

Request to reinstate LAMP funding

June 28, 2020

To: the Board of County Commissioners:

Dear Commissioner Blocker,

We are an organization of approximately 2,000 active members, and we join several other county organizations that are deeply concerned about the preservation of our conservation lands, particularly as we see a high rate of growth in our county and no plan to establish green spaces commensurate with that growth. We concur with The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable and St. Johns Audubon Society, which have strongly urged the County Commission to restart and fund the Land Acquisition and Management Program (LAMP), established by Ordinance No. 99-3, in order to be competitive with other counties for matching state land conservation funds.

Residents consistently cite the preservation of green spaces as a top priority for our county. Despite financial stresses on government during the pandemic, the State of Florida has found the means and will to fund its premiere land acquisition program, Florida Forever, at \$100 million for the current fiscal year.

As our friends at SJCCR have pointed out, the County will need to provide matching funds to be able to compete for any Florida Forever funds. LAMP is one of the easiest and best vehicles to compete for land conservation funds in the future. As the richest county in the State, according to the Wall Street Journal, St. Johns County should be able to reinstate LAMP and recognize the leading concern of its residents for effective land conservation.

As you know, one parcel which may potentially be eligible for these funds is the 100 acres of conservation land known as the Outpost. Residents have strongly advocated for it to remain in conservation, and acquisition would protect it in perpetuity. This land would not only provide much needed park land, trails and lake access for thousands of residents, but it would continue to provide animal habitat while protecting an Outstanding Florida Water within a State Aquatic Preserve. Preservation of the Outpost would also provide a critical buffer for the GTM National Estuarine Research Reserve - the only NERR on Florida's east coast.

According to the North Florida Land Trust, the Outpost has an eco-systems services value of \$588,000 per year which reflects how the property cleans our air, improves our water quality and quantity, and prevents flooding - when left in its natural state. Guana Lake is also economically important to the tourism of St. Johns County; kayak/SUP rentals in this portion of the river have doubled this summer vs. one year ago according to North Guana Outpost outfitters. However,

this waterway is prone to the deleterious effects of excess stormwater pollutants which can result from development. Recent water quality data show Guana Lake suffers from impairment due to excessive nutrients and is expected to be officially listed by DEP as impaired in the near future.

The Outpost must be protected from development because of its ecological significance (as stated by nearly every major environmental group in Florida) and for its excellent potential for recreational use.

Establishing the LAMP fund may prove critical to protection of the Outpost as well as the shallow, fragile waters that border it for nearly a mile. LAMP will help protect wildlife habitat and eco-tourism - providing much-needed green space and recreation for our rapidly growing population. LAMP will also help protect the rural nature of St. Johns County which distinguishes it from its neighboring Duval County.

We respectfully request the Commission provide funding for LAMP. Thank you for taking the concerns of Save Guana Now into consideration during your budget discussions.

Sincerely,

Nicole Crosby and Gary Coulliette
Co-founders, Save Guana Now

Members of the Save Guana Now Board: Al Aftoora, Joseph Gill, Sheila Hickson-Curran

www.SaveGuanaNow.org

P.O. Box 2111, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004