

May 9, 2021

For over 30 years my family and I have had a house along the narrows on Cayo Costa. It's one of three built in the 1970s. All the families are the same owners and do not rent out their properties. I grew up along the shores and waters of Pine Island Sound and have witnessed its pristine beauty. I think I can speak for all of us who have property here, we are great stewards of the island. The narrows used to look like "old Florida", not anymore.

In 2016 the state built a landing for large commercial tour boats in between 4 private residents. The state ever asked for any input from any of the adjacent property owners nor did they notice us about the dock being built and for what purpose they were building it. The permitting process was apparently flawed. Immediately large boats began to bring large groups of people every day. Now private boaters can't tie up there anymore. Suddenly the beach began to look trampled, there has been more trash, people have been trespassing on the private properties. All of this is taking a toll on Cayo Costa.

The narrows is just that, narrow. It is fragile and the right type of storm may cut a breach here. Now the pathway where the commercial groups land is clear cut and eroded. I have noticed fewer shorebirds nesting and foraging along the beach. I remember seeing coachwhip and indigo snakes in and around the dunes but none in the past 5 years.

One day I looked down in front of our house and saw tiny, speckled eggs right in the sand dunes. Snowy plovers were nesting right there! I photographed the eggs and moved away from the area. Sadly, these endangered birds no longer are seen in this area. The increased daily human impacts have affected their nesting habits.

I am very aware of the effort that has been made by island advocates to stop the commercial boats from coming. There is evidence of propeller scarring and damage to the sea grass beds. Apparently, the state agreed there were damages and said they'd stop this practice but now changed their minds and are going to let this continue. Visitation at the typically is from boats anchoring off, hikers and kayakers. These lighter uses (heavy on weekends) pose less stress to the resources. During the week the island can regroup. Not so now with constant daily large group impacts. With Florida's ever increasing population, controlling human impacts where possible is urgently important.

Stop commercial boats from coming to the narrows and take these large groups to the park's north Pelican Bay docks where the facilities are made for this purpose. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephanie Malone".

Stephanie Malone, St. Petersburg, FL