



April 2021

Perdido Key State Park West Use Area Reopened!

Perdido Key State Park West Use Area reopened on March 19, 2021 significantly increasing the parking space and beach access available for public use. Both East and West Use Areas of the Park have been closed since Hurricane Sally in September 2020 and require substantial infrastructure repair, including restrooms and dune walkovers to the beach. The West Use Area was prepared for temporary use with portable restroom facilities and mats over sand for beachfront access. In several outings, volunteers let by State Park Rangers and the Friends of Pensacola State Parks helped remove debris remaining from the demolition of damaged park infrastructure. As promulgated by Escambia County and the office of Florida Representative Alex Andrade:

The Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) anticipates the West day use area of Perdido Key State Park will open with temporary access and portable restrooms by Friday, March 19; and the East and West day use areas of the park will be fully open by the end of July 2021. The DRP plans to phase the construction to allow for one of the day use areas to remain open during construction. The project will include repairs to the boardwalks, shelters and restrooms on both the East and West day use areas.

Multi-Use Path Construction Begun!

The long awaited construction of the Perdido Key Multi-Use Path has finally begun with ground being broken just west of Perdido Key State Park and heading for the Florida-Alabama state line. Design and engineering are still being completed for the east portion of the Path through the State Park and along the west side of the Theo Baars Bridge to River Road. Construction followed Escambia County Board of County Commissioners approval of agreements with Chavers Construction, Inc. and DRMP at the Board's January 21, 2021 meeting.

Crosswalk Signal Repairs

The five crosswalks on Perdido Key Drive were updated in April 2020 with improved “pedestrian-activated flashing in-roadway lights, a bidirectional pedestrian-activated flashing LED crossing sign, a ‘Pedestrian Crossing Ahead’ sign and a ‘Pedestrian Crossing Ahead’ pavement message.” Hurricane Sally destroyed much of the improved installations in September 2020. At its March 4, 2021 meeting, the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners approved the purchase of material necessary to move forward with repair of the crosswalks prior to the 2021 beach/tourist season. Information on the 2020 upgrade drawn from the April 13, 2020 Escambia County news article “Perdido Key Drive Pedestrian Crossing Upgrade Project Completed.”

Increase Signage on Perdido Key

Substantial efforts are being made to replace and add signage on Perdido Key so visitors are aware of authorized places to park and access the beach as well as precautions to preserve wildlife and the environment. These include signs along Perdido Key drive restricting roadside parking and efforts at various condominiums to improve beach access and use instructions. Complementing these efforts are Escambia County flashing roadside signs emphasizing Perdido Key Drive parking restrictions.

Blue Angels back Home!

Flying F-18 Super Hornets for the first time, the Blue Angels returned to the Pensacola area and NAS Pensacola on Sunday March 14, 2021 with a welcome flyover. The team’s 2021 schedule is available at

<https://www.blueangels.navy.mil/assets/docs/schedules/show-2021.pdf>.

Shorebird Nesting Concerns on Perdido Key Beaches

Shorebird nesting on Perdido Key is endangered because many dune crossovers were destroyed by Hurricane Sally in September 2020. According to Caroline Stahala, the Western Panhandle shorebird program manager at the Audubon Society: “The one thing about these birds – seabirds or shorebirds – is that they lay their eggs right on the sand and they’re camouflaged, so you aren’t going to see these eggs but you’ll step on them.” She urges beach visitors to “take notice of signage, walk only in designated areas and be cognizant of visible activity such as mating behavior that mean there could be nest and eggs around.” For more on this issue, see the March 2, 2021 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Shorebirds need dunes to nest, but beachgoers are walking over them due to Sally damage” by Emma Kennedy at

<https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2021/03/02/perdido-key-shorebird-nests-trampled-due-hurricane-sally-damage/6824159002/>.

Manatees in Trouble

Manatee Appreciation Day was March 31 and came at a time of growing concern for Florida’s manatees. At least 317 manatee deaths have occurred in the first two months of 2021, many more than the past five year average of 100 deaths a year. Locally a

manatee died from cold stress in Trout Bayou near Milton in January. According to director of the Save the Manatee Club Pat Rose: "It looks like we have a substantial number of manatees that are starving." Poor water quality from stormwater runoff leading to algae blooms and loss of sea grass may be responsible. Manatees have been seen in increasing numbers in the Pensacola area; report any sighting to www.panhandlemanatee.org. For more on manatees see the February 28, 2021 *Fort Myers News-Press* article "Florida manatees are dying in droves this year. Experts blame poor water quality, starvation" by Chad Gillis at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/02/27/florida-manatee-deaths-way-up-2021-experts-blame-water-quality/6817814002/>; for information on Manatee Appreciation Day go to <https://nationaldaycalendar.com/manatee-appreciation-day-last-wednesday-in-march/>.

Search for Beach Vitex

During April, Escambia County Sea Grant Representative Rick O'Connor will be leading efforts to identify beach vitex in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. 75 locations were previously identified with four in Perdido Key/Perdido Bay areas. Beach vitex is an aggressive and hardy invasive species that can completely take over areas like Perdido Key when not caught early. If interested in attending a Zoom presentation on conducting a survey to identify the plant, e-mail Rick at Roc1@ufl.edu; information about beach vitex is available online at entries such as "Getting Rid of Beach Vitex" by Rick O'Connor at <https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/nat/2019/06/18/getting-rid-of-beach-vitex/>.

Short-term Rentals Issue Returns

The Florida legislature is again considering placing short-term property rentals under state regulations instead of allowing local governments to retain control. Short-term rentals can provide income for some but may be disruptive to residential neighborhoods and are sometimes restricted by county or city government. In 2011, the Florida legislature banned cities and counties from adopting any new vacation rental rules but this was rolled back in 2014 following public protest and "allowed communities to regulate rentals, so long as they did not ban them outright or limit their frequency or duration." 2020 saw proposed legislation to remove local control, but was never pursued into law. In 2021, House Bill 219 is making its way through the legislative process and would "prohibit local governments from creating laws or ordinances about short-term rentals and it would require online platforms like VRBO or Airbnb to collect certain taxes and data on its properties," though a number of proposals have followed to modify the bill. Escambia District 2 Commissioner Doug Underhill stated "There's no good reason to support that..."; "Local government knows best what the impact on a local community could be with rentals." State Representative Alex Andrade favors the bill noting the "argument for state regulation is one of upholding property rights and instituting accountability." For more on this issue, see the March 3, 2021 *Pensacola News Journal* article "Opponents of short-term vacation rental bill fear it would strip local control" by Emma Kennedy at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/2021/03/03/opponents-short-term-rental-bill-fear-would-strip-local-control/6886833002/> and the March 12, 2021

News Service of Florida article “Vacation rental plan ‘clearly a work in progress’ in Florida legislature” by Dara Kam at <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/politics/fl-ne-florida-vacation-rental-bill-overhaul-20210312-jqvc2j35w5gi7fvbqkm35dwa6u-story.html>.

OLF-8 Agreement

OLF-8 is the 640 acre former Navy Outlying Field 8 adjacent to the Navy Federal Credit Union complex in the Beulah area of western Escambia County purchased by the County in January 2019. At its March 11, 2021 meeting, the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners approved a so-called “hybrid plan” for mixed use of the property with “a tentative division of 271 acres for commercial and industrial; 47 acres for mixed-use for both residential and retail; 45 acres for public amenities such as a post office, school, day care and trails; and 61 acres for other residential such as multi-family units, duplexes and townhouses.” Opposition to the “hybrid plan” remains with some believing too much property is committed to commercial and industrial use. The next phase of the project will involve “zoning and density” studies over the next few months. For more on the issue, go to the March 11, 2021 *Pensacola News Journal* article “OLF-8 hybrid plan overcomes major hurdle, proceeds to zoning phase” by Emma Kennedy at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2021/03/11/olf-8-hybrid-plan-overcomes-major-hurdle-proceeds-zoning-phase/4647125001/>.

President Biden Freezes New Oil and Gas Leases

In one of its first actions, the Administration of President Joe Biden imposed a 60-day pause on the issuance of new leases and permits for oil and gas drilling on federal lands and offshore. The order “does not limit existing operations under valid leases.” For more on the issue, go to the February 8, 2021 *National Law Review* article “President Biden Freezes New Oil and Gas Lease and Pauses Permits on Federal Land and Offshore” by James W. Noe and Elizabeth Neoty Craddock at <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/president-biden-freezes-new-oil-and-gas-leases-and-pauses-permits-federal-lands-and>.

How to make beaches more accessible to the disabled?

Escambia County has assigned \$300,000 in RESTORE funding (BP penalty funds) to improve access for people with various disabilities to local beaches. Among access concerns are uneven walking surfaces and beach boardwalk dune walkovers covered with sand. A recent “barrier assessment” and webinar by engineering firm Baskerville-Donovan helped identify concerns and “basic compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.” Public ideas for improvements and other comments are welcome at pns-gtm@baskerville-donovan.com or mposner@mtescambia.com. For more on the issue, see the March 12, 2021 *Pensacola News Journal* article “What would make Pensacola Beach more accessible for people with disabilities?” by Emma Kennedy at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/2021/03/12/escambia-county-spend-300-k-pensacola-beach-accessible-disabilities/4647113001/>.

Section of Perdido Pass Beach Closed

The Alabama Point East section of beachfront near the Perdido Pass Bridge has been closed to the public until further notice. The action was taken as a precaution to reduce crowding during the current pandemic. For more on the closure, go to <https://www.obawebsite.com/notice-of-beach-area-closing-at-perdido-pass>.

Perdido Key Master Plan

The 2020 Perdido Key Property Owner Survey showed 43.6% of property owners supported the Perdido Key Master Plan but 46.4% were neutral. This likely means that many Perdido Key property owners were uninformed about the plan. As emphasized by Commissioner Doug Underhill at the February 2021 PKA Annual Membership Meeting, the Master Plan is one of the ways development is managed on Perdido Key. Many PKA members attended charrettes and are familiar with the process leading to approval of the Master Plan. It is probably up to us to ensure the value of the plan is known to other Perdido Key owners and residents. Information about the plan is available on the PKA website at <https://perdidokeyassociation.org> on the "Master Plan" page with additional links to Master Plan documents on the Escambia County webpage.

Canal Road Widening Project to Complete by Memorial Day

The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) hopes to complete widening of Canal Road between Rt. 161 (Doc's Seafood) and William Silvers Pkwy (just east of The Wharf Amphitheater entrance) by Memorial Day. Resurfacing of the roadway should take place April 5-23 including some weekends, followed by a curing period and permanent restriping. For more on the project, go to <https://www.obawebsite.com/canal-road-widening-project-scheduled-to-be-complete-before-memorial-day-weather-permitting>.

PKA Mailing List Error

As its membership initiative for 2021, PKA sent postcards to personnel who had been sent forms to participate in the 2020 Perdido Key Property Owner Survey. The survey mailing list was modified to add a number of late identified properties and delete current PKA members. Regrettably an error made in list compilation that combined some names with incorrect addresses. We apologize for any concern the error may have caused.

April Calendar

Apr 01,02,14,23,24,25 – Pensacola Ice Flyers at Pensacola Bay Center

Apr 01-30 – Rose Bloom Out at Bellingrath Gardens

Apr 03 – Spring Fling at OWA

Apr 03 – Easter Egg Hunt at Flora-Bama and other venues

Apr 04 – Easter services

Apr 06 – FDOT Public Hearing on I-10 east of Alabama State Line to west of Rt. 29 virtual and at Pine Forest United Methodist Church

Apr 10 – Discovery Day at Sea Lab Estuarium on Dauphin Island
Apr 11 – Gulf Coast Half Marathon and 5K in Pensacola Beach
Apr 17 – Flora-Bama Mullet Man Triathlon
Apr 17 – Pensacola VegFest 2021 at Community Maritime Park
Apr 17 – Mobile Bay Earth Day in Fairhope
Apr 21 – Perdido Key Area Chamber Annual Luau at SanRoc Cay Marina
Apr 23 – Interstate Mullet Toss at Flora-Bama
Apr 25 – Dog River Mudbottom Revival Music Festival in Mobile
Apr 30 – Pensacola Crawfish Festival

Blue Angels typically practice on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at NAS Pensacola
Bands on the Beach Tuesday evenings at Gulfside Pavilion, Pensacola Beach

The following websites provide additional information about events taking place in our great Gulf Coast region:

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

Perdido Key Association Board of Directors