



## May 2023

### Perdido Key Drownings

A teenager and Atlanta youth basketball coach died on April 6, 2023 in Gulf of Mexico waters off Perdido Key while trying to save others. The drownings, along with a spate of water rescues by Escambia Fire Rescue, have led to discussions on improving public safety on Perdido Key beaches. More consistent flag warnings and lifeguards are among topics being considered. For more on the issue, see the April 11, 2023 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Bryce Brooks: Family honors Atlanta teen who died saving kids from drowning at Perdido Key” by Brandon Girod at

<https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/pensacola/beaches/2023/04/11/bryce-brooks-atlanta-teen-died-saving-4-kids-drowning-at-florida-beach/70103838007/>; April 11, 2023 *11 Alive (WXIA)* news report “Beloved Atlanta basketball coach dies in Florida current after trying to save teen, children” by Akilah Winters at <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/charles-johnson-atlanta-basketball-coach-dies-florida-current/85-d9855ada-9208-4645-af67-6bdb4dcc1842> and April 17, 2023 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Perdido Key lacks safety protocols to educate visitors. Officials want that to change” by Mollye Barrows at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/perdido-gulf-shores/2023/04/17/perdido-key-safety-a-priority-in-wake-of-rescues-from-the-gulf-of-mexico/70109117007/>.

### Perdido Key Private Beach Public Access Dispute

District 1 Commissioner Jeff Bergosh and Escambia County are following up on a finding that 1957 deeds transferring property from the Federal government to private ownership specified the southerly 75 feet of the Gulf front lots were “subject to a perpetual easement for a beach for public use generally.” Research on the finding continues with further investigation showing the easement may not apply to property west of Perdido Key State Park and in the vicinity of Beach Access 1. For more information, consult Commissioner Bergosh’s blog at <http://jeffbergoshblog.blogspot.com/>, April 13, 2023 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Old deeds give new life to the fight for public access to Perdido Key beaches” by Mollye Barrows at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/escambia-county/2023/04/13/property-deeds-give-public-an-edge-in-fight-for-access-to-beaches-on-perdido-k-versus-private-beache/70107445007/> and April 19, 2023 *Mullet Wrapper* article “Bergosh sets plan in motion to ‘liberate’ Perdido Key

beaches” by John Mullen at <https://mulletwrapper.net/bergosh-sets-plan-in-motion-to-liberate-perdido-key-beaches/>.

### **Beach Sign Ordinance**

On May 4, 2023, the Escambia County Board of County Commissioners will vote on an ordinance addressing “No Trespassing” signs on Perdido Key private beaches that reduces the number of allowed signs from three to one and requires them to be within 10 feet of the dune vegetation line and no larger than 24” by 24” with a maximum height of 6 feet. To view the proposed ordinance, go to

<https://civicclerk.blob.core.windows.net/stream/ESCAMBIACOFI/de99150a-50f3-41ac-b439-4a03d9f7aca9.pdf?sv=2021-10-04&st=2023-04-29T15%3A23%3A47Z&se=2024-04-29T15%3A28%3A47Z&sr=b&sp=r&sig=mg%2Bes%2FBh7YS0Xhtake85NZLK8TNviTVvNXyMsDxmeOU%3D>.

### **Military Appreciation at Blue Angel Recreation Area**

On Saturday, May 20 from 3:30 to 8:30 PM, the Perdido Key Area Chamber of Commerce and other Perdido Key community organizations, businesses, and volunteers will host the “Star-Spangled Salute: Military Appreciation Festival” for active duty and retired military, DOD personnel and their family members. It will feature games and activities, arts and crafts, a kid zone, food and live entertainment as well as a fireworks display. New this year, the festival will be held at the Blue Angel Recreation Area, 2100 Bronson Rd (off Hwy 98 and not far from the Rt. 98 bridge to Lillian). Drawn from Perdido Key Area Chamber of Commerce release.

### **Rice’s Whale Protection Remains**

Rice’s Whales inhabit the northern portion of the Gulf of Mexico and were only identified as a separate species in 2021. Only 51 remain and are protected under the 1972 Marine Mammal Recovery Act from activities that might result in their “unintentional harming or killing,” possibly from Eglin Air Force Base exercises. Local congressional representative Matt Gaetz had proposed removing the protection, but the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued a letter extending “Eglin’s ability to test its weapons inside an established Gulf Test Range through April 13, 2030.” For more on this complicated issue, see the April 20, 2023 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Despite best efforts of US Rep Matt Gaetz, Rice’s Whale remains protected in Eglin fire zone.” by Tom McLaughlin at <https://sports.yahoo.com/despite-best-efforts-us-rep-090300659.html#:~:text=Pensacola%20News%20Journal-,%20Despite%20best%20efforts%20of%20US%20Rep%20Matt%20Gaetz%2C%20Rice's%20Whale,protected%20in%20Eglin%20fire%20zone&text=Despite%20the%20best%20efforts%20of,t%20he%20highly%20endangered%20Rice's%20Whale>.

### **Warrington Middle School may yet Close**

The agreement between Escambia County School Boards and Charter Schools USA to keep Warrington Middle School open could unravel because of the Charter Schools list of “seemingly non-negotiable terms for a long-term commitment to take over operations of the school.” Disputed Items include what students from which areas will attend the school, e.g., will neighborhood children be able to attend their neighborhood school, and what organization will pay for upkeep of the school. For more on the issue, see the April 13, 2023 *Pensacola News*

*Journal* article “Closure back in play at Warrington Middle School after charter terms cause major concern” by Brittany Misencik at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/education/2023/04/13/warrington-middle-may-close-if-escambia-school-board-rejects-charter/70110703007/>.

### **Navarre Beaches to be Restored**

Santa Rosa County Commissioners voted to add 900,000 cubic yards of sand to 4.1 miles of Navarre Beach. The beaches were last renourished in 2016. The nearly \$18 million cost will be shared by the County (from tourist taxes), Florida DEP and FEMA. For more on the issue, see the April 28, 2023 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Santa Rosa County Commissioner votes to go all in on Navarre Beach restoration” by Tom McLaughlin at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/navarre/2023/04/28/navarre-beach-santa-rosa-commission-to-fund-18-million-renourishment/70157720007/#:~:text=%22Congratulations%20Navarre%20Beach%2C%22%20Commission,the%20county's%20greatest%20visitor%20attraction.>

### **NOAA Awards for local Watershed Projects**

The Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program announced awards totaling \$24 million for three projects in local watersheds. These include “\$10.9 million for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative, \$12.8 million for the Perdido Watershed Initiative, and \$300,000 for the EscaRosa Oyster Shell Recycling Program.” For more on the issue, go to the *Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program* news article “NOAA Awards \$24 Million” at <https://www.ppbec.org/articles/2443-noaa-awards-24-million>.

### **Manatee Deaths in Lee County**

Florida Fish and Wildlife reported that of the 227 manatee deaths in Florida during the first three months of 2023, 65 occurred in Lee County – the center of a “lingering and deadly red tide outbreak.” For more on the issue, see the April 12, 2023 *Fort Myers News-Press* article “We’re quite concerned: Red tide, Lee County at center of 65 Florida manatee deaths” by Chad Gillis at <https://www.news-press.com/story/news/environment/2023/04/12/manatees-dying-by-dozens-in-lee-county-waters-largely-due-to-red-tide/70103213007/>.

### **May Calendar**

May 02-07 and 17-21 – Blue Wahoos at Blue Wahoo Stadium in Pensacola

May 04-06 – Gulf Coast Hot Air Balloon Festival at OWA

May 04-07 and 11-14 – NAS Pensacola public access including Naval Aviation Museum

May 05 – Cinco de Mayo celebration at various venues

May 05-06 – Fly Fishing Fest at Gulf State Park Learning Center

May 05-07 – Hillbilly Lifestyle Perdido Key Music Festival at Playa del Rio RV Resort

May 05-07 – Women’s National Collegiate Beach Volleyball Championship at Gulf Shores

May 06 – Rosamond Johnson Beach Day at Perdido Key Area Gulf Islands National Seashore

May 06 – Arts and Crafts festivals at Navy Point and Sanders Beach

May 12 – Pensacola Ladies Billfish Tournament at Pensacola Beach

May 13-14 – Art in the Park in downtown Foley

May 14 – Mother’s Day events at various venues

May 14 and 28 – Blues on the Bay at Community Maritime Park in Pensacola  
May 16 – Thru traffic on River Road closed for several months for culvert replacement  
May 16-21 – Orange Beach Billfish Classic  
May 18-21 – Hangout Music Festival 2023 in Gulf Shores  
May 20 – Star Spangled Salute: Military Appreciation Festival at Blue Angel Recreation Area  
May 20 – Gulf Coast Culture Fest at Seville Square and Bartram Park in Pensacola  
May 22 – National Estuaries Day highlighted at Dauphin Island Sea Lab  
May 26-28 – Pensacola Pride Memorial Day Weekend at Pensacola Beach  
May 27 – Family Beach Fest at Pensacola Beach  
May 27 – Kenny Chesney and Kelsea Ballerini at The Wharf Amphitheater

Blue Angels practice at NAS Pensacola May 2,3,9,10,16,17,31

Bands on the Beach at Pensacola Beach every Tuesday, 7-9 PM April to October

The following websites provide additional information about events 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