



# Conserve Nassau

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1417 Sadler Road, #187, Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

March 19, 2024

Ramesh Buch, Director of Conservation Acquisition  
North Florida Land Trust  
843 W. Monroe Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Dear Ramesh,

As stated in the March 4 Acquisition and Restoration Council Public Hearing, Conserve Nassau enthusiastically supports Nassau County's application to the Florida Forever Program for the Atlantic to Okefenokee Conservation Corridor (A2O), a new corridor along the St. Marys River in the northern part of Nassau County.

Conserve Nassau ([ConserveNassau.org](http://ConserveNassau.org)) is a relatively new nonprofit, but most of those involved have been working on conservation in this community for many years. We are concerned with sustainability and resilience. Our scope is quite broad in an effort to emphasize the interdependence of all aspects of our environment and our lives.

The A2O corridor connecting our shoreline and riverine habitats to core interior natural areas is critically important for many reasons—to protect water quality and the extensive wetlands in our county, to maintain native habitat and ecological viability, to provide ecological sustainability and resilience and to constitute a major step in building sustainability and resilience for our human population. Our migratory bird population and all species are being developed out of their habitat.

Of course, the Okefenokee is a national treasure that we all want to maintain in its natural state, and the St. Marys River is one of the few rivers that maintain much of their native viewshed and health, clearly a treasure to be maintained and an excellent core for a major wildlife corridor. Nassau County staff have been collaborating with Georgia staff, who have been enthusiastic about the effort to conserve corridors on both sides of the St. Marys River, the potential for a far more extensive corridor.

The ecological benefits of the A2O extend much farther than we might notice on a map. In addition to the St. Marys and the habitat within this corridor, this corridor has the potential to literally determine the future of a number of ecologically sensitive and important areas, as well as adjacent parks and lands:

- Cumberland Island National Seashore
- Ft. Clinch State Park Aquatic Preserve
- The Amelia River marshes
- The Nassau River-St. Johns River Marshes Aquatic Preserve
- Egans Creek Greenway



In the process, the future of the human and non-human inhabitants of these areas will also be determined.

In recent years, North Florida Land Trust has collaborated with the military to ensure buffers around bases that protect our national security. This corridor will greatly contribute to the security of the US Navy Submarine Base at King Bay by ensuring that the base retains its buffer, which also provides protection for the public.

One of our recent initiatives that may be of interest to those considering this corridor is a multi-year project to develop a Field Guide to Nassau County. We have taken this on because of the limitations in the existing data regarding the flora and fauna in Nassau County. This data is critical to decision-making on land use, critical canopy, policy, preserving diversity and protecting unique habitats. This project is being led by wildlife biologist Dr. Elise Pearlstine, who has worked on large scale patterns of biodiversity through projects that identified plant communities to predict wildlife diversity. The Field Guide could enable the A2O to become a popular birding and passive recreation area.

Because of the current rapid development of Nassau County and South Georgia, it is urgent that we conserve these lands now. We therefore encourage the state to add this important corridor to its Florida Forever List. **It's now or never.**

Sincerely,

Margaret Kirkland, Leonard Pearlstine, Elise Pearlstine, Cheryl Witt, Joyce Tuten, Wendelle Burdick, Frank Hopf, Lauree Hemke and Tammi Kosack

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