



Hatteras Island's Beaches Should Remain Accessible

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Some will remember the "Why We Fight" series of films during World War II, following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Our government asked director Frank Capra to produce these movies to help explain the war effort to the American people. Capra, known for portraying moral truths in a dramatic way with his production of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" and "It's a Wonderful Life," accomplished his mission. His pioneering film series "Why We Fight" outlined the reasons why ordinary citizens needed to mobilize in defense of freedom. These films were shown on military bases and in theaters until our nation was victorious.

Today we need a new series of "Why We Fight" films for the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area on North Carolina's Outer Banks. Unlike during World War II, our threat is not from foreign forces. Our current threat is from internal forces who want to prevent people and vehicles from having access to portions of the beach although the enabling legislation that created this first national seashore promised access to everyone for recreation.

This threat became apparent in 2008 when a group of "environmentalists" sued the National Park Service in a federal court. They alleged that the park service, and by inference the local residents and visitors, were not doing enough to protect area wildlife. These "environmentalists" decided that they know better how to protect our wildlife than the people who have actually preserved this area from ages past to the present. It is ironic that the funding and support for these "environmentalists" comes mostly from those who have never visited this area, walked our beaches or observed our wildlife firsthand.

Because of this lawsuit, Dare County, where Hatteras Island is located, and its citizens were forced to sign a consent decree or risk having a federal judge completely close the area. The consent decree severely restricted access to sections of the recreational area to both people and vehicles and remains in effect until 2011, when the National Park Service must come up with a new set of regulations for the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area.

The consent decree has substantial penalties for infringement on areas closed for resource protection. It also has draconian penalties for "violations" that do not directly involve wildlife, such as vandalism of signs. The first time a sign is vandalized the quarantine area is expanded by 50 meters. For any subsequent act of vandalism, the quarantine area expands even further.

This approach punishes law-abiding residents and visitors, instead of those who committed the act. In my view, this is grossly unfair and unconstitutional.

You can "enlist" in the fight to preserve our freedom to enjoy public recreational areas. Visit our Web site at www.PreserveBeachAccess.org. Learn more about how you can help us achieve victory here and set an example to other areas of the country where access to public lands may be threatened.