



The mission of the Florida Native Plant Society is to promote the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

May 18, 2016

Mayor Gregory J. Oravec
City of Port St. Lucie
121 Southwest Port St. Lucie Blvd.
Port St. Lucie, FL 34984-5099

Subject: Impacts to Conservation Lands Resulting From Crosstown Parkway Extension

Dear Mayor Oravec:

The Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) has long been an advocate for the conservation of lands that have significant natural resource values. The protection of such lands advances our mission to conserve native plants while also providing places where Floridians and visitors alike can experience nature and enjoy a respite from the hustle and bustle of the “real” world. We place an especially high value on the continued protection of such lands after the public has invested in conserving them. As such, we are greatly disturbed by the City of Port St. Lucie’s plan to build a bridge across the North Fork of the St. Lucie River without doing everything possible to avoid impacts to publicly owned conservation land.

It has been well documented in the assessment of alternative routes for the Crosstown Parkway Extension that your preferred alternative (Alternative 1C) is the one that will produce the most extensive environmental impacts to conservation land. While we do not dispute your responsibility to address a pressing transportation need within your community, we believe the protection of important natural areas and recreational green spaces is just as fundamental to meeting the quality-of-life needs of your residents. The portions of the Savannas Preserve State Park and North Fork of the St. Lucie River Aquatic Preserve that would be affected by the City’s preferred alternative support an amazing diversity of habitats and native species. The area’s status as an island-of-green within a highly urbanized landscape only increases the emphasis that should be placed on avoiding any impacts that would degrade it. The Halpatiokee Trail is a recreational gem that will only increase in value over time, provided you recognize its value and protect it judiciously. The choice of Alternative 1C does not reflect such recognition.

Publicly owned natural areas are increasingly viewed as the “path of least resistance” when local governments must address infrastructure needs. That is why FNPS is so disturbed by this project and stands in support of those individuals and organizations that have mounted legal challenges against it. Florida’s explosive growth rate and attractiveness to new residents make it more important than ever that our investments in natural resource conservation be protected rather than eroded.

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Obviously, we are late entering this debate, although local members from our Cocoplum (Martin County) and Lakela's Mint (St. Lucie County) Chapters have been vocal opponents of this project. We hope the challengers prevail; and in the event of that outcome, we hope the City will be open to viewing both environmental protection and transportation planning as compelling and important public responsibilities, rather than as competing interests or mutually exclusive outcomes. Thank you for considering our comments.

Respectfully,



Anne C. Cox, PhD, President
Florida Native Plant Society

cc: Governor Rick Scott
Secretary Jonathan Steverson, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Councilwoman Linda Bartz
Councilwoman Michelle Lee Burger
Councilwoman Shannon M. Martin
Councilman Ron Brown
Jim Bremer, City Manager, City of Port St. Lucie
David Clark, Office of Cabinet Affairs, Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Gary Clark, Deputy Secretary FDEP & Chair of the Acquisition and Restoration Council
Hank Vinson, Staff Director FDEP and Liaison for Acquisition and Restoration Council
Anthony Waterhouse, South Florida Water Management District
Alisa Zarbo, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Darayl Tompkins, United States Coast Guard
Shari Anker, President, Conservation Alliance of St. Lucie County
Joan Bausch, Martin County (Cocoplum) Chapter of FNPS
Diane Goldberg, St. Lucie County (Lakela's Mint) Chapter of FNPS