



## Fast Facts

Jekyll Island State Park is legally required to generate income to support all park operations, so income generated by visitation is a primary concern.

There is a master plan for the island but it lacks details and there is insufficient public involvement in the planning process.

Private developers of hotels and other businesses on Jekyll Island pay relatively low lease fees compared with developers of facilities located in national parks.

Visitors to Jekyll Island place high priority on the state park's tranquility and environmental appeal, so the public is very sensitive about development choices.

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# Responsibly Manage Jekyll Island

## What's at Stake?

Jekyll Island State Park boasts wide, flat beaches on its eastern shore and is one of only four Georgia barrier islands easily accessed by car. Yet the island has suffered from a pattern of declining amenities, most notably the privately built and managed hotels resulting in suppressed park visitation and reduced revenues of the Jekyll Island Authority (JIA), the state agency responsible for managing the park and for ensuring its financial self-sustainability.

## Challenges

To counter this trend, JIA has launched a park revitalization effort. Unfortunately, in its master planning, the authority has not consulted with experts in public land planning and resource management before moving forward with park redevelopment. Instead, JIA forged ahead without determining the reasons for the decline in privately operated amenities; without establishing development objectives for revamping the park; and, most importantly, without adequate consideration of the impacts of development on the park's traditional character and natural assets.

Lost upon JIA is that effective public land planning must be an open and collaborative process built upon a comprehensive evaluation of all relevant conditions and trends. From this open process comes a clear statement of mission and goals of management, a draft plan that meets criteria for sustainable land management, clear statements of management options for achieving them, guidelines to govern implementation of the management plan; and strategies for on-going evaluation and monitoring.

JIA's neglect of established public land planning principles is jeopardizing the future of "the people's park." Steps must be taken to secure optimum park stewardship by JIA.

The political appointees who manage Jekyll Island exercise their authority with little accountability to state legislators or the general public. This insularity invites the risk of both ineffectiveness and conflicts of interests which threaten the public interest.

Adopting a coherent, accountable, and transparent process for park management is likely to be perceived as a threat by those who now control decisions. Politically connected private entities with a vested interest in Jekyll's redevelopment can also be expected to resist new requirements.

## Next Steps

- Establish an independent blue ribbon panel that provides expertise the Jekyll Island Legislative Oversight Committee currently lacks. The panel would consist of specialists in public land planning and resource management, hospitality, public finance, recreation, tourism, coastal ecology, and sustainable development.
- Charge the panel with three tasks:
  1. Evaluate JIA's revitalization plan, including its methodology, assumptions, goals, and forecast of the long-term impacts of development on Jekyll Island
  2. Formulate an adaptive management program that would include measurable objectives, performance standards, and annual monitoring and assessment of the revitalization effort and park stewardship by JIA.
  3. Recommend legislation that would help ensure Jekyll's revitalization while meeting public accessibility and affordability objectives.
- Build a coalition to promote the panel's findings and recommendations.