

TO THOSE WHO WOULD CLOSE OUR BEACHES

By Jack Shea, Dare County Commissioner

I am fortunate to live on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. This area, which I call home, is a travel destination for people all over the world who enjoy great family vacations and a wide variety of recreational opportunities. Although our year-round population is very small, we have a vast extended community who considers themselves, at heart, part of the Outer Banks.

As a community coalition of full-time residents, visitors and part-time Outer Banks residents, we have made a concerted effort to enjoy the beaches responsibly and in a way that is always in harmony with nature. That is why many of us are outraged that special interest groups have targeted our area and filed a lawsuit against the National Park Service to close the beaches of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area.

Large numbers of the membership of these special interest groups do not live in our area and have never visited. Sadly, they have never had the opportunity to walk our beaches or talk with the people so passionately committed to working with the National Park Service to preserve this environment for future generations.

It is important that you know how the mainstream community feels about the courts being used to force your will upon us. Let there be no doubt, your misguided actions have hurt our tourism-based economy. Because of you, people are without employment and unable to feed their families. You are hurting the very people who have labored for generations to protect and preserve the environment.

People in our community are frustrated and hurting. I have heard the anguish and pain, first-hand, from my neighbors of all ages, races, and political affiliations. You deserve to know the truth.

TO THOSE WHO WOULD CLOSE OUR BEACHES

There are those of you out there, who I believe want to see the beaches of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore closed to all pedestrian and vehicular access. The overwhelming numbers of your group do not live on or near this area. You probably have never even taken the time to visit this area, walk the beaches, fish, surf, or just sit and bask in Nature's creation. However, you have decided that you have the right to impose your will on the people that live here, earn a living here and visit this area to vacation in this wonder of Nature.

We know that your groups are funded by people across the Country who like to watch television nature programs showing birds, deer and other animals with their young. Who would not be moved by seeing these pictures, and being told that you must help prevent these creatures from becoming extinct? No one wants to see that. However, there are other messages that you seem to ignore. If you had your way, people would disappear from public lands and become the extinct species. You ignore the basic principle that people and wildlife can both coexist and thrive.

I wonder if you know that there are more deer in this country today than when the first settlers came to this continent. This is the case even though there are some three hundred million people in the United States. Hunting and other uses by people of the woodlands has not resulted in the dreaded “E” word (extinction) and is not expected to happen in the future. Responsible use of resources by those who have a vested interest in their future use is the key to ensuring that these resources will continue to exist, not some dictum.

Here on the Outer Banks, generations of residents and visitors have come to enjoy and preserve this gift of nature. Long ago people realized their economic future depended on maintaining the integrity of this natural world and sustaining its value for future vacation and recreational use. The local residents and visitors have been faithful stewards of the environment. Look around the Outer Banks and you will see a living testament to the concept that people and nature can live together in harmony.

Now you and others with no vested interest in this area are seeking to impose your will on the residents and visitors by attempting to ban all people from large areas of the seashore. Have you forgotten that our Constitution guarantees that people are endowed with the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? I claim that here on the Outer Banks the “pursuit of happiness” means the right of residents and visitors to continue our heritage of responsible access to the public lands, which make up the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

To those who want to learn the truth about beach access, honest information is available at www.PreserveBeachAccess.org. Learn the history of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area. Discover the promises made to the people in the enabling legislation that set aside the area for recreation. See “My Story” videos of how people are being hurt by the efforts to close our beaches. Help us preserve access to America’s beaches.