

KEY NOTES

NEWS FROM
THE PERDIDO KEY ASSOCIATION



March 2020

PKA Annual Membership Meeting

The Perdido Key Association held its Annual Membership Meeting on February 29, 2020 at the Eden Condominium. Guest speaker Dr. Alissa Deming, the Staff Veterinarian with the Alabama Marine Mammal Stranding Network based on Dauphin Island, provided a very informed update on the health of the Gulf Coast bottlenose dolphin population. She pointed out that the current dolphin Unusual Mortality Event could be related to increased fresh water in local areas from the past year's weather events. She also noted that the health of dolphins, as the region's top oceanic predator, can be a good indicator of the overall health of the ecosystem they inhabit. PKA president Charles Krupnick followed with updates on PKA initiatives and particularly the soon-to-be distributed 2020 Perdido Key Property Owner Survey – noting the cost challenges of the project. Approximately 40 people attended the meeting and seemed to appreciate the information provided.

Innerarity Point Park to Open March 6

Don't miss the opening of the new Innerarity Point Park scheduled for 10 AM on Friday, March 6, 2020! The park is sure to be a family favorite location with "an ADA-accessible boardwalk as well as a dock for fishing and paddle crafts, covered pavilions, two playgrounds, restrooms and parking." Park completion has been accompanied by controversy regarding plans for the redevelopment of the Galvez Landing Public Boat Ramp nearby. For more on the issue, see the February 25, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article "Neighbors support Innerarity Point Park opening, have mixed feelings on Galvez Landing updates" by Madison Arnold at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/25/escambia-county-open-innerarity-point-park-neighbors-concerned-over-galvez-landing-updates/4859931002/>.

BOCC Approves More RESTORE Funding for Path

The Escambia County Board of County Commissioners gave its final approval to Amendment #1 to the RESTORE Act Direct Component Multi-Year Implementation Plan at its February 20, 2020 meeting. The Amendment raises RESTORE funding for the Perdido Key Multi-Use Path from \$960,000 to \$4.5 million, which should be sufficient to complete the project. Final approval by the US Treasury is still required and may be received by about July 1, 2020, after which contracts can be negotiated and construction started – perhaps as early as September 2020.

Disputed Perdido Key Beach Access moving forward

At the same BOCC meeting, Escambia County Commissioners decided to go forward with construction of a new public beach access location at 16477 Perdido Key Drive (next to the Crab Trap Restaurant) despite continued legal opposition. The site will have 34 parking spaces and Mobi-Mat dune walkover instead of a boardwalk. Commissioners committed \$228,202 for the project from Tourist Development Tax (TDT) funds.

Pamela Johnson may lead Visit Pensacola

The Visit Pensacola Board of Directors has decided to ask Ms. Pamela Johnson to be the organization's new President and CEO. She is currently the deputy director of the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau in Fort Myers, Florida, and has 25 years of beach tourism experience. Contract negotiations and final Board approval are needed before the hire is complete. For more on the issue, see the February 26, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article "Visit Pensacola taps Pamela Johnson with Fort Myers visitors bureau as next CEO" by Madison Arnold at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/26/visit-pensacola-taps-pamela-johnson-fort-myers-visitor-bureau-ceo/4879122002/>.

Recent Perdido Key Beach Erosion

Winter tides and storms have taken a toll on area beaches, particularly in the vicinity of the East Use Area of Perdido Key State Park and just west of the National Seashore entrance. As the year progresses with more favorable winds and tides and the Pensacola Pass Inlet Management Program moves forward, we can hope for some natural replenishment of Perdido Key beaches.

Questions about Sorrento Road Development

Plans are moving forward for a new elementary school at 10789 Sorrento Road with a large apartment complex to follow. Some argue the facilities are needed to accommodate growth and employment opportunities in the area while District 2 Commissioner Doug Underhill is concerned that Sorrento Road "can't handle any more traffic. It can't handle the traffic that we have now." He believes more money needs to be spent on infrastructure and that greater concern is given to environmental issues such as encroachment on wetlands. For more on the issue, see the February 18, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article "Is Sorrento Road poised for new growth or already at

capacity” by Madison Arnold at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/18/is-sorrento-road-poised-for-growth-or-already-at-capacity/4792750002/>.

Innerarity Island Tax Increase

The 200 or so property owners on Innerarity Island may see a big increase in their property taxes. After the Innerarity Island sewer system was abandoned by a private company in 2014, ECUA agreed to take it over but only after extensive repairs and upgrades were made. The initial estimate for the repairs would add \$500 to owner annual property tax bills through an MSBU (municipal services benefit unit), but the increase is now estimated at \$1600 and has caused considerable concern among some affected owners. For more on this issue see the February 11, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Innerarity Island property taxes expected to balloon over increased cost of sewer project” by Jim Little at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/11/innerarity-island-sewer-project-leads-spike-property-tax-bills/4713818002/>.

Pensacola Beach #4 Best

TripAdvisor recently rated Pensacola Beach as 4th among its “Top 25 beaches in the United States,” saying “the white sand squeaks as you walk.” For more on the issue, see the February 26, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Tripadvisor places Pensacola Beach in top 25 U.S. beaches of 2020 list” by Jake Newby at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/26/tripadvisor-puts-pensacola-beach-top-25-u-s-beaches-list/4883969002/>.

But Cash won’t get you to Pensacola Beach!

Sometime in spring 2020, your ability to use a \$1.00 bill for the toll to cross the Bob Sikes Bridge to Pensacola Beach will expire; only Florida’s Sun Pass and other interoperable transponders will work, or be billed with TOLL-BY-PLATE. The move is an effort by Escambia County officials to relieve the traffic congestion that often forms on the bridge during peak use periods. But the shift is not without controversy; Escambia County Commissioner Lumen May noted: “Those who live in the pockets of poverty are still in a cash society.” “And as we talk about beach access, there should not be anything that prohibits anyone from the opportunity to come to what God has given to us.” For more on this issue, see the February 20, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Tolls to Pensacola Beach will officially go cashless this spring. Here's how it will work” by Madison Arnold at <https://amp.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/20/pensacola-beach-go-cashless-electronic-only-spring/4824168002/>.

Shorebird Nesting Season

Gulf Islands National Seashore spokesperson Brent Everitt recently provided information on ways to help ensure a successful shorebird nesting season. Certainly do not enter closed areas and always adhere to speed limits since shorebird chicks may walk across roads before they can fly. And be mindful of dog regulations since adult

shorebirds view them as predators and may abandon their nests long enough for heat to damage the eggs. For more on this issue, see the February 14, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Shorebird nesting season is upon us: Here’s how you can keep the chicks safe” by Madison Arnold at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/14/gulf-islands-explains-how-keep-shorebirds-safe-nesting-season/4748280002/>.

Smuggling Florida’s Turtles

Florida’s turtles are in demand as food and pets, particularly for Asian markets. Sought after species include “box turtles, diamondback terrapins, mud and musk turtles, softshell turtles and snapping turtles,” with some fetching as much as \$10,000 at auctions in China. While undercover investigations have recovered many turtles, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission officials are concerned more smuggling will occur because of increasing prices. For more on this issue, see the February 22, 2020 *USA Today* article “Officials are cracking down on turtle smugglers in Florida” by Kimberly Miller of the *Palm Beach Post* at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/22/turtle-smuggling-florida-officials-crack-down-illegal-trade/4845180002/>.

Sea Turtle Ambassador Program

Escambia County is beginning a pilot “sea turtle ambassador” program where selected volunteers are trained to inform others about sea turtles on Pensacola Beach and Perdido Key. The program complements the County’s more time-demanding marine turtle patrol program and is about educating people “on how everyone can be more sea turtle-friendly on the beaches.” As noted in the *Pensacola News Journal* article: “The focus will be on sea turtles, but many of the conservation principles they’ll be sharing also apply to other species like shorebirds, marine life and beach mice.” Applications for 2020 are already closed, but those interested can apply for next season. For more on this issue, see the February 24, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Another sea turtle program planned” by Madison Arnold at <https://pensacolaneWSjournal-fl.newsmemory.com/?selDate=20200224&editionStart=Pensacola+News+Journal&goTo=A03>.

Why are there fewer Lionfish?

Estimates of lionfish numbers in the north Gulf of Mexico have dropped substantially in recent months. Florida Fish and Wildlife spokesperson Amanda Nalley said “What we do know is people are seeing them less and less on frequently visited reefs right now, and we do know they’re still in deep waters.” Many lionfish taken in recent months have lesions, though the cause of the ulceration has not been determined and it is not clear the lesions are the reason for the decrease in lionfish numbers. Robert Turpin, Escambia County Marine Resources Division manager, noted: “There’s a variety of potential factors that are resulting in the reduced numbers we are seeing. My perspective is that I hope everything is working against lionfish in the invaded range to diminish their negative impact to our native ecosystem.” For more on the issue, see the February 19, 2020 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Lionfish populations are down. But

experts aren't sure why or how long it might last" by Madison Arnold at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2020/02/19/lionfish-populations-gulf-mexico-dip-experts-unsure-why/4793522002/>.

March Calendar

Mar 1-31 – Spring Bird Migration at Dauphin Island
Mar 4 – Chamber Music Recital Old Christ Church Pensacola
Mar 5 – Jersey Boys at the Saenger Theater Pensacola
Mar 5 – Snowbird Hootenanny at the Flora-Bama
Mar 6-8 – Cox Diamond Invitational college baseball at Blue Wahoo Stadium
Mar 6,7,8,21 – Pensacola Ice Flyers at Pensacola Bay Center
Mar 7 – Gulf Coast Renaissance Fair and Pirate Festival at Santa Rosa Fairgrounds
Mar 8 – Mac and Cheese Festival in Destin
Mar 14-15 – Southeast Stock Horse Show 7750 Mobile Hwy
Mar 14-15 – Orange Beach Festival of Art
Mar 15 – Harlem Globetrotters at the Pensacola Bay Center
Mar 21 – Pensacola Beach Music Fest
Mar 21 – Gulf Coast Mustang and Mega Car Show at OWA
Mar 28 – Flora-Bama's Annual Beach Run/Walk for America's Warriors
Mar 31 – Easter Egg Hunt and Kids Fun Day at the Flora-Bama

The following websites provide additional information about Gulf Coast events

<https://www.visitpensacola.com/>
<https://myescambia.com/>
<http://mygulfcoastchamber.com/>
<http://www.visitperdido.com/>
<http://mulletwrapper.net/>
<http://www.emeraldcoastfl.com//>
<http://alabama.travel/festivals-and-events>

Perdido Key Association Board of Directors