

Issue Forum

Ecotourism in Northeast Florida

This forum examined the balance of education, preservation and generating revenue while enjoying ecotourism. It explored the role of the public and private partners involved and examined the effects of ecotourism on our community.

Key Findings:

- Many opportunities exist to enjoy Northeast Florida ecotourism and explore local natural resources.
- Both local residents and visitors lack of awareness of ecotourism activities available in Northeast Florida. As a result, many undervalue local natural resources.
- The City of Jacksonville's Preservation Project has shifted focus from acquiring land to creating access to the existing properties. Each acquisition is open, to some extent, to the public. The property's natural resources and the surrounding community's needs are being evaluated to produce an access and passive recreation plan for each property.
- Many difficulties surround balancing the urban interface and visitation of natural resources with the protection of those resources.
- Although partnerships are developing between the public partners from the local, state and federal park systems, Northeast Florida lacks a comprehensive, regional strategic plan to address the needs of ecotourism.

Action Plan:

The committee decided to send a letter of request to the public and private partners to consider funding and participating in the development of a comprehensive, regional strategic plan to address the needs of ecotourism in Northeast Florida. The recipients of the letter of request will include the City of Jacksonville's Mayor's Office, the City of Jacksonville's Parks and Recreation Department, the City Council of Jacksonville, the Federal Park Service, the State Park Service, Department of Environmental Protection, and the Jacksonville and Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The committee also committed to "get out there" and enjoy the natural resources in Northeast Florida. The committee pledged to spread the word of the opportunities available and the value of participating in ecotourism activities.

Resource Speakers:

Lucy Cortese, Tree Hill
Diane Dyal, Untamed Adventures
Barbara Goodman, Timucuan National Park
Ray Hetchka, Kayak Amelia
Amy Hay Holliman, Girls Scouts
Bob Joseph, Talbot Islands State Park
Elizabeth Kohler, City of Jacksonville Preservation Project
Wayne Lash, Audubon Society

Mark Middlebrook, The Middlebrook Company
Steven Miller, St. Johns River Water Management District
Kitty Ratcliffe, Jacksonville & Beaches CVB Representative
Dave Roman, City of Jacksonville
Lesley Royce, Audubon Society
Howard Solomon, Outdoor Adventures
Leslie Wheeler, North Florida Trail Blazers

Number of participants: 31