

A stunning investment in Jacksonville's riverfront parks was forwarded last week by Mayor Lenny Curry's Downtown Working Group which recommends the city spend more than \$104 million to revitalize Downtown, including a boost to riverfront parks. The group of CEOs and business leaders voted 5-0 on March 30 to adopt a list that includes [\\$70 million for riverfront public spaces](#).

Those riverfront public spaces would, hopefully, feature a wide variety of native plants. IXIA has recently partnered with the two primary public advocacy groups promoting a "green" Jacksonville Riverfront – [Riverfront Parks Now](#) and [Resilient Jax](#) – and I look forward to our group's expertise informing these efforts.

The Downtown Working Group's vision is not binding, but as local business leaders, they can have tremendous influence in not only setting community priorities, but funding them, and as political leaders are led around by the nose by money, this seems wildly promising.

Chapter President Cate Hurlbut came across interesting research stating Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*) is [NOT native to Florida](#).

The Great Florida Riverway is a vast 217-mile system of rivers and springs that flows north from Lake Apopka to the Lower St. Johns River estuary ending at the Atlantic Ocean. The riverway supports many diverse river communities and ecosystems – including more than 50 freshwater springs, forested wetlands in the Ocala National Forest and the flowing waters of the 100-mile St. Johns River estuary.

[Breaching the Rodman/Kirkpatrick dam](#) is crucial to restoring the natural flow of the impounded Ocklawaha River and setting the Great Florida Riverway free. The potential impact this could have on returning a greater diversity of native plants, trees and wildlife to thousands of acres may be the most exciting conservation opportunity in Florida. Learn more about the Great Florida Riverway by watching this screening of a recent documentary on the project [followed by a Q&A hosted by FNPS](#) at 7 PM on April 7 via the Florida Native Plant Society YouTube Channel.

Competing bills are working through the state legislature to scale back the [M-CORES/Roads to Ruin](#) toll roads project. While one version would curtail the project, another version would end it all together. You can tell your local representatives to support that legislation [here](#).

Jeff VanderMeer is a *New York Times* best-selling author from Tallahassee who is also rewilding his yard with native plants and trees and sharing the journey on Twitter. He joined me on [this week's episode of my "Welcome to Florida" podcast](#) where we talked about his passion for native plants and conservation.