

RESOLUTION NO. 2008- 176

A RESOLUTION BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA, RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MATANZAS RIVER ESTUARY AS A NATURAL RESOURCE ASSET OF THE COUNTY; REQUESTING THE ST. JOHNS RIVER WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT DESIGNATE THE MATANZAS RIVER ESTUARY HYDROLOGIC BASIN AS A "SPECIAL BASIN" BY ESTABLISHING AND ADOPTING SPECIAL BASIN CRITERIA; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

RECITALS

WHEREAS, it is the policy of the St. Johns Water Management District to regulate and control the management and storage of surface waters throughout the District in accordance with Chapter 373 of the Florida Statutes, and in a manner consistent with the Florida Administrative Code; and

WHEREAS, St. Johns County, Florida ("the County") desires to protect the ecological, biological and economic well-being of the Matanzas River Estuary, one of Florida's greatest natural resources; and

WHEREAS, the Matanzas River Estuary is a relatively undeveloped and natural hydrologic basin system supporting a diversity of native habitats and wildlife of regional, state and national importance; and

WHEREAS, its is estimated that 80-90% of Florida's fish and shellfish species depend on estuaries for part of their lifecycle; and

WHEREAS, the County desires to protect the Matanzas River Estuary Hydrologic Basin to provide for continued habitat, to sustain the plants and wildlife and to sustain the fishing and shrimping industry and ecotourism activities; and

WHEREAS, federal, state and local governments have expended substantial public investment to, among other things, preserve natural resources, promote outdoor recreation, and foster research and educational programs associated with the Matanzas River Estuary Hydrologic Basin; and

WHEREAS, escalating population growth and development, without proper safeguards and water quality standards, could jeopardize the Matanzas River Estuary Hydrologic Basin for the purpose which those public investments were expended; and

WHEREAS, the St. Johns River Water Management District is authorized to establish surface water management standards and criteria for certain designated bodies of water to ensure

the preservation of natural resources, fish and wildlife, and to protect the integrity of the ecology, biology and public investments associated with such designated bodies of water; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the County to ensure the protection and long term benefit of the Matanzas River Estuary Hydrologic Basin for this and future generations; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida, as follows:

Section 1. The above recitals are incorporated by reference into the body of this Resolution and such recitals are adopted as findings of fact.

Section 2. The Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County hereby supports the designation of the Matanzas River Estuary Hydrologic Basin as a "special basin" by the St. Johns River Water Management District for the purpose of establishing and adopting all necessary standards and criteria.

Section 3. The Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County respectfully requests that the St. Johns River Water Management District initiate the rule making process required to designate the Matanzas River Estuary Hydrologic Basin as a "special basin" and to establish and adopt such standards and criteria.

Section 4. The County Administrator, on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners for St. Johns County, shall immediately notify the St. Johns River Management District of this Resolution and shall provide a certified copy of the same to the District.

Section 5. This Resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of County Commissioners of St. Johns County, Florida, this 24th day of June, 2008.



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: _____

Thomas G. Manuel, Chairman

ATTEST: Cheryl Strickland, Clerk of Court

By: Pam Halterman
Deputy Clerk

RENDITION DATE 6/27/08

Effective Date: June 24, 2008

Special Basin Designation for Protection of the Matanzas River Estuary

Executive Summary & Recommendations

Abstract. Early explorers of Florida's east coast described a land rich in fish, shellfish, birdlife, other fauna, and flora – in abundance like nothing they had ever seen before. Now, even centuries later, the Matanzas River south of historic St. Augustine still retains most of its original richness. In recent times, these natural attributes have been protected and enhanced by substantial governmental investments in conservation, outdoor recreation, research, and education. Accelerating population growth and concomitant development, which has already degraded most of Florida's east coast estuaries, now directly threatens the Matanzas River estuary. A "Special Basin Designation" for the Matanzas River basin could better protect this extraordinary and valuable resource and sustain the many public uses in which the state and federal government have invested in.

Attributes. The Matanzas River basin covers nearly 100,000 acres (see map) and is composed primarily of forest and wetland; only 11 percent has been developed for residential, commercial, or transportation uses. The estuary and its surrounding marsh is well supplied with a high quality mixture of fresh- and seawater from natural sources.

The natural attributes of Matanzas River basin are well recognized. Regional, state, and national agencies, as well as private donors, have invested extensively in research and educational programs to improve our understanding of the basin and its importance (\$10 million capital investment since FY 2000, \$1.5 million annual operating budget); and they have acquired land to preserve and protect the many environmental and economic attributes of the area (\$60 million over 18,000 acres, \$2.2 million annual operating budget). These investments are exemplified by the presence of the Guana-Tolomato-Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience (University of Florida), and the Dolphin Conservation Center at Marineland.

The Threat. New development and growth are now poised to compromise not only the natural attributes of the Matanzas River, but also the public and private investments and purposes for which these funds were committed in the area. In particular, St. Johns and Flagler Counties have received initial applications for four major developments covering over 16,000 acres within the basin, with others promised. These will more than double the developed area in the basin. Plans in the applications propose over ten-thousand new residential units and nearly six million square feet of industrial and commercial space. These developments will be sited within the headwaters of Pellicer, Moultrie, and Moses Creeks, which constitute the primary supply of freshwater for the Matanzas River basin.

This threat cannot be minimized; Floridians have, too often, seen pristine water bodies significantly impaired. We all know of lakes, rivers, and wetlands that had high water quality, productive marshes, and diverse species of fish and wildlife, which were substantially altered and degraded by flood and navigational control structures, extensive waterfront development, wetland loss, and development practices that compromised

natural drainage patterns and, therefore, the quality of downstream waters. Too often, government has been unable to react until after the destruction. We have, for example, witnessed belated attempts to restore an ecosystem in the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee, Kissimmee River, the Indian River, and Lake Apopka. In some cases, such damage is irreversible, and in others, the costs of repair are astronomical.

The Fix. The St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) has established, through rules, "Surface Water Management Basin Criteria" that afford "Special Basin Designation," and thus protection, to certain watersheds or drainage basins within its jurisdiction. Moreover, this mechanism has already proven successful in protecting other high-value natural resource basins within the District, such as the upper St. Johns, Wekiva, Ocklawaha, and Tomoka Rivers, Spruce Creek, and Lake Apopka basins. The criteria established within the designated basins insure that development incorporates appropriate controls on water quality and quantity and other environmental measures as may be necessary to protect the integrity of the public investments in the basins and to minimize adverse impacts to the District's water resources. As demonstrated in the already designated watersheds, special basin status can accomplish significant protections for water quality and watershed based resources. It can also add economic value to the watershed by ensuring quality development, often with market values and tax base returns to local government that are higher than otherwise might have occurred.

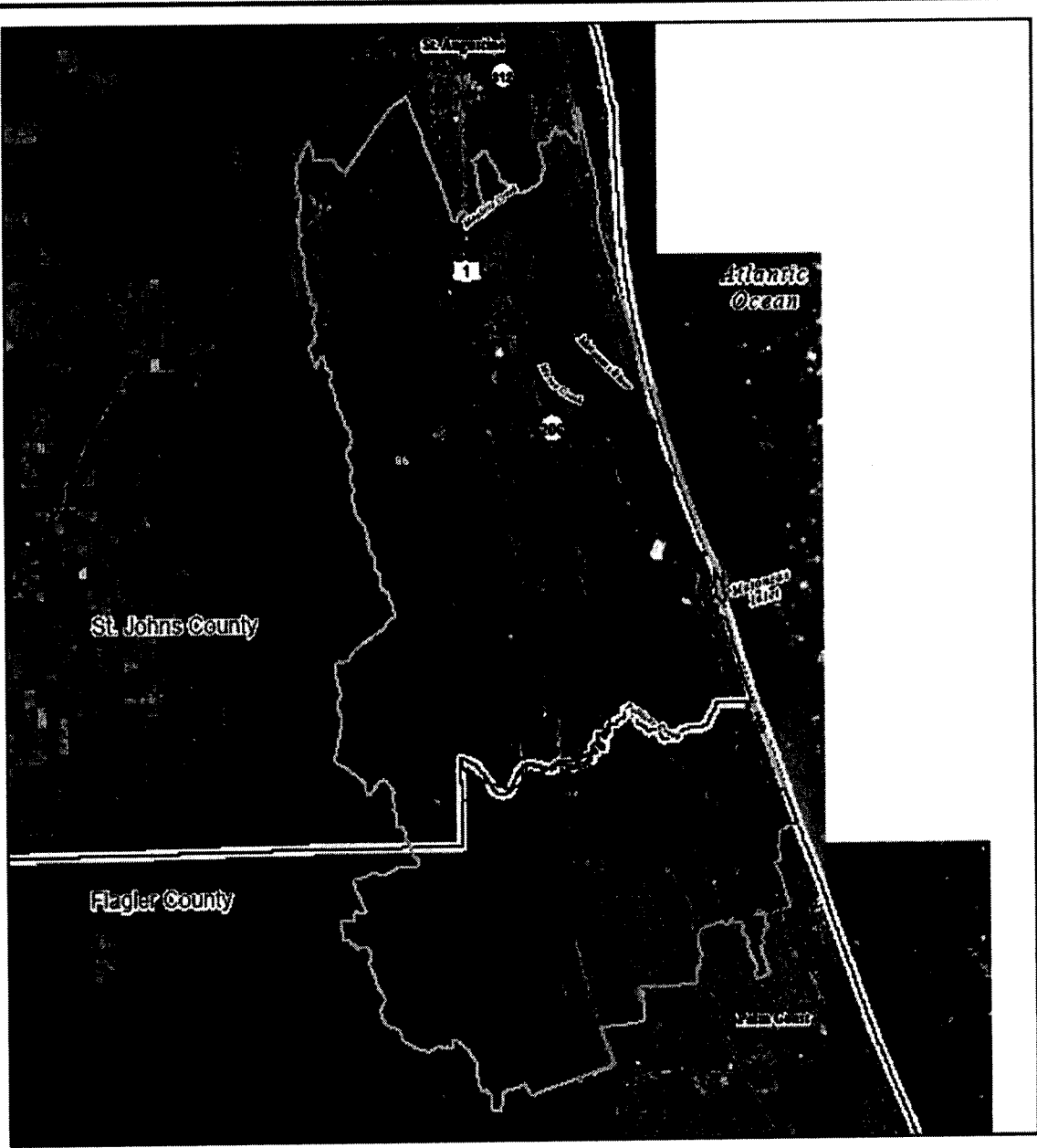
Recommendations. We strongly urge the SJRWMD Governing Board to immediately direct staff to begin rulemaking that would create "Surface Water Management Basin Criteria" for the Matanzas River estuary and its drainage basin. We recommend further that, as rulemaking progresses, the District consider the results and recommendations set out in this white paper as the basis for setting new, higher standards for addressing stormwater quantity, capture and treatment; water recharge and storage; sediment erosion and control; water quality; riparian habitat protection zones; and local government notification. The basin criteria should include implementation of low impact development standards, wetland/ conservation banking, wetland/ conservation restoration projects, and land acquisition and management of natural areas.

We have a unique, narrow window of opportunity here – prior to major development approvals and permits – through which "special basin designation" may aid to avoid the degradation of the Matanzas River basin.

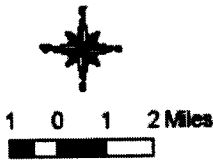
Here is where we must raise the bar and set standards that will ensure a sustainable future for this valuable resource. We must avoid impacts, not mitigate them. This is where we must get it right, as history will judge us harshly for having failed to learn the lessons taught by places already lost.





If you would like to receive a complete copy of the Matanzas River Special Basin white paper and support this proposal before the SJRWMD please contact:

Paul G. Johnson (850) 926-7439; PaulJ488@aol.com



Matanzas Special Basin Project



-  GTMERR Boundary
-  Project Boundary
-  County Boundary
-  Northern Coastal Basin

The St. Johns River Water Management District prepares and uses this information for its own purposes and this information may not be suitable for other purposes. This information is provided as is. Further documentation of this data can be obtained by contacting St. Johns River Water Management District, Geographic Information Systems, Program Manager, P.O. Box 1428, 4800 Road Street Palatka, Florida 32970-1428 Tel: (205) 338-4176.