

The Progress-Index

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IF WILDLIFE COULD SPEAK

By Jack Shea, Dare County Commissioner

Dr. Doolittle would have a busy time on the Outer Banks of North Carolina talking with our animals. They certainly would have a lot to say about being the center of attention since a Federal Court issued a consent decree, which severely restricted human access to large tracts of popular areas in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area. The consent decree is a result of a lawsuit filed by a small group of well-funded “environmentalists” against the National Park Service, alleging they have not done enough to protect area wildlife.

The “environmentalists” ignore the dedicated efforts of generations of local residents and visitors serving as responsible stewards in protecting wildlife, in the area established by Congress, as the first National Seashore, with the promise there would always be recreational access. The lawsuit criticized the National Park Service, and by inference the people of Dare County where most of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore is located.

Many people have expressed feelings of frustration watching the area’s economy suffer under the restrictions of the consent decree. Perhaps it is time for us to hear from the animals. If they could speak to us today, based upon my research, here is what I believe they might say to Dr. Doolittle and you –

“My name is T. Turtle. I was hatched about 10 years ago on the beach in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area. My first remembrance, after I broke through my shell, was of a human. No, they did not try to eat me. Instead, a gentle human kindly escorted me towards the ocean, to prevent me from being swallowed by predators. This wonderful person saved me from the legions of ghost crabs who consider me a delicacy. Years later, I learned that many local residents and visitors regularly volunteer to save countless numbers of my fellow turtles in this way. We owe our lives to the humans. Without their help, our numbers would be severely diminished.”

Next, one of the birds wants to speak. “My name is O. Oystercatcher. 5 years ago, life began for me in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area. Have I seen humans? Yes, I have. However, I don’t bother them, and they don’t bother me. I wonder though, why do they like to stare at me through binoculars and take my photograph. Anyway, I believe their presence helps us because it keeps away my natural predators. For example, the Park Service reported that on May 3 one of my fellow

Oystercatchers was most likely killed due to predation by peregrine falcon. Another report said, eggs in a nest were seen being predated by a grackle while the nesting bird stood by on May 5. If humans really want to protect us, control the natural predators who constantly stalk us.”

Although these conversations are imaginary, they are based on facts that the “environmentalists” do not want you to know. The truth is, the biggest threats to wildlife, in the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area, are their natural predators, not humans. Let there be no doubt, wildlife and humans are compatible. Nature and people can live together in harmony.

We are asking all Americans to help us in our fight to preserve access to public beaches. View our website at www.PreserveBeachAccess.org. Learn more about the history of this recreational area and discover ways you can help. We need to set an example here, for people in other parts of our Country, where access to public lands may soon be threatened. Please help in this important endeavor. Remember, next time you see a Sea Turtle or American Oystercatcher, you will know what they are thinking.