

Allen, Shauna R

From: margi29@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, May 5, 2021 8:30 AM
To: Allen, Shauna R
Subject: Cayo Costa State Park ARC: Melynda Brown email

Shauna, please enter the email I copied you on into the batch of items for review by ARC, I just sent it but would like it included with the other items you will be receiving. Thank you, margi

Allen, Shauna R

From: margi29@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, May 5, 2021 8:26 AM
To: Brown, Melynda A. "Mindy"
Cc: Stafford, Heather; ThurstonChavez, Karen; Draper, Eric; Alsentzer, Daniel; Small, Parks; Allen, Shauna R
Subject: Re: DEP Mismanagement of Cayo Costa State Park "The Narrows"

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Ms. Brown, thank you for your reply.

I must say I am quite disheartened that you would not communicate directly to me. Our group has worked for five years to protect an area of Pine Island Aquatic Preserve that is being negatively impacted from heavy commercial ferry activity. Because you are over the DEP departments that directly are responsible for the well being of these resources, I was hoping you could at least answer a few questions for me. Your name has repeatedly come up as a very reputable authority on the issues of seagrass. I have read some of your studies and appreciate your work.

Regarding my referral to the "Press Office", I doubt they will contact me and am sure they do not have the information I need. I expect to receive the DEP's boiler plate position statement on this topic, at best.

The DEP and all of its departments are vested with protecting our resources yet our group has been left with an inability to trust or rely on any of them to listen to and remedy the damages that are being done. For all of us private tax payers and stakeholders this is very frustrating and sad.

Kind regards,

Margi

-----Original Message-----

From: Brown, Melynda A. "Mindy" <Melynda.A.Brown@dep.state.fl.us>
To: margi29@aol.com <margi29@aol.com>
Cc: Stafford, Heather <Heather.Stafford@dep.state.fl.us>; ThurstonChavez, Karen <Karen.ThurstonChavez@FloridaDEP.gov>
Sent: Wed, Apr 28, 2021 1:58 pm
Subject: RE: DEP Mismanagement of Cayo Costa State Park "The Narrows"

Hello Ms. Nanney,

I have forwarded your request to our DEP Press Office and they likely will reply directly to you. You may contact the Press Office directly at DEPNews@FloridaDEP.gov. Also, here is a link to the Press Office's contact information: <https://floridadep.gov/comm/press-office>.

Thank you,

Melynda Brown
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection
Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves

From: margi29@aol.com <margi29@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 28, 2021 10:06 AM
To: Brown, Melynda A. "Mindy" <Melynda.A.Brown@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject: Fwd: DEP Mismanagement of Cayo Costa State Park "The Narrows"

Hello again,

I know you are a very busy person so understandably you possibly have not had time to respond to my letter below.

Please update me on whether or not you have reviewed this information and what your agency's position is in terms of protecting the Pine Island Sound Aquatic preserve relative to Cayo Costa State Parks' southern shores.

Our group is concerned and reaching out directly to the agency who is vested with these protections.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Kindly,

Margi Nanney
941-527-7865

-----Original Message-----

From: margi29@aol.com

To: melynda.a.brown@dep.state.fl.us <melynda.a.brown@dep.state.fl.us>

Sent: Wed, Apr 21, 2021 11:58 am

Subject: DEP Mismanagement of Cayo Costa State Park "The Narrows"

Hello Ms. Brown,

I am writing to update you on a major concern that has been ongoing since 2016 at the south end of Cayo Costa State Park (CCSP) along the island's least resilient and most sensitive south section known as "the narrows". It is our understanding that you are over the Charlotte Harbor Aquatic Preserves. CCSP is part of the Pine Island Aquatic Preserve (PIAP) which is why we need your help.

After a tiny dock was built (using a questionable permitting process) on land purchased by the state for preservation, large 50' commercial ferry boats began to bring up to 100 people per day across this section of the island which is only about 450' wide. These large boats cross over shallow and very sensitive grass flats which have been impacted by the propellers, they do this at all tides and multiple times a day. Manatees frequent this area which historically had only been used by private boaters and residents. This is not a marked channel by any means. Shorebird and turtle nesting habitats have been impacted. The heavily groomed path is now trampled and the opening to the beach is impacting the island's natural defense systems, sea oats and native foliage. The Faulkner Calusa Mound complex is only a few hundred feet from this dock and has shown signs of looting and trespass since thousands of people have been exposed to it's presence by the commercial tour operations.

There is a lot to this story and our group, SAVE CAYO COSTA, worked with DEP/DRP staff for 4.5 years when the DEP reached consensus last fall to stop this commercial activity at this questionably permitted dock. Then, in December, after pushback from the concessionaire, they reversed this language and to continue to allow this to occur. Below I am providing more information about these actions.

In 2019 the DEP formed the Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection (ORCP) who's job it is to harden and protect fragile coastal resources against storms/wash overs and sea level rise. The PIAP is supposed to be protecting the 17 coastal miles along Charlotte Harbor of which Cayo Costa encompasses more than half that distance. "The Narrows" is only 450' wide, the proper park infrastructure best suited for large groups is over a mile wide. Access to Cayo Costa's southern shores are best suited for private boaters, hikers and paddlers. Leave it "wild Florida"!!! Cayo Costa should be the poster child for the ORCP and the PIAP!

We implore you to join our efforts to protect Cayo Costa from further damage.

Below are some copy points we have used to explain our case to interested parties:

- Commercial use of The Narrows portion of Cayo Costa is inappropriate as it is the least resilient and most vulnerable section of the entire island.
- Destruction of benthic habitat, to include sea grass, is occurring.
- Public access to public lands by private boaters is negatively impacted.
- Increased human impacts to endangered species habitat is occurring.

- The fragile beach dune habitat is being trampled by thousands of visitors each month.
- The uncapped commercial use at The Narrows is in close proximity to the Faulkner Calusa Mound Complex.
- Commercial use of a parcel acquired with public funds for preservation is occurring.
- Adjacent private properties are being impacted by trespass and litter
- Alternative and appropriate locations for commercial use exist in the form of dispersed beach landings and the main dock at Cayo Costa State Park headquarters.

This excerpt from the draft management plan August 2020 plainly states the case:

"South Dock / Southern Gulf Beach Access

In 2016, the existing bayside dock located near the south end of Cayo Costa was designated for concession boats. Visitor use impacts to the natural communities and shorebird/sea turtle nesting habitat have occurred on the beach side of the trail extending from the south dock, indicating the need for closure of this site for facilitated direct public access. The dock and trail will be maintained for park support purposes only. As permitted in other remote areas of the park, this southern portion of the park will remain accessible for visitors by hiking or other authorized means from the Gulf, such as self-guided boating or paddling. Reduced visitation at this site is expected to result in gradual recovery of the observed impacts. Due to resource impact concerns (i.e., seagrass beds and mangrove swamp) and poor navigability of the shallow waters along this segment of the island, alternative locations for a southern concession dock and beach access trail were determined infeasible. As additional parcels are acquired, depth conditions change, and new navigational information becomes available, alternative access points may be evaluated. Concession ferry access will continue to be facilitated through the docks at Pelican Bay."

Now the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Recreation has reversed the above position and is recommending the continuance of the commercial use at the Narrows. This represents a gross mismanagement of this unique and fragile resource. For decades concessionaires to the park have brought visitors to the main dock at Pelican Bay and to the island via dispersed beach landings. Therefore, with appropriate alternative access points there is simply no reason to continue the inappropriate commercial use of the Narrows in violation of the state's responsibility to manage and protect this critical resource for future generations.

Melynda, our group is actively engaging the public, elected officials and media in efforts to see that the CCSP management plan language is reversed to disallow commercial use at the south dock along the "narrows". ARC votes on it June 11. Your input is valuable to us.

Please give me a call at your earliest convenience, thank you.

Kind regards,
Margi Nanney
941-527-7865

