



## SEPTEMBER 2024

### **Commissioner Bergosh Defeated in Primary Election**

In a result that surprised many, Escambia County District 1 Commissioner Jeff Bergosh was defeated in the recent Republican primary election receiving 36.84% of the vote to Steve Stroberger's 54.14%. Because there is no candidate from the Democratic Party, US Marine veteran Stroberger will become the next District 1 Commissioner. The vacant District 4 Commissioner position will be determined following the November general election in a contest between Republican Ashlee Hofberger who won the Republican primary and Democrat Ron Helms. As the linked article by Jim Little indicates, the dynamics of the new Escambia County Board of County Commissions are likely to be very different from recent years. For more on this issue, see the August 23, 2024 *Pensacola News Journal* article "Tuesday's primary was a political earthquake for the Escambia County Commission" by Jim Little at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/escambia-county/2024/08/23/escambia-county-commission-primary-election-saw-major-shakeup/74886971007/>.

### **September 21 Perdido Key Coastal and Roadside Cleanups**

Please join the Perdido Key Association, Friends of Pensacola State Parks, Florida State Park rangers, Perdido Key Area Chamber of Commerce and other local groups for cleanups of our beaches and roadsides from 8 AM until Noon on Saturday, September 21, 2024 – International Coastal Cleanup Day! Beach cleanup volunteers will meet at the East Area of Perdido Key State Park (note the change from previous years when we met at the West Area of the Park) while roadside cleanup volunteers will meet at the Perdido Key Visitors Center. Individuals and groups are all very welcome to participate!

### **Lawsuit on 75 ft Public Access Beach Easement**

District 1 Commissioner Jeff Bergosh and Escambia County followed up a 2023 finding that some 1957 deeds transferring Perdido Key property from the Federal Government to private ownerships specified the southern 75 feet of the Gulf front lots were "subject to a perpetual easement for a beach for public use generally." The properties affected are from Perdido Skye Condominium to the eastern boundary of Perdido Key State Park. A lawsuit was recently filed contesting implementation of the easement. Attorney Robert Powell with Morehead Law Group is part of the legal team representing owners from six condo associations (La Riva III, Portico, Mirabella, Ocean Breeze, the Palms of Perdido, and Windemere) and noted "Florida law favors the marketability of title to real property, and it provides a vehicle to resolve disputes of this

very nature that involve somewhat ancient claims or interests that are asserted in someone else's property, like this easement." Commissioner Jeff Bergosh said he will fight to keep the beach open. For more on this issue, go to the August 6, 2024 *Pensacola News Journal* article "Condo owners on Perdido Key file lawsuit over validity of new public easement on beach" by Mollye Barrows at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/escambia-county/2024/08/06/perdido-key-condo-owners-file-lawsuit-over-public-easement-on-beach/74671317007/>.

### **District 1 August 7 Town Hall Meeting**

District 1 Commissioner Jeff Bergosh hosted a town hall meeting at the Perdido Bay United Methodist Church on August 7, 2024. He was joined by several members of the Escambia County Staff, including County Administrator Wes Moreno. Commissioner Bergosh and the County staff primarily addressed infrastructure issues affecting the Perdido area, including improving/replacing the Perdido Key Drive/Johnson Beach Road roundabout, adding lanes to Sorrento Road, concerns about the Canal Rd/Perdido Key Drive intersection, improving crosswalks on Perdido Key Drive, adding sidewalks/paths to the south side of Perdido Key Drive, acquiring new beach access property on Perdido Key, pursuing underground utilities for Perdido Key and evaluating the Valencia Square project. Commissioner Bergosh also revealed discussions to create "Sunset Island" from the small islands at the confluence of the Old River and Intracoastal Waterway (near the Sunset Grill restaurant) by using dredged sand from the Intracoastal Waterway. The island would be a new boating recreation location as well as providing a reserve of sand for beach dune restoration following major storms. The Commissioner also discussed his push to have the County adopt "concurrency management" procedures so new developments would receive County approval only where existing infrastructure, such as schools and roads, was available or planned for the location being developed. A video of the town hall is available on Commissioner Bergosh's blog at [https://jeffbergoshblog.blogspot.com/2024/08/blog-post\\_51.html](https://jeffbergoshblog.blogspot.com/2024/08/blog-post_51.html).

### **Controversial Florida State Park Changes Postponed**

A proposal by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) for major additions to several Florida state parks (part of the "Great Outdoors Initiative") has been postponed by Governor DeSantis following substantial bipartisan opposition. According to 1000 Friends of Florida: "The plans include building three golf courses on more than 1,000 acres of scrub habitat at Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Martin County, as well as constructing 350-room lodges and pickleball courts at Anastasia State Park in St. Johns County and Topsail State Park in Walton County. Nine parks altogether would be impacted." "They [Florida state parks] are sanctuaries for wild lands, wildlife and the millions of people who treasure them. This is increasingly important in fast developing Florida. So the DEP proposal, if implemented, would represent a radical, irreversible change for lands within the Florida Parks system." For more on the issue, see the August 29, 2024 *Tallahassee Democrat* article "Amid statewide backlash, DeSantis calls on DEP to put Florida state park plans on hold" by Gary Rohrer at <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/politics/2024/08/28/florida-gov-desantis-puts-controversial-state-parks-plans-on-hold-jonathan-dickinson/74980449007/>; 1000 Friends of Florida comments drawn from August 21, 2024 and August 23, 2024 e-mails.

### **Siquenza Cove Resurfacing Project**

Escambia County's Board of County Commissioners has approved the Siquenza Cove Resurfacing Project that calls for "a partial reconstruction of roadway on areas of Gongora Drive and Don Carlos Drive. The project also include[s] resurfacing a portion of River Road, Don Carlos Drive, Gongora Drive, and Siquenza Drive." The roadway shall be open to at least

one lane of traffic for the duration of the project. Scheduling information for the project will be distributed when available. Drawn from “Siquenza Cove Resurfacing Project” at <https://procurement.opengov.com/portal/escambiacountyfl/projects/93578/document>.

### **New Perdido Key Condo**

Escambia County’s Development Review Committee (DRC) approved two residential development projects in July, 2024: “Highland Ridge” in Ensley and “Royal Beach at Perdido” on Perdido Key. Royal Beach at Perdido will be a 10 story condominium with eight residential units located at 14757 Perdido Key Drive, the site of the former Sea Oats condominium that was destroyed by Hurricane Ivan in 2004. For more on this issues, see the August 1, 2024 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Ensley, Perdido Key to get more residences after pair of projects OK’d in July” by Edward Bunch III at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/2024/08/01/ensley-perdido-key-residential-projects-approved-in-escambia-countyd-in-july/74586018007/>.

### **Gulf State Park Fishing Pier Reopened**

After undergoing extensive repairs since it was damaged by Hurricane Sally in 2020, the Gulf State Park Pier near the Orange Beach/Gulf Shores boundary reopened on August 19. The pier’s gift shop and restaurant have reopened, but the observation deck remains closed pending installation of a new elevator. A ribbon-cutting ceremony will occur at a later date. For more on this issue, see the August 21, 2024 *Mullet Wrapper* article “Gulf State Park Fishing Pier is back open!” at <https://mulletwrapper.net/gulf-state-park-fishing-pier-is-back-open-2/>.

### **Red White and Birdies Golf Scramble Venue Change**

The location for the 2024 Perdido Key Area Chamber of Commerce’s “Red, White and Birdies Golf Scramble” on October 11 has been changed from the Lost Key Golf and Beach Club to the A.C. Read Golf Course at NAS Pensacola.

### **Beach Express Traffic Up**

After tolls were lifted on the Foley Beach Express Bridge in Orange Beach, traffic on the Foley Beach Express has increased by 6,000 to 8,000 vehicles a day (20% rise) while according to Foley Mayor Ralph Hellmich traffic on Hwy. 59 in Baldwin County has dropped. For more on this issue, see the August 20, 2024 *Mullet Wrapper* article “Beach Express traffic has increased by 20 percent since toll lifted” at <https://mulletwrapper.net/beach-express-traffic-has-increased-by-20-percent-since-toll-lifted/>.

### **Master Naturalist Course**

Interested in learning more about our region’s natural wonders? Please consider the “Florida Master Naturalist Program” run by UF/IFAS of the University of Florida. The course runs from October 2 until November 12, 2024 with in person meetings one day a week at various locations. Tuition is required but fellowships may be available. For more information, go to <https://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/fmnp/cs24-17inperson.php>; note registration closes at 10 AM on September 25, 2024.

### **Scallops in Big Lagoon**

The scallop population in local waterways has collapsed in recent decades, most likely from sea grass loss, low water quality and over-harvesting. A 2024 count of scallops in Big Lagoon, however, found 101 scallops – a substantial rise from only 2 found in 2023. Efforts continue to ensure the count was accurate. The Santa Rosa Sound count increased from 2 to 32. As

noted in the study: “It is important for locals NOT to harvest scallops from either body of water. First, it is illegal. Second, any chance of recovering this lost population will be lost if the adult population densities are not high enough for reproductive success.” Drawn from the August 30, 2024 *UF/IFAS Extension* publication “2024 Pensacola Scallop Search Report” by Rick O’Connor at <https://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/nat/2024/08/30/2024-pensacola-scallop-search-report/>.

### **Invasive Plants on Perdido Key**

A recent survey found patches of invasive beach vitex and cogongrass on Perdido Key. These will be addressed in the months ahead. Cogongrass has passed its blooming season but can be identified by its long green leaves with distinctive white stripe in the center or off-center. Do not attempt to remove the plants because they are easily spread without proper procedures. For more information on cogongrass, go to the *UF/UFA Blog* “Now is the Time to Search for Invasive Cogongrass” by Rick O’Connor at <https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/escambiaco/2024/04/18/now-is-the-time-to-search-for-invasive-cogongrass/>.

### **Successful Sea Turtle Hatches!**

More than 160 loggerhead sea turtle hatchlings made it to the Gulf early in August from two nests on Perdido Key and 13 in Pensacola Beach. Some of the nests remaining include less common green and Kemp’s ridley sea turtles. For more on this issue, see the August 6, 2024 *Pensacola News Journal* article “Pensacola Beach, Perdido Key celebrate first sea turtle hatches of season” at <https://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/pensacola/beaches/2023/08/06/pensacola-beach-perdido-key-see-first-sea-turtle-hatches-of-season/70528904007/>.

### **Lionfish Festival**

Following efforts by many divers to help reduce the number of invasive lionfish in our area waters, the Pensacola Lionfish Festival will be held September 21 and 22 on Pensacola Beach. Along with many vendors and displays, the festival will be a great opportunity to have lionfish for lunch or dinner – they taste really good! For more on the event, go to <https://pensacolalionfishfestival.com/>.

Blue Angels practice at NAS Pensacola on September 4,10,11,17,24

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

### **September 2024 Calendar**

Sep 01 – Labor Day celebrations at OWA and The Wharf

Sep 01&10-15 – Pensacola Blue Wahoos at Blue Wahoo Stadium in Pensacola

Sep 02 – Labor Day

Sep 02-04 – USS Richard M. McCool, Jr. (LPD 29) at NAS Pensacola

Sep 05-07 – Bulls on the Beach at the Flora-Bama

Sep 05-07 – Backpack Project USA Family Fishing Rodeo at Grand Lagoon Yacht Club

Sep 07 – Coastal Triathlon at Gulf Place Public Beach in Gulf Shores

Sep 07 – Wingman Foundation Pensacola Memorial 5K and Fun Run in downtown Pensacola

Sep 14 – Rock4Vets Run/Walk at Maritime Park Amphitheater in downtown Pensacola

Sep 14 – Turtle Fest at Gulf State Park Fishing Pier in Orange Beach  
Sep 14 – WSRE PBS Kids Day at Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park in Fort Walton Beach  
Sep 20 – “Cinemas in the Sand” movie *Inside Out* at Gulfside Pavilion Pensacola Beach  
Sep 21 – International Coastal Cleanup Day on Perdido Key and Alabama Gulf Coast  
Sep 21 – Bird watch Field Trip to Ft. Pickens  
Sep 21 – Pensacola Lionfish Festival on Pensacola Beach  
Sep 21 – Burgers, Bourbon and Beer Festival at Destin Harbor in Destin  
Sep 27-29 – Pensacola Seafood Festival at Seville Square in downtown Pensacola  
Sep 27-29 – Destin Seafood Festival at Destin Harbor in Destin  
Sep 28 – Fee Free Days at Gulf Islands National Seashore, Johnson Beach and Ft. Pickens

<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