

Neighborhood Council of St. Augustine

June 26, 2019

Dear Governor DeSantis and Respected Members of the Cabinet,

The Neighborhood Council of St. Augustine is asking for your support for the approval of Florida Forever funding for Fish Island, so that it may be permanently protected and preserved as Florida Conservation Lands. This will come before you at the July 23rd Cabinet meeting.

The Neighborhood Council of St. Augustine is made up of ten Neighborhood Associations representing a cross section of historic neighborhoods in St. Augustine. Preservation and maintaining St Augustine as a livable city for its residents is one of our core missions. Natural preserves such as Fish Island are an important part of livability to our residents.

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation has just named Fish Island as one of the most threatened historic properties in our State, earning it a place on their 2019 "11 to Save" list. Fish Island came very close to being clear-cut and filled last August, when the largest home developer in the country was planning a housing development there. Fortunately, our collective community voice to protect Fish Island was heard, and the owner has generously been working with the North Florida Land Trust to bring it into permanent conservation.

It has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1972 due to its significance to Florida's History. Archeological artifacts dating back 4000 years have been discovered on Fish Island, as well as, important archeological discoveries from the 18th century. Fish Island was the site of a large 18th century commercial orange plantation owned by Jesse Fish, and is believed to represent the very beginnings of Florida's early commercial orange history. It is the site of the plantation life of the enslaved African people who lived and worked on this large plantation and may be home to unmarked burial sites.

Many of our neighborhoods have suffered greatly from flooding during Hurricanes Matthew and Irma, and regularly experience sunny day tidal flooding. St Augustine's storm resilience has become a growing concern among our residents. Fish Island's natural shoreline, established wetlands and upland buffer provide needed protection from winds, storm surge, and flooding, and serve to filter pollutants from our beautiful and still healthy Matanzas River.

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Fish Island is one of the last remaining wildlife habitats of this size within our City limits, and serves to provide needed wildlife corridors and refuge for many animals.

For the many important reasons we have just described, The Neighborhood Council of St Augustine asks that you approve the funding of Fish Island through Florida Forever so that it may be protected and preserved forever as Florida Conservation Lands.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter not only to the residents of St. Augustine, but to the people of Florida who visit here.

Sincerely,

Melinda Rakoncay
President of the Neighborhood Council of St. Augustine

Neighborhood Associations under the Council

- Flagler Model Land Neighborhood Association
- Greater Fullerwood Neighborhood Association
- Lighthouse Park Neighborhood Association
- Lincolnvillle Neighborhood Association
- Nelmar Terrace Neighborhood Association
- Old City South Neighborhood Association
- St.Augustine North Davis Shores (SANDS)
- St.Augustine Ravenswood Neighborhood Association (SARNA)
- St.Augustine Uptown Neighborhood Association (SAUNA)
- Spanish Quarter Neighborhood Association