



**Jekyll Island Environmental Assessment Procedure (EAP)
Report summarizing the findings of the EAP Committee considering:**

Updates to the exterior of the restaurant facility to be named “Tortuga Jacks”

Date of EAP Committee meeting: 9/16/2014

EAP Committee members

- Ben Carswell, Director of Conservation, JIA (chair, present)
- Kimberly Andrews, Research Coordinator, JIA (present)
- Cliff Gawron, Director of Landscape and Planning, JIA (present)
- Terry Norton, Director of the Georgia Sea Turtle Center, JIA (present)
- Eamonn Leonard, Wildlife Biologist, GADNR Nongame Conservation Section (present)
- Jeff Homans, Landscape Architect, Land Design Associates, St. Simons Island (present)
- Robb VanWie, Restaurant Industry Professional, Blythe Island (present)

Project under consideration

The restaurant formerly operating under the name, “Fins” is expected to be re-opened under the name “Tortuga Jacks” with a new operator, Georgia Stewart. Mr. Stewart has worked with the JIA on proposed modifications to the exterior of the building and adjacent landscape to support the success of the new restaurant. Proposed modifications include the following:

- expansion of the deck to allow for more outdoor dining space
- Management of existing vegetation and new plantings adjacent to the beachside dining room windows to enhance native dune vegetation and improve the foreground aesthetics from the dining space.
- Unspecified modifications to exterior lighting

Assessment

The members of the EAP Committee are excited about this project and believe that it offers substantial opportunities to capitalize on an improved environmental portfolio for the property. The Committee finds this project, as outlined in the design-development drawings submitted to us, to be compatible with the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan contingent upon the following requirements. The EAP Committee stands ready to consult with the project manager(s) and provide technical guidance in regards to any of the requirements or recommendations outlined below.



Requirements

Deck construction

- No heavy equipment or motorized vehicles of any sort may enter the area shoreward of the eastern edge of the existing deck.

Lighting

- Detailed plans for any proposed changes to the exterior lighting at the facility must comply with the [Jekyll Island Beach Lighting Ordinance](#). Plans must be provided in a timely manner for review by the Jekyll Island Authority and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for review and comment before lighting changes can be made.

Waste management

- A wildlife-proof waste management system is a critical measure that will reduce operational costs on Jekyll Island. All trash and recycling containers and dumpsters should prevent access by raccoons, feral cats, or other animals. This measure will keep the property cleaner and safer for guests and staff, and eliminate wasted staff-time spent cleaning up trash scattered by animals. JIA and other property managers on the island have been successful using trash and recycling containers with latching doors and heavy lids. Plans for these containers can be provided upon request. Compactors are advised where possible because they are more secure than dumpsters. The Jekyll Island Convention Center and the Jekyll Island Club Hotel have successfully deterred wildlife from waste disposal areas by using compactors provided and serviced by Waste Management. Most dumpster designs are not completely secure, but at a minimum, a dumpster with a locking lid, and a staff that is well-trained to keep it closed and latched, is a necessity.

Recommendations

Interpretive signage

- The committee recommends that the Mr. Stewart be asked to contribute to the purchase of an interpretive panel highlighting shoreline change processes, plant succession, and types of native dune vegetation to be placed along the bike path north of the restaurant. Mr. Stewart indicated during initial conversations with the JIA staff that he would be willing to mitigate for any plants displaced by the deck expansion. The educational value of the signage recommended here would be a reasonable mitigation request.



Commendations

The planting plan developed by Cliff Gawron was approved of by the EAP Committee and is commended for its use of a representative mosaic of native dune grasses. The committee finds that this project will be an enhancement of existing habitat and is therefore a worthy use of the sweet grass plants that were grown from native stock collected with the gracious permission Little Saint Simons Island. Due to her integral involvement in the collection of seed and experimental growing procedures, it is strongly encouraged that Americorps member, Miranda Miller, be engaged in the planting project. The committee encourages Mr. Gawron to plant any other habitat appropriate native plants he may find compatible and be able to obtain to maximize the species diversity of the site.

Other Comments

Although it is not a matter that is currently being proposed, the committee discussed the possibility that it may later be proposed to prune vegetation, including wax myrtles and pine trees that are growing in the inter-dune area between the restaurant and the shoreline. Such a proposal would not be surprising given the attraction of the ocean view.

The committee strongly recommends against acceptance of any such proposal in the future for the following reasons:

- This area of Jekyll's beach is one of the few locations that have experienced consistent growth, or accretion, in recent years rather than losing land to erosion.
- The natural growth of vegetation in the inter-dune zone supports the integrity of that vegetation. Often, once a few shrubs, vines, or trees are pruned or removed in these areas, the remaining plants can succumb to the stresses of constant salt spray carried by the winds coming of the ocean.
- Inter-dune vegetation should be protected because, along with the dunes themselves, it offers better protection than money can buy against damage from severe storms and hurricanes. For this reason and because of the valuable wildlife habitat it offers, it is recognized as a special protection area in the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan.
- The thick wax-myrtle shrubs along with the growing pine trees provide an effective natural shield, blocking some of the light emanating from the restaurant from potentially reaching the frontal dune or beach. While the facility must still comply completely with the Jekyll Island lighting ordinance as stated above, this natural shield should minimize the possibility of cumulative light from the restaurant reaching the beach or primary dunes.