



Jekyll Island Environmental Assessment Procedure (EAP):

Report summarizing the findings of the EAP Committee considering the 12-acre expansion of the Jekyll Island Campground

Date of EAP meeting: 10/18/2021

EAP participants present:

JIA Staff:

Ben Carswell, Director of Conservation and Sustainability, JIA
Noel Jensen, Deputy Executive Director, JIA
Cliff Gawron, Director of Landscape and Planning, JIA
Yank Moore, Natural Resources Manager, JIA

External Stakeholders:

Becky Kelley, former GADNR Director of State Parks and Historic Sites (retired)
Clark Harrison, Stewardship Trips Director, Georgia Conservancy
Jeffrey Griffith, Jekyll Island Campground user
Chris Jones, Jekyll Island resident

Project under consideration

The Jekyll Island Campground expansion concept has planned for and carried forward over multiple update cycles of the Jekyll Island Master Plan. The initial expansion concept called for a 26-acre expansion to include 135 sites, averaging 5.2 sites per acre. The 2014 Jekyll Island Master Plan limited acreage available to the Campground Expansion to 12 acres. This extent of expansion, expanding the current campground acreage by approximately 50%, was supported by broad stakeholder input during the development of the 2014 Master Plan. This acreage was mapped into the Developed land classification shown on the 2014 Master Plan land use map. Subsequently, through iterative concept development, the conceptual site plan was reduced to 54 camp sites. The density of camp sites within the existing Jekyll Island campground is 7.25/acre and the future site density of the expansion area as proposed for EAP consideration would be 4.5/acre. Additionally, a 3000 square foot campground store, two bathhouses, access roads and new primary entry way, to replace the current entryway, are called for in the expansion concept.



Assessment

The EAP review finds that this project is compatible with the Jekyll Island Conservation Plan and poses no inherent conflicts with Conservation Plan goals and objectives. Even so, it is recognized that the project site has been occupied by maritime forest habitat and that careful attention to design and construction details are called-for to preserve valuable ecological elements, most significantly the tree canopy, within the context of future campground use.

Commendations:

JIA Deputy Executive Director, Noel Jensen, who will be serving as the project manager for the campground expansion indicated to the EAP participants that the JIA plans and intends to adhere to the following:

1. Two compactors will be installed, as collection points for the entire campground, to handle trash and garbage, maximizing efficiency of trash service and minimizing wildlife access to food waste.
2. Pervious paving, either pervious concrete or a TRUEGRID style surface, will be utilized wherever possible outside of arterial roadways and other surfaces that must accommodate regular RV/Camper traffic.
3. Buried infrastructure (power, sewer, etc.) will be routed to campsites along roadways to minimize any additional impacts to tree root systems beyond what will already be required to construct roads and camp sites.
4. Concept development has had a focus on tree protection to emulate positive aspects of the character, experience and ecology of the existing campground while also prioritizing safety.
5. Topsoil associated with root balls from removed trees will be separated and reclaimed for use on the island.

Requirements

The favorable EAP assessment of this project is contingent upon adherence to the following requirements:

Tree Protection

1. Carry out all phases of the project in accordance with the requirements of the Jekyll Island Tree Protection Ordinance including mitigation and use of tree protection (aka tree save) barriers during site clearing and construction, as practicable, to prevent damage to trees to-be saved, including their critical root zones.



2. Maximize efforts throughout the course of the project to retain priority trees in coordination across JIA Departments
3. Any live oak tree in good condition that must be removed shall be mitigated for by replanting live oaks within, or adjacent-to, the campground, provided that appropriate planting locations can be identified.
4. To avoid long term risk of compromising trees within the dog park area, tree health and soil conditions. To help prevent over-use that could degrade tree health, access to the dog park shall be limited to campground guests only. Even so, corrective actions, including soil treatment or restoration and tree mitigation, may be required if it becomes apparent over time that soils or trees are being compromised.

Wildlife proof trash and recycling bins

1. Any exterior trash or recycling bins distributed within the campground must be designed and maintained to prevent access by wildlife, particularly raccoons.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are strongly encouraged and, if implemented, will enhance the project by aligning with Conservation Plan goals and objectives.

Tree Canopy Habitat Preservation

The primary compatible opportunity for sustaining wildlife habitat in the campground area is in maximizing retention of the midstory and overstory canopy. Tree protection efforts should therefore seek to identify, in addition to Heritage trees and live oaks, large shrubs and small to medium sized trees that can also be preserved in the midstory. The species that currently dominates the site, laurel oaks, can present safety concerns in larger specimens due their propensity to develop structural weakness, particularly when stressed. Laurel oaks should therefore be prioritized below other native species. Midstory species and smaller specimens of canopy species that can contribute beneficially to the ecology and aesthetic of the campground expansion may include, holly, rusty staggerbush, sparkleberry, magnolia, and live oak.

1. Make every practicable effort to retain 100% of the Heritage and Historic Live Oaks on site, defined as those exceeding 36 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) and 24 inches dbh respectively, and determined to be in good condition.
2. Make every practicable effort to retain more than 90% of all live oaks in good condition
3. Prioritize retention of mid-story plants and young trees wherever possible



4. Native vines, including Virginia creeper, trumpet creeper, grape species, and poison ivy create ecological diversity and provide bird forage in the midstory and overstory. Vines should not be indiscriminately removed.

Wildfire Safety

1. Saw Palmetto can be highly combustible and therefore is a concern whenever it may be near campfires, grills, vehicles, or other potential sources of ignition.
2. Campground staff and hosts should be trained in appropriate standard operating procedures for rapid response to fire. Fire response boxes or kits, distributed at strategic points around the campground should be considered.

Consider all angles to select the most Jekyll-appropriate novel camping alternative or mix

1. EAP participants broadly agreed that an alternative and novel camping offering, or a mix of alternatives, is a good component of the proposed expansion. However, perspectives differed among the group regarding Yurts and other alternatives.
2. Although yurt camping presents a proven business model with strong demand elsewhere, there are no other known Yurt camping facilities in south Georgia for comparison.
3. Yurt maintenance costs and energy demand associated with the need for constant climate control to keep moisture at bay should be anticipated as should cleaning and upkeep expenses.
4. Some participants were favorable to considering an alternative novel camping experience in addition to, or instead of Yurts. Elevated, screened, open air camping platforms are another proven model with examples in Florida. These could be designed facing into the forest along the eastern edge of the expansion area, with the structure built to foster a sense of privacy and isolation from the rest of the campground. Such a structure could offer a uniquely Jekyll experience, with a canopy level perspective into the maritime forest, no energy demand, and less need for maintenance. This could also further diversify price points and attract a more adventurous, eco-oriented segment of the outdoor recreation market that otherwise might not be enticed by the Jekyll Island Campground.

Resources encountered during site prep and construction

1. All personnel working on site preparation and construction should be informed that appropriate parties with the JIA Conservation and Historic Resources departments should be notified if sensitive wildlife, or historic/prehistoric artifacts or resources are encountered/uncovered during the project. In some circumstances, temporary stoppage of work may be called for while situations/resources are managed and evaluated in a timely fashion.