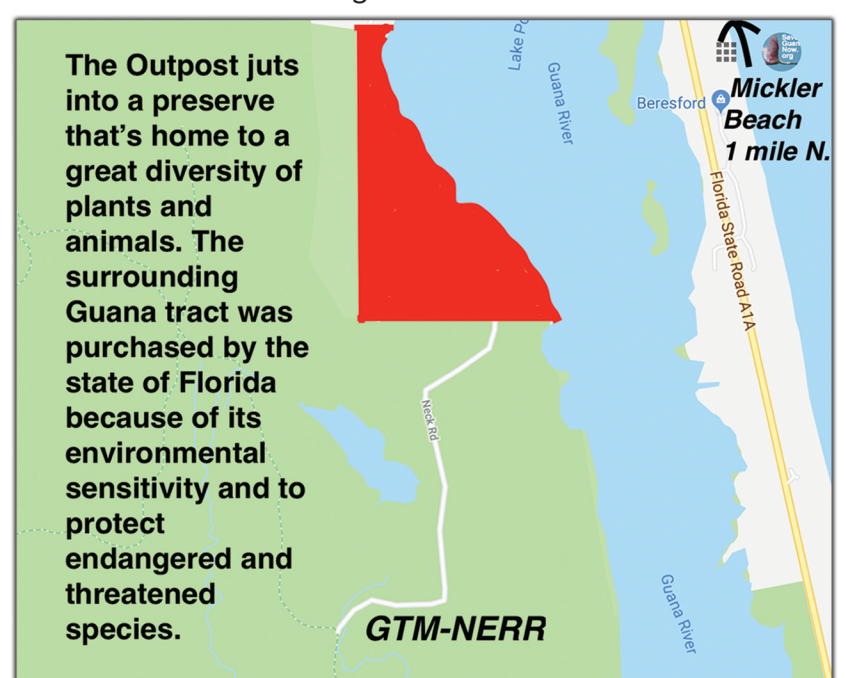
The development would create an eyesore in the north end of Guana Reserve – an area popular for eco-tourism. As County Commissioner James Johns wrote in his letter to Senator Bill Nelson, “The [GTM-NERR] is particularly essential to the local economy in St. Johns County and is a vital environmental component of our local natural landscape.”

Six environmental groups support our cause, including Audubon Florida, Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife and 1000 Friends of Florida, who said: “Some areas are suitable for development and some areas need to be preserved forever. The Outpost is without question the latter.”

North Florida Land Trust stands ready to conserve the Outpost if Ponte Vedra Corporation will make it available for purchase. The alternative is unthinkable.

As this newspaper's Opinion Editor, Jim Sutton, wrote: “Put the five words ‘Conservation Land’ and ‘Planned Unit Development’ into the same sentence and it might light up the bulb of lunacy.”

Do we really need to sacrifice conservation land or imperil an ecological gem to make room for more building lots when there is no shortage of residential land to build on? To see the property we're fighting to save, please view the video at SaveGuanaNow.org



Please write emails today all five county commissioners and county staff. Find all of their email addresses at SaveGuanaNow.org Although we lost the Planning and Zoning Agency vote 3-2, our chances are much better of winning the vote that could decide the future of the Outpost. ALL Plan Amendments are legislative actions that can be DENIED for ANY legitimate reason.

Please plan to attend the upcoming County Commissioners hearing. Your attendance on September 17th is crucial. Wearing a white shirt will show you oppose development of the Outpost. Our county commissioners will either keep the Outpost in conservation, or make a decision that requires two more hearings. If they choose the latter, we'll maintain pressure.

If the auditorium is full when you arrive, it's critical that you stay. Your presence will be documented and the overflow number will be told to commissioners. There will be a room with a monitor for viewing the hearing, and if you plan to give a public comment, you can still do so.

Find support points, email addresses, and details at SaveGuanaNow.org. Click on the “Take Action” tab. We won't get a second chance to save those 74 acres of wildlife habitat from decimation. It's now or never.

SaveGuanaNow.org

ATTEND THE PUBLIC HEARING SEPT. 17. WRITE EMAILS NOW.

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