

**TOPSAIL HILL PRESERVE STATE PARK  
12.05.2018 PUBLIC MEETING – ADDITIONAL BEACH ACCESS**

Opening remarks by Daniel Alsentzer conducted at 5:30 p.m.

**PRESENTATIONS**

Jim Sumpter: I recognize that the objective for tonight is not to reach agreement. This is an opportunity for open dialogue. I met with South Walton Community Council this morning; quoted George H.W. Bush. I do respectfully offer criticism – dunes are currently being used and trampled on; the park is currently and has historically been used here; there are current paths all along the dunes; residents frequently report people going across the dunes; state has confirmed footprints and heat signals from cell phone use proving continued and existing use. Options are to do nothing; bar all entry, which violates all values of state parks; option to channel current use through one boardwalk – we are doing this in collaboration with the park to regulate and control access. We offer this with no request for money from the state or county. We realize people say this isn't necessary. On the issue of customary use, we understand this means we are forced to look at additional access points. We offer to pay for crushed shell path or boardwalk – 350 homesites secured for this means. There would be annual park passes acquired so that money would go to state. This would be federally regulated. We realize this would increase values of homes. This is not a Cypress Dunes amenity; there would be 25 parking spaces offered. I am providing/presenting 262 signed petitions from community members.

*Mr. Sumpter submitted printed copies of links to online information about existing boardwalks in other Florida State Parks and signed petitions by members of the community in favor of additional beach access.*

Celeste Cobena: Since 1992, Walton County and developers have tried to take the land. This is more of the same efforts. DRP must adhere to the statutes – this property must be managed for the reason it was required; passive recreation is secondary. In management of the preserve, natural resources must be prioritized; must only allow for one entrance into the park. Cypress Dunes and TDC only wish to increase profits. All the proposals would be difficult to manage by the park staff; explosive development is undergoing in neighborhoods and this would leave the campground vulnerable. Concerning mouse and shorebirds, these paths would disturb wildlife with people passing through and with dogs. USFWS grant on beach mouse acquisition states purchase was for beach mouse, shorebird and turtles. These proposals would be prohibited in the terms of these grants; protection of resources is paramount. The county has ignored the problem of customary use so they are turning to other lands; one entrance serves best interests for communities and the park.

Anita Page: Asks Sumpter if he said his proposal would be on Topsail Hill Preserve land; then asks how many proposals there are; one comment – just because people are illegally going on the dunes does not mean they should keep going on the dunes. DRP describes Topsail as protecting one of the most impressive assemblages of natural resources that protect incredible biodiversity. It has always been a preserve – the RV part of the park was acquired later, but preservation is still the priority. Topsail already has two beach access points. There has been an effort over years to get access from outside the boundary; all proposals would worsen the protected habitat for beach mice. The county parcel was

purchased through grant funding for habitat protection. No proposal would fit the grant criteria. In the beach highlands area there are already two access points. What is being asked of the DRP is an access from an area technically outside of the DEP management. Edge effect would occur with any new access points; resource considerations must come first.

Norman Capra (Bay County Audubon/Friends of Camp Helen): Statute says preserve resources first then provide recreation if it would not disturb natural resources. Topsail is home to many diverse species; beach mice are still here in these parcels as are shorebirds. Topsail is surrounded by quickly growing communities. Unmonitored and privileged access would allow for habitat damage and wildlife displacement. After Hurricane Michael, it is particularly important to preserve the habitat that is remaining after Michael. This privileged access would not allow for equal access by all communities. We need thoughtful and creative solutions to appease everyone, but primarily protect resources.

Jamie Cogswell (Audubon Florida): Three of Walton County's 26 miles of beaches serves as critical habitat and has two listed species residing on it. There isn't just one part that is important to shorebirds. Outfalls and the entire ecosystem serve needs of the shorebirds. Least Terns from large colonies – snowy plovers have isolated nests; Snowy Plovers require a lot of protection because they lay their eggs in the sand. These species are really only found in state land because it is all they have left. These sites are mostly undisturbed. The threats are human encroachment. She has walked the three miles and has tried to educate others. Natural and domesticated animals are also threats and human paths become corridors for the animals as well. Dogs are already a threat. Seagulls are also predators of the eggs and people attract the seagulls. Habitat loss is the main threat which is why they are no longer on the areas outside of the state park. Single access point allows DRP to educate its visitors and manage access, and keep people off the dunes. These boardwalks would fragment the habitat and set a precedent for further access.

Susan Palladini (Coffeen Nature Preserve): Founder of the preserve saved the land from FDOT development through letter writing campaign; can only echo sentiments of previous presenters; protect resources, but also staff; issues with poaching.

36 Speaker Cards

32 Spoke