

Opposition to the Commercial Spaceport/Shiloh Project

This letter is written by and on behalf of the following concerned organizations, businesses and citizens: _____, _____, _____, etc

We hereby voice our collective opposition to efforts by Space Florida, SpaceX and various private enterprises to turn the Shiloh Tract into a commercial spaceport. At its proposed location this project is ill-conceived, reckless, and risks total devastation of an already endangered estuarine environment. It clearly places private profit above the public's welfare. In the long term, it will convert the City of Titusville from an eco-minded, tourist and sportsman destination into just another blighted industrial city. Whatever public benefits the project may promise are vastly outweighed by its environmental and economic detriments.

There are a multitude of reasons for not pursuing this project at this location. At another, less environmentally sensitive location, the project might indeed make sense. However, the Shiloh Tract is simply the wrong place for such an endeavor. The following are but a few factors that make this the wrong project for this location.

/1. In a world of diminishing natural resources and a strong focus on minimizing damage to our resources, it makes no sense to risk destruction of a pristine wilderness in an environmentally sensitive area known to house several unique species. There are presently 20 State and Federally listed threatened or endangered animals (such as the scrub Jay, Eastern indigo snake, Curtiss Milkweed) on the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. There are an additional 41 animal species designated as species of "Special Concern" by State or Federal agencies. There are 31 plant species listed by the State as threatened, endangered, or commercially exploited. We have to ask the question whether it is a wise decision to put an industry that uses highly toxic compounds and volatile liquids in such a precarious environment.

/2. This area is considered the Redfish capital of the world. It is an enormous economic asset to the City of Titusville and to the area in general. Any diminution of access or closure will adversely affect a multitude of users including birders, duck hunters, fishermen, kayakers, professional fishing guides, eco-tour kayaking companies and crabbers. What happens to the local economy when these groups no longer come?

/3. The Indian River Lagoon is a diverse and sensitive shallow-water estuary. According to the St. John's Water Management District, the lagoon is an important commercial and recreational fishery. It is an economic resource with a total estimated annual value of \$3.7 billion, supporting 14,000 jobs and providing recreational opportunities for nearly 11 million people every year.

<http://floridaswater.com/itsyourlagoon>

/4. In the past few years the area has experienced several hard freezes and a series of algae super-blooms. By the end of 2011, approximately 32,000 acres of sea grasses were gone, a loss of about 44%.

The lagoon is under duress and this has resulted in fish kills and a multitude of pelican and manatee deaths. The additional stress of such a massive development will further attack the stability and sustainability of this area. Our state government should be focused on repairing not destroying more habitat. **To date we have not seen any environmental study for this project.**

/5. The use of the Shiloh Tract on MINWR would violate the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 by preventing, or limiting access to the northern area of MINWR. Thus far, there has been no plan presented for access by the public through the Shiloh Tract, or to several boat ramps nearby. No plan has been presented to prevent further restrictions on fishing areas in both the Indian River and Mosquito lagoon. How sad it will be if the public loses access to a vibrant recreational resource for the benefit of a private corporation.

<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/planning/downloads/NWRSystemImprovementact.pdf>

/6. The proposed SpaceX site will split the MINWR into a north and south area. This will certainly affect The biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the refuge. (This is a direct violation of the MINWR System Improvement Act of 1997)

/7. On March 14, 2013, a Florida Senate bill analysis and fiscal impact statement was released by the Revenue Estimating Conference. They met on HB 135 (which is identical to what is now proposed) and concluded that giving the proposed tax breaks to SpaceX, or other commercial space companies, would create a negative recurring fiscal impact of \$100,000 on the General Revenue Fund. In a period of sequestration and budgetary restraints, it is folly to spend tax dollars and to suffer additional loss of annual tax revenue to the state of Florida to benefit a corporate entity. This is especially disturbing when the end result of the financial sacrifice is to place infrastructure into a critically important wildlife refuge.

/8. There already exists viable and less destructive alternatives to the Shiloh Tract for a commercial spaceport. Patrick Air Force Base and existent NASA lands already provide the roads and lands that can be used for such a project. In 2007, Reynolds, Smith & Hills, Inc. was tasked to evaluate the potential available launch sites for a combined two-user launch pad. In this study the Shiloh Tract was known as Area J. The study deemed area J as a "**fail**." As a result, Reynolds, Smith & Hill did not pursue any additional research to validate area J for use as a commercial spaceport. Instead, RS&H identified two other well suited areas within the Kennedy Space center.

So why is there such an interest in the area deemed as not suitable as a launch site? SpaceX founder Elon Musk stated his perspective to the Texas House Appropriations Committee on March 8th, 2013. He said that the Lone Star state is now the front-runner because he and his company seek a site for operating a *more-bureaucratic-free* facility for launching commercial rockets into orbit. Make no mistake, what SpaceX wants is public dollars but at the same time freedom from governmental restraints. What can we expect for our sensitive environmental resources from organizations with such a stated attitude?

/8. SpaceX has admitted it would only bring to the area a total of 80 new jobs. How many jobs will be lost when the Indian River Lagoon and Mosquito lie in ruins? How many fishing guides, tourist-and-sportsmen-dependant businesses and job-holders will be lost in the wake?

We, the collective organizations, businesses and citizens writing this letter, ask that you abandon all efforts to locate any commercial spaceport at the Shiloh location. Begin by making available to the public a comprehensive environmental impact assessment for this project. Follow that with full financial disclosure of the economic costs of this development. Provide to the public at least 30 days advance notice of the dates, times and locations of any meetings related to this project. We are convinced that such a thorough and detailed consideration of this project cannot help but end with its defeat.

This is a case where years from now we cannot un-ring the bell. Once the Indian River Lagoon and Mosquito Lagoon lie in ruins, all that will remain is a post mortem and recriminations. The truth is that this project can be sited in a less sensitive area without the loss of whatever dubious economic advantages it promises. The only reason it is proposed for Shiloh is the desire of a private company to avoid governmental restraint. That seems to us to be a very feeble reason for risking our precious natural resources.

Sincerely,