



Jekyll Island Environmental Assessment Procedure (EAP):

Report summarizing the findings of the EAP Committee considering the Jekyll Island Foundation's Horton Pond improvement project

Date of EAP Committee meeting: 05/27/2014

EAP Committee members

Ben Carswell, Director of Conservation, JIA (chair, present)
Kimberly Andrews, Research Coordinator, GSTC/JIA (present)
Cliff Gawron, Director of Landscape and Planning, JIA (present)
Terry Norton, Director of the GSTC, JIA (not present due to scheduling conflict)
Tim Keyes, Wildlife Biologist, GADNR, Nongame Conservation Section (present)
Richard Chewning, Education Coordinator, Jekyll Island 4H Center, UGA (present)
Christy Carone, Educator, Jekyll Island resident (not present – out with a cold)

Project under consideration

Improvements to the Horton Pond area to support more responsible visitor use, environmental education, and wildlife habitat.

Summary assessment

Horton Pond is an artificial pond on the north end of Jekyll Island that was first excavated between 1965 and 1972. Its original purpose was most likely a borrow pit from which fill dirt was excavated for road building and development on that end of the island. The pond has since been utilized variously through the years for fishing and wildlife watching. While it has never been maintained primarily as a visitor-use area, it is regularly visited. Unfortunately, irresponsible and illegal activities are also regular at the pond, including littering and wildlife feeding/harassment. The project under consideration was proposed by the JIA Conservation staff for Jekyll Island Foundation fundraising campaign as a way to inspire more positive public use of the site by demonstrating that the area is cared for. The project will include installation of a viewing deck on the edge of the pond for observing wildlife, improvement of parking and traffic management, improvement of trash disposal facilities, installation of a basking platform for alligators and turtles, excavation around a projection of low-lying land in the pond to improve nesting habitat for wading birds, and addition of a 0.7 mile nature trail to be named "Tupelo Trail". The members of the EAP Committee are excited about this project and find it to be compatible with the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan. The project promises substantial improvements to the status quo in providing for responsible visitor use, environmental education accessibility, and enhanced wildlife habitat.



Recommendations

1. Waste management

- Separate raccoon-proof trash and recycling containers are advised. All trash and recycling containers should prevent access by raccoons, feral cats, or other animals. This measure will keep the area cleaner and safer for guests and staff, and eliminate wasted staff-time spent cleaning up trash scattered by animals.

2. Trail construction

- Tupelo Trail should be constructed to an average width of 5 feet, not to exceed 6 feet and should be carefully designed and built to minimize disturbance to vegetation communities.
- Either mulch or dirt surface will be acceptable.

3. Signage

- Ecologically interpretive signage should be included along the trail and by the pond.
- Directive signage and rule-postings will be required to guide traffic (both foot and vehicle) and to inform visitors that feeding/harassing wildlife, fishing, and off-road cycling on Tupelo trail are not allowed.
- A subtle street sign should be installed at the intersection of the access road and Beachview Road identifying Major Horton Road to facilitate giving directions to the pond. A more prominent, attraction sign is not recommended at this time because of limited parking and the need to not overwhelm the site with more visitation than would be sustainable.
- For safety purposes, a stop sign for traffic exiting the access way onto Beachview Road is recommended.

4. Incompatible recreational activities

- Fishing – The consensus among the committee was that fishing in Horton Pond would be incompatible with the low-impact use that we hope to encourage at the pond. Unfortunately, fishing has a tendency to result in unintentional and intentional littering and wildlife disturbance. With limited space on the viewing deck, use for fishing would not be compatible with use for environmental education programs.
- Off-road bicycling – The consensus among the committee was that off-road bicycling on Tupelo Trail would be incompatible with use of the trail by walkers and environmental education groups due to the narrow, tightly meandering trail and limited visibility due to dense undergrowth.

5. Enforcement and code-compliance

- The JIA should coordinate with the Georgia State Patrol and the JIA Code Compliance officer to increase enforcement effort at the site.