



# UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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Dr. Charles Young  
President, University of Florida  
226 Tigert Hall  
PO Box 113150  
CAMPUS

Dear Dr. Young:

This letter concerns the proposed eastward extension of SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue on right-of-way to be donated by University of Florida from the academic-only portion of the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory [NATL]. The enclosed usage report documents that NATL is used in more than 70 courses in four colleges and that more than 2,500 students in these courses use NATL annually. Representatives of the nine departments in which these courses are taught make up most of the Natural Area Advisory Committee, a group designated by Provost Colburn to recommend management plans for NATL. Current members of the Committee are listed on the back of the enclosed pamphlet.

For the following reasons, the Committee has voted unanimously that the University oppose the extension of SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue:

The road will reduce the academic area of NATL. The road will establish a new southern boundary of NATL, eliminating nearly 3 acres of the part of NATL that is for academic use only (see enclosed map). The exclusion of the public makes this the only part of NATL that is suitable for class or individual projects for which equipment and markers must remain on site or for which wildlife must be observed without frequent interruption. (See usage report for documentation of special projects.) In addition to land lost directly to the road, the academic area will lose another 1.6 acres by virtue of the road cutting off the southeast peninsula of NATL. This part of NATL is geologically and biologically unique because it contains a large pond that drains into a sink. Despite its small area, NATL currently contains a range of habitat types important in north-central Florida. The road will clearly eliminate the wet end of NATL's spectrum of habitats.

The road will impair the academic uses of NATL. This is principally because it will reduce the quality of the hammock and upland pine ecosystems of NATL (explained below), but it should also be mentioned that being close to heavy traffic is detrimental to teaching about nature and to studying it. Even though the University spent nearly \$20,000 to build a 700 ft. berm to shield NATL's academic area from SW 34<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, the noise level from that traffic remains high. The proposed extension will bring heavy traffic to nearly 1,400 ft on the south.

The road will reduce the quality of NATL's ecosystems. One of the principal reasons for establishing NATL was that it preserved (on campus!) significant samples of two upland ecosystems that were no longer conveniently accessible to classes because of Gainesville's westward growth. The samples were modest but large enough to perpetuate populations of many of the plants and animals characteristic of these ecosystems. The road will reduce the biotic diversity of NATL's ecosystems because (as many studies have shown) the smaller the patch of isolated habitat the more likely the extinction of isolated populations. A major impact of the road is that it separates NATL from two other wild areas that currently help maintain NATL's diversity through interchanges of animals and plant propagules. The smaller of these areas is 3.2 acres and includes a large retention pond. It is contiguous with the southern border of NATL between Regency Oaks and Archer Woods apartment complexes. The larger area is 12 acres of forested wetland that is east of NATL and drains into NATL's sinkhole pond. It is most closely in contact with NATL at the south end of Surge Area Drive. The proposed road will interpose 90 ft of concrete and heavy traffic between the main body of NATL and these two wild areas. This is especially problematical, given that many species of wildlife live in woodland areas and visit wetland areas to breed or attain water. With the proposed road, these species in NATL would almost certainly be eliminated as they tried to cross the road on their way to or from the wetlands. This is a common and well documented problem. For example, the Department of Transportation considered roadkill such a problem along US 441 where it crosses Paynes Prairie that they invested heavily in fences and underpasses along the road.

Not only will NATL's wildlife be run over, but lights along the road and from nighttime traffic will illuminate their habitat while pedestrians along it will litter it and may even choose to sleep there. The reduction and degradation of NATL's academic area will lower the quality of teaching and learning especially at upper undergraduate and graduate levels.

In summary, the proposed road will unacceptably degrade an irreplaceable asset to many of UF's academic programs. For environmental science programs NATL is the equivalent of essential indoor laboratories for other disciplines. The Natural Area Advisory Committee fervently recommends that the University prevent this loss by refusing to donate the needed right-of-way.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Walker  
Chair, Natural Area Advisory Committee

xc: David Colburn, Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs  
Ed Poppell, Vice-President of Administrative Affairs

Enclosures: map, NATL pamphlet, usage report, article from *UF Today*