

# Scenic Watch



Covering  
July  
2020  
News

"A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make Jacksonville's riverfront parks great"



Photo: Scenic Jacksonville

"Great cities have iconic riverfront parks that connect people to their waterways.

In Jacksonville, we are fortunate to have one of our nation's great rivers, the St. Johns, flowing through the heart of our city, while also having an expansive blank slate of publicly owned land along the river in Downtown.



## Events

Our coverage will resume when Florida's travel calendar is available and more events are listed.

As a result, a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity is before us.

We have the chance to transform a significant portion of this riverfront property into a signature network of public green spaces and iconic parks that prioritizes public access, connects the community to the river, creates a more resilient Downtown, and provides a catalyst to surrounding economic development.

Other mid-size cities like St. Petersburg, Tampa, Chattanooga, Detroit, Louisville, and Nashville have successfully capitalized on this approach, resulting in vibrant riverfronts and reinvigorated downtowns. Why not Jacksonville, too? A truly remarkable park system along our river would transform our city.

Riverfront Parks Now consists of representatives from various nonprofit organizations including **Scenic Jacksonville**, the **Late Bloomers Garden Club**, **The Garden Club of Jacksonville**, **Greenscape** and **St. Johns Riverkeeper**.

We envision a well-designed connected river park system that would not only give the public easy access to the river, it could be Jacksonville's defining centerpiece. Most of the land already belongs to the city, which eliminates the significant cost of buying riverfront property from a private landowner. A well-designed system of parks and green spaces also offers unparalleled economic opportunities for our Downtown. We know from numerous economic studies that urban parks and greenways are proven economic drivers that increase adjacent property values and spur surrounding development.

The current advent of COVID-19 also reminds us of how important it is to offer equitable and high-quality public spaces for all citizens to enjoy and be able to social distance in a safe way. In addition, such a park system could create a more resilient riverfront, serving as a buffer that helps protect



downtown from future storms and flooding.

Imagine extensive public green spaces, shade trees, gardens and various recreational activities all along the Downtown riverfront, including an 'iconic' destination park. Jacksonville's residents and visitors alike would enjoy paths and trails, playgrounds, wading pools, outfitters, and cafes.

Transforming Bay Street into a tree-lined promenade would connect historic Downtown to the entertainment district around the Stadium District. A unified design for the riverfront would also complement and incorporate Groundwork Jacksonville's exciting plans for restoring McCoys and Hogans Creeks and creating the Emerald Trail with 33-miles of biking/walking paths. This integrated network of parks and green spaces would significantly enhance public access to our river, while also connecting the Southbank and surrounding neighborhoods to Downtown.

Studies have estimated that the return on investment for great parks can be as high as 40 to 1 in economic impact, with an increase in surrounding property values as much as 49 percent. Just think of the economic impact created by Chicago's Grant Park, New York's Central Park, or the Boston Commons...

The time is right. The time is now."

-- Riverfront now, Palm Beach Post

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"Wide open places in Central Florida where you can catch your breath this summer"



Photo: Ashley Belanger

"I can see for miles.

The key to making it through the summer might be the opposite of past years (our usual annual advice: Park yourself in front of the strongest air conditioning and don't move). In fact, we think taking in some fresh air, sunshine and greenery - in a space so big you'll be free to move while staying safely distanced - might be the best way to get a moment of mental respite during this deeply messed-up 2020 summer.

#### Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area

...It's off the beaten path, but its many trails offer a rare solitude typically encountered exclusively in apocalyptic storybooks and doomsday movies. Once inside, enjoy hiking the rugged Florida landscapes - quaint ponds, open fields of wildflowers and canopies of hanging moss - populated in the early morning hours by wild turkeys, boar, deer and more birds than Audubon Park documents on its street signs. Butterflies flock here, too; the Palamedes Swallowtail, Gulf Fritillary, Silver-spotted Skipper and Northern Cloudwing are just some of the species commonly seen in summer.

#### Orlando Wetlands Park

The 1,650-acre property in east Orange County used to be a cattle pasture...The biodiversity of the wetlands makes it a boon for animals as well as visitors - more than 220 bird species live in the park, and 19 endangered or threatened species thrive there as well: 12 birds, three reptiles, two mammals and two insects.

#### Split Oak Forest Wildlife and Environmental Area

The county line between Orange and Osceola runs right through this park, untouched in centuries by Central Florida's rampant development...The mostly flat terrain of pine woods and scrub hammocks is home to threatened gopher tortoises, scrub jays, sandhill cranes, Sherman's fox squirrels, gopher frogs, white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, indigo snakes, bald eagles, and feral hogs..."

-- Orlando Weekly Staff

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## "10 scenic drives around Tampa Bay to take while self-isolating"



Photo: 10 Tampa Bay, Getty/istock

"In the age of social distancing and isolating, we must avoid other people and places that could increase the spread of coronavirus."

But, that doesn't mean we can't go outside and enjoy some of the beautiful parts of Florida. Your own car (cleaned, by the way) can become a safe, isolated way to give you some new views besides your television.

Lucky for us, living in Florida, the state has dozens of scenic drives and designated highways to get your dose of nature but keep you away from people."

-- Chelsea Tatham, 10 Tampa Bay

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## "The Perfect Family Road Trip along Florida's 30A"



Photo: Emily Krause

"Along the Florida Panhandle between Panama City and Destin runs a scenic highway called 30A. This small strip of land has become somewhat famous in the last few years thanks to the 16 beautiful beach neighborhoods of South Walton... Whether you decide to stay and play for a week or you're only passing through, South Walton is definitely worth a stop."

-- Emily Krause, Travel Pulse

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"H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act (formerly the INVEST in America Act) passes the House"



"H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act (formerly the INVEST in America Act) passes the House"

On July 1, at 5:23 p.m., H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act, passed the House by a vote of 233-188 - a moment that marked a huge victory for Scenic America and all those who care about our nation's scenic resources.

It's hard to overstate the importance of the Moving Forward Act when it comes to our country's scenic beauty. This bill includes funding for more than \$1.5 trillion in infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, schools, housing, and transit systems, over the next five years.

Over the month of June, Scenic America and our supporters all worked tirelessly during the bill's review and amendment period to ensure that scenic priorities were included - and bad billboard amendments were defeated.

Federal bills like this often run to over 2,000 pages, and the process of adding amendments to them is usually long and complex.

But the Moving Forward Act includes 3 major wins for scenic beauty:

#### Funding for Scenic Byways

H.R. 2 authorizes funding for the National Scenic Byways Program for the first time in 8 years, a total of \$325 million over 5 years. That funding breaks down as follows: \$55 million in Fiscal Year (FY)

2021, \$60 million in FY22, \$65 million in FY23, \$70 million in FY24, and \$75 million in FY25.

During a House Session on June 18, members of both parties shared personal stories of cherished byways and scenic areas in their home districts. Click to see a statement by Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY), Highways and Transit Subcommittee Ranking Member Rodney Davis (R-IL), and several other supporters, about the importance of the program.

The Scenic Byways Program hadn't been accepting nominations for 10 years before the 2019 passage of the 2019 Reviving America's Scenic Byways Act, something we only achieved as a result of activating our allies in the Scenic Byways Coalition.

#### Undergrounding of Utility Wires

Undergrounding also made enormous progress under this bill as well, through the \$25 billion per year National Highway Performance Program.

Scenic America was able to get the following language in the bill as an acceptable use of the funds: "Undergrounding public utilities in the course of other infrastructure improvements eligible under this section to mitigate the cost of recurring damages from extreme weather events, wildfire or other natural disasters."

In addition, a Dig Once Task Force was created to encourage undergrounding of broadband, and Scenic America advocated for the placement of "one representative from a public interest organization" to that Task Force.

#### NO Billboard Amendments

A last-minute dramatic turn was the end-of-day, right-before-the-weekend introduction of Amendment 316, which would have changed the current safety requirements in the Highway Beautification Act. The change would allow a billboard to be anywhere "within 200 feet of a



highway” including in the highway median or 2 feet off the highway.

This proposed amendment was a direct attack by the billboard industry on the legacy of Lady Bird Johnson’s Highway Beautification Act, but Scenic America and our supporters mobilized right away and was able to defeat the amendment. The House Rules Committee rejected it definitively, which means that we beat the billboard industry in a straight-up legislative fist fight in Congress.

### Next Steps

What happens now? The Senate has their own bill, S. 2302, so they won’t take up H.R. 2. They will continue to work on S. 2302 and once they pass it, these two bills will go to a conference committee.

S. 2302 has two wins for us—it includes funding for gateway communities and encourages native plants as part of the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) and it includes no pro-billboard measures.

The Senate will act on their own legislation either later on in 2020 or early in 2021. If there is a change in party in the Senate, then the process in the Senate may start over, but this is a must-pass bill, so eventually it will have to pass. We will keep you informed about further actions.

### A Huge Collective Effort

These are huge victories, and we didn’t do it alone.

We would like to thank the following people for their help in adding funding for Scenic Byways into H.R. 2: Reps. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY), Rodney Davis (R-IL), and Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX), for their outstanding bipartisan leadership. Furthermore, we would specifically like to thank Reps. Garret Graves (R-LA), Dina Titus (D-NV), Randy Weber (R-TX), and Albio Sires (D-NJ) for speaking in favor of the Byways funding and for their continued support. We also want to thank Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) for

speaking in support of Byways funding and highlighting the great value Scenic Byways bring to our nation.

We want to thank every Scenic America supporter who contacted their legislators, forwarded an email, or spread the word about this piece of legislation. Without your support and efforts, we would not be here today. There is more that we need to do together, but this is a terrific start."

-- Mark Falzone, Scenic America

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