

CENTER FOR A SUSTAINABLE COAST

Recommended guidance re. Jekyll Island Capacity Study

May 1, 2018

Emailed to consultants, Sand Hill Studios

PUBLIC/ VISITOR OPINION

In the interest of developing a more robust and reliable base of information for guiding the study, we strongly believe that interview results should be posted as early as possible after they are produced. Making these results promptly available to the public will help reduce any bias caused by having fewer responses provided in the original set of informal interviews. Additional comments on the same topics discussed in the interviews will ensure a more representative array of viewpoints. To get the maximum benefit from a more robust range of opinions, the study must gather such information early in the sequence of proposed actions.

SERVING THE FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE JEKYLL ISLAND AUTHORITY (JIA)

While we recognize the imperative of ensuring that the state park is financially solvent, applicable obligations must be precisely understood. Based on our understanding of Georgia law, JIA is only required to produce revenues sufficient to cover maintenance and operating costs, not capital costs, as demonstrated by the state's providing more than 65 million taxpayer dollars for capital improvements on Jekyll Island over the past 10 years. Capital-cost burdens accepted by JIA are discretionary, and have primarily occurred when state funding was not made available quickly enough to satisfy the planning preferences of the JIA board. It would be a profound mistake to apply an incorrect, inflated figure for revenues needed, which could compromise capacity study objectives.

INTEGRATING CAPACITY STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS WITH JIA MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

In past efforts, including the master plan and conservation plan, the effectiveness of applying related findings and recommendations into JIA's decision-making processes has been disappointing. Due to a lack of procedural precision and vague language in these plans, subsequent outcomes have not been consistent with relevant objectives. We strongly advise that the capacity study include specific recommendations about methods to be used to apply "metrics" by JIA to serve stated objectives. Clearly, such recommendations would have fundamental implications for future amendments and updates in these other guiding documents – as well as for the processes under which they are produced.

RECOGNIZING THE REVENUE VALUE OF FEATURES, RESOURCES, AND FACILITIES

Due to conventional methods of bookkeeping, Jekyll income-generating contributions of activities such as biking, birdwatching, and nature photography are not taken into account by JIA. As you may know, according to some studies, average daily revenues generated by birdwatchers have been found to be greater than those of golfers – with far lower costs for providing resources of interest to birding enthusiasts. [See http://www.responsibletravel.org/resources/documents/birdstudyreport_71615.pdf .] For the capacity study to be most effective, these overlooked and undervalued activities must be thoroughly, credibly documented. In developing capacity "metrics," we advise the consultants to carefully track the benefits of various island resources that are intrinsic to activities of significant value to visitors. Costs of maintaining, conserving, and expanding or upgrading these resources could be justified by such documentation.