

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION  
DIVISION OF RECREATION AND PARKS  
OFFICE OF PARK PLANNING**



**CAYO COSTA  
STATE PARK**

**PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS  
AND COMMENTS**

**From:** Melanie & Brian Holaway  
**To:** [FLStateParkPlanning](#)  
**Cc:** [Alsentzer, Daniel](#)  
**Subject:** Cayo Costa State Park UMP  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 21, 2018 4:22:21 PM

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Good afternoon.

I had the opportunity to attend the Public Meetings on March 20 & 21 related to the Cayo Costa State Park UMP this week.

I applaud the staff for conducting these meetings, especially Daniel. I felt staff truly listened and were authentic in responding to the comments. I agree with most of the comments made, but feel the need to articulate my concerns with the "weighted" amount of comments related to the South End Dock usage since there were no general users of the south end dock present or tourists to present the other side.

I mentioned this to Daniel in person today and want to mention it again. The key word that continues to come up in these discussions, is BALANCE. Please keep in mind a balance of use when it comes to the Commercial Operations at the South end. Many in attendance today were pushing for all commercial operations to take place at the north end of the island, but this is not going to provide BALANCE. I recognize and agree with concerns related to the amount of commercial usage at the south end dock, however, commercial operations have been operating successfully for almost 20 years at the south end prior to the change implemented in 2016. I believe there are a few ways to continue operating a large commercial boat at the south end of the island.

One is to go back to just how things were prior to the south end dock being used.

**Some other ideas to lessen the impact to the south end of the island are:**

- Only operate large boats to the south end at the point 5 days a week. (ex: no commercial trips on Sunday or Mondays).
- Only use the south end dock when weather does not allow to safely anchor beach side or bayside at the south end point.
- Special events such as wedding receptions or other events involving tents to only be conducted at the North end.

**Some opportunities to better relations between the concessionaire and the private owners at the south end:**

- Install a pay pole at the south end which the concessionaire would be responsible for collecting daily and remitting to the park.
- Concessionaire to participate in park approved dune and plant restoration efforts near the south end.
- Educate concessionaire on sensitive vegetation, native plants, shoreline nesting birds, etc on the island and how they can manage flow of people better on their trips to the south end.

Again, these daily commercial trips operated for 20 years with little or no resistance

from the public or land owners.

The large concessionaire boat going to the south end does have a bathroom aboard for visitors to use, provides shade and drinks for those who want to just sit on the boat to people watch. When the boat is docked at the south dock, the bathroom is less accessible and the boat is out of view for those wishing to sit and watch on the boat. The bayside view is less appealing for many and honestly much more buggy.

The presence of the concessionaire using the south end is valuable for another set of eyes monitoring park activity and communication to the park staff on a regular basis. Also, for safety reasons the concessionaire staff being at the south end is valuable for anyone needing help such as a person being stung by a sting ray.

I truly don't believe ceasing all commercial operations at the south end is a balanced approach and does not provide sufficient access to the public who do not own a boat and wish to visit the south end as they have done for decades. I know a primary reason of concern is erosion, which I agree has accelerated near the south end dock with the increased commercial use (especially near the dunes), but the primary erosion at or near the south point and below the high tide line is primarily natural. The beach changes on a daily basis and people cannot be primarily blamed for the change of beach below the dune lines. The majority of passengers on the commercial boat anchoring at the south end point are primarily staying below the high tide line as they are searching for shells.

Keep in mind, none of the discussion at these meetings addressed the 500 acres of park on North Captiva Island of which there is a commercial boat going to almost daily. How would that commercial operation be impacted if all commercial operations must go to the north end of Cayo Costa?

Almost everyone who touches their foot on Cayo has an immediate appreciate and respect for this largely unspoiled piece of Florida. Thank you for all you do to help preserve, protect and promote one of Lee County's biggest assets for its tourists and residents.

Melanie Holaway  
Lee County Resident

**From:** [Alsentzer, Daniel](#)  
**To:** [FLStateParkPlanning](#)  
**Subject:** Cayo Costa SP...thanks.  
**Date:** Friday, March 23, 2018 12:32:06 PM

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**From:** margi29@aol.com [mailto:margi29@aol.com]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 22, 2018 10:45 PM  
**To:** Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** Cayo Costa SP...thanks.

Daniel,

First of all, it was a pleasure to meet you and to work together on the UMP for Cayo Costa State Park. You are very gracious and patient and the FPS is lucky to have you in the position you are in. It is not easy to juggle the different personalities and issues that face each park you work for but you did a great job at the meetings this week juggling multiple challenges.

One very passionate Cayo Costa advocate, Virginia Morton, was not able to attend Tuesday night due to a medical issue. She is the direct descendant of the Padilla pioneer fishing family who lived on Cayo in the 1800s. I am going to send you some written comments from her along with a letter written by her relative, the first person born on the island during those times according to her family records. She has quite the story to tell. The Padilla Cemetery, referred to in the UMP, is where many of her family are buried. When we did the first "Mullet and Mangroves" video, she was interviewed.

We know you have a lot to do to absorb all of the meeting notes and input to take it to the next step. After the April 4th date, do you anticipate another 4-6 weeks to produce the final draft? Just trying to get a timeline and I can let others know.

I think our points were clear on the commercial use of the south end and we do hope the FPS makes the changes necessary to protect the irreplaceable resources Cayo Costa SP offers. We are in this for the long haul.

Again, thank you for everything Daniel.

Kind regards,

Margi Nanney

**From:** [Alsentzer, Daniel](#)  
**To:** [FLStateParkPlanning](#)  
**Subject:** South Dock of Cayo Costa  
**Date:** Friday, March 23, 2018 2:07:42 PM

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**From:** Randy Johnson [mailto:rjohnson@sakata.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 21, 2018 4:57 PM  
**To:** Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>  
**Subject:** FW: South Dock of Cayo Costa

Daniel...

Thanks again for inviting me to the meeting today.

I was a participant in BJ's meeting at the Charlotte Harbor Station on March 4, 2016 in which we were assured a prompt resolution to the controversy. Here's a long winded email I sent to staff 2 years ago, without any response. I hope we get one soon. You will recognize the same EXACT points I made in the management plan meetings last night and today. After chatting with the man driving the boat in the attachment it was apparent he was affiliated with Captiva Cruises (Mr. McCartney's friend)..which seemed unfair.

Thanks,  
Randy

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**From:** Randy Johnson  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 27, 2016 12:36 PM  
**To:** [margi29@aol.com](mailto:margi29@aol.com); [karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us); [valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us); [Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com](mailto:Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com); [donald.forgione@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:donald.forgione@dep.state.fl.us); [william.nash@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:william.nash@dep.state.fl.us); [chad.lach@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:chad.lach@dep.state.fl.us)  
**Cc:** [ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us); [Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us); Ruane, Laura <[lrwane@gannett.com](mailto:lrwane@gannett.com)>; [jlfrock@yahoo.com](mailto:jlfrock@yahoo.com)  
**Subject:** South Dock of Cayo Costa

All,

I am a boater and longtime user of the "state dock". While my main motive for getting involved in this issue revolves around public access rights, I would concur with the points made by Margi in recent emails. Public use of the south dock area has grown exponentially to 50-100/day along with the associated undesirable impacts. I would estimate this is as much as a 10X that of historical visitation numbers. Margi is correct that the high traffic areas through the dunes are creating a depression for storm surges to more easily cut through the island. The path will eventually create a "hard pan" that sea oat rhizomes or other plant roots cannot penetrate, thus exacerbating the problem. On the bay side, I have watched the Captiva Cruises gun their motors when leaving, which I suspect is creating a "blowout area" near the dock and undercutting the mangroves. I am also seeing an increase in larger private boats (see photo) being moored at this dock which I suspect may be affiliated with Captiva Cruises/South Seas Resort. Larger boats like this could not moor at the

state dock in previous years because the stern piling never existed. Neither the dock or the shallow grassy bay area approach are compatible with daily traffic involving these sorts of boats. Finally, I have noticed that the passenger boats are not taking a consistent path through the unmarked natural channel and are often cutting across the grass flats. I would like to ask the state to monitor this daily traffic and the potential impacts to the large grass flat to the east and south. As of now, I am aware of no daily boat/passenger limits for Captiva Cruises, so I am concerned that more traffic is on the horizon (i.e. boats from Punta Gorda, Pine Island, etc. going to the south dock rather than the main dock).

The lock has been taken off the gate so that others beyond Captiva Cruises can use the boardwalk, but technically not the new dock. The process can be very difficult and chaotic. I am also seeing impacts of private boats having to tie up to mangroves (per Chad Lach's suggestion) This is NOT the answer, and neither is the suggestion to drop a bow anchor and wade to shore without some sort of stern anchor on land to help stabilize the boat. Historically, the "local knowledge rule" for the "old" state dock (pre-Hurricane Charlie) was once 3-4 boats were moored, the dock was at capacity and others would have to wait for a spot. Now, chaos rules on the weekends and you will begin to see people trimming mangroves back along the shore to increase space for private boats because there is not enough room for the CC passenger boat plus ~2-3 small private flats or bay boats.

A while back, Chad mentioned 2 main reasons for the policy shift towards Captiva Cruises: #1) to increase visitors to the park; and #2) to help spread out the density of visitors from the Captiva Cruises charters more evenly from Captiva Pass to the state dock. Of all places, increasing visitors to the south end and "the narrows" area does not make sense because of environmental, archaeological (Faulkner Mound), and logistical reasons. Reason #2 seemed like a good idea, but in reality, it seems that Captiva Cruises has abandoned their Captiva Pass landings, so the full impact has shifted to "the narrows".

I believe in public access for all within reason and without significant detriment to the environment. It seems that the access priority to the south dock rests with a charter service whose average client is an upscale tourist vacationing on another barrier island to the south. Captiva Cruises is advertising this as a "shelling charter". Has Captiva Island combed their beaches to such a degree that tourists need to go shelling elsewhere? What about a mainland resident like myself who are year-round stewards and supporters of the park? Do we have a voice? I have heard the argument about collecting the park fee from private boaters would be difficult at the south end, but my suggestion of selling annual park decals was met with disinterest. Hundreds of boats anchor in the surf of Cayo Costa each spring/summer weekend, but the main boat basin does not have the capacity to take on that traffic merely to pay a few dollars in park fees. Most of us would be happy to support Cayo Costa through annual decals if money is the driving force behind giving the park vendor more latitude.

The imbalance between the park vendor, private local boaters, island residents, and the environment has become obvious. There needs to be a ceiling of visitors/boats/boat types to the state dock at "the narrows", and private boaters should be included in the average daily quota. Moreover, private boaters deserve a more formal way of mooring in order to access the boardwalk more easily.

In the March 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, I was promised a swift resolution, but we are approaching 2 months without one.

Thanks for your time and consideration,

Randy



**Randall R. Johnson**

FL Station Branch Manager / Plant Pathologist

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[VEGETABLES](#)



**From:** [margi29@aol.com](mailto:margi29@aol.com) [<mailto:margi29@aol.com>]

**Sent:** Wednesday, April 27, 2016 9:28 AM

**To:** [anhinga42@comcast.net](mailto:anhinga42@comcast.net); [millercornell@mindspring.com](mailto:millercornell@mindspring.com); [karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us); [valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us); [Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com](mailto:Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com)

**Cc:** [ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us); [Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us)

**Subject:** Re: Plovers gone, dune systems being destroyed

All,

Sorry I am so tardy about the timing of my response to these recent emails, have been out of town.

Consistent monitoring of the birds along the southernmost beaches of Cayo (known historically as "the narrows") has been inconsistent and sometimes non-existent. We know this is because of lack of staff/time/money and because it's simply hard to access. Because of it's remote nature, this is the exact reason why the birds came to the south end, to get away from all the people, noise and hoopla. Now a large portion of this habitat is being taken away from them on Cayo.

Because of our recent outcry to the park system over the new commercial use of a new south dock the state has stepped up its monitoring in that area. It is clear the hundreds of people coming now have truly disturbed what was once "wild Florida" and a prime area for protected plovers and other creatures/plants that depend on such habitats to have healthy life cycles.

Since 1978 I have had a cabin on the south end adjacent to the new dock. There are five families who have had private houses together, this dock is in between these houses on a state owned lot sold to the state using EEL funds in 1978. Because I have been down there the most and have hiked (and worked

killing exotics) along that long stretch of beach for almost 40 years my empirical knowledge of the area is very strong.

About 5 to 6 years ago we began to see a large number of snowy plovers (the others birds you mention have also been present but the plovers were relatively "new" to the area). About 10-15 years ago the south "point" (where fallen trees are in Gulf) began to shift south and the past few years since Charley a new "emerging" dune system has begun to grow widening this fragile south end of the island. Hurrican Charley came on shore right at the spot where this "dock" is...it's still recovering.

While I am not formally trained to count/note and record these birds I can say we had as many as 12 pairs from the "new" point (wide area) south to the area where our houses are. I have a photo of eggs in the sand in front of our houses from 2014. I don't think the state has the consistent oversight we do to note these birds but they WERE there. Now they are gone. The closest plovers I saw were about a mile north,, none to the south.

Our concern is the loss of habitat for the birds as well as the turtles (hard to keep 3000 people per month off the nests since this part of the beach is so narrow to begin with)...not to mention the destruction of the dune system. We had a meeting March 4 with DEP officials where local boaters and property owners were present. We have had no formal response to this point from out pleas to stop this destruction. We are pursuing every avenue to see that all commercial groups (Captiva Cruises is bringing these groups and has the concession) go to the north end where there is infrastructure to handle such large numbers.

I am taking the liberty of sharing a recent, short pdf/power point with you that will show you photos of what we are talking about.

We hope the state has the wisdom to seek a solution that makes sense. This is just not right.

I would like to meet with you Charlie and see what I can do to become a volunteer with Audubon.

Thank you for listening!

Margi Nanney (941) 527-7865

-----Original Message-----

From: anhinga42 <[anhinga42@comcast.net](mailto:anhinga42@comcast.net)>

To: Brad Cornell <[millercornell@mindspring.com](mailto:millercornell@mindspring.com)>; margi29 <[margi29@aol.com](mailto:margi29@aol.com)>; karen.schanzle <[karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us)>; valinda.subic <[valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us)>; Harris, Katheryn <[Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com](mailto:Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com)>

Cc: ezell.givens <[ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us)>; Gloria Beauchamp <[Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us)>

Sent: Mon, Apr 25, 2016 1:48 pm

Subject: RE: Plovers gone, dune systems being destroyed

Hi Brad and All,

As for any survey data questions, I am part of a group of Lee County Bird Patrol (volunteer group affiliated with Lee Parks and Rec/Conservation 2020) folks that 5 years ago began doing shorebird nesting surveys for FWC and their efforts to coordinate a cooperative effort to survey all the coastline in SWFL for nesting shorebirds during that season (Mar-Jul). We keep our data in an an eBird account, and share it with both the FWC database and the Cayo Costa personnel/admins. We also survey outside the breeding season as we can fit it in. In short, there are 5 years of recent data for the island's outer beach and Gulf coastline. While I haven't personally surveyed the south end of the island (I have covered from the lagoon north), I can say those that have probably did not cover the backside of the island where there are structures and docks.

Also should be said since it was mentioned, the nesting season for shorebirds, including the Snowy



Plovers, in most cases begins in earnest around mid-March. This year is a good example of the timing with eggs, as they have been reported around the state for a few weeks now, and the first known Snowy chick in SWFL was reported this weekend. Any birds seen in January would most always be wintering individuals/pairs, and there are always a good number of them present at Cayo. As an example, the data I have access to from a 15 March survey this year by Karen and some other park personnel had 4 Snowies present north of the Tunnel of Love area, and 10 south of Tunnel of Love with no nesting observed. Just recently another survey had 10 Snowies north of the Tunnel of Love, and 6 to the south. No nests were observed, but many of the birds were noted to be in pairs, and given the date were likely mated pairs that may have already made nest scapes or laid eggs.

As for the campground area, I/we haven't seen nesting activity anywhere near there over my 5 years involved.. While there is a dune system in that area, it has not been attractive to nesting species like Snowy Plover, Wilson's Plover, Least Tern, Black Skimmer, or American Oystercatcher. The lagoon area and farther down the island to the south have been the preferred nesting areas.

We are not involved in policy or management decisions, only surveys, so that's all I can really address.

Charlie

Charlie Ewell  
Cape Coral, FL  
[anhinga42@comcast.net](mailto:anhinga42@comcast.net)

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S® 5 ACTIVE™, an AT&T 4G LTE smartphone

----- Original message -----

From: Brad Cornell <[millercornell@mindspring.com](mailto:millercornell@mindspring.com)>  
Date: 04/22/2016 3:18 PM (GMT-05:00)  
To: [margi29@aol.com](mailto:margi29@aol.com), [karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us), [valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us), "Harris, Katheryn" <[Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com](mailto:Katheryn.Harris@MyFWC.com)>  
Cc: [ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us), Charlie Ewell <[anhinga42@comcast.net](mailto:anhinga42@comcast.net)>, Gloria Beauchamp <[Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:Gloria.Beauchamp@dep.state.fl.us)>  
Subject: RE: Plovers gone, dune systems being destroyed

Hi Margi, Karen, Charlie and all,

This is an old email and I have not been engaged on this for the past month, so I would like to know if DEP or FWC, or Lee Bird Patrol has been able to record snowy plover nesting on Cayo Costa this spring and reported them on the Florida Shorebird Database. In particular, is there a way to post (sign, posts and twine) nests found near high activity areas like the campgrounds, or the dock described below? The dock situation especially seems in need of oversight, so I also wonder if this situation has been addressed.

Audubon is conducting its volunteer nesting season Shorebird Stewardship training tomorrow, 4/23 at Lovers Key S.P. for new and veteran stewards from 9am - 11am. However, the nesting area we monitor is the south end of Ft. Myers Beach and we have not extended our work to Cayo Costa until Margi N. brought this to our attention. Please advise.

Thanks,





**From:** Lisa Kreiger  
**To:** [FLStateParkPlanning](#)  
**Subject:** Cayo Costa State Park  
**Date:** Monday, March 26, 2018 3:19:36 PM

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The purpose of this email is to submit comments regarding the proposed improvements and facilities at Cayo Costa State Park.

I strongly support the inclusion of a predator control objective (Objective B, p. 74) in the Cayo Costa State Park Unit Management Plan. I would like to emphasize the importance of this control by providing you with personal observations, gleaned through involvement. I worked as the Friends of Cayo Costa State Park's Adopt-A-Nest Program Coordinator for four years. The Adopt-A-Nest Program is a fund-raising program in which supporters "adopt" a sea turtle nest, and the funds raised are used to support sea turtle conservation efforts at the park.

As a review, the Recovery Plan for the NW Atlantic Population of the Loggerhead Sea Turtle states a recovery objective goal of ensuring the annual rate of mammalian predation on nests be 10% or below by implementing ecologically sound year-round predator control programs. I know this may not be expected, a goal, feasible, nor required, for Cayo Costa. But - it appears that the park had an approximate nest predation rate (partial or full) of 69% in the 2017 nesting season based on data collected by park staff and turtle interns. The high rate of nest predation in 2017 is mentioned on page 49 of the Unit Management Plan.

The park tracks nest productivity data every year, including predation data. This data can be used as leverage to request additional funding for a year-round trapping program, and assist in obtaining grant funding for predator control. In talking to the leadership of the Friends of Cayo Costa (CSO), they too have expressed concern for the level of predation and appear willing to fund or partially fund additional trapping resources. So whether the Park is able to obtain grant funding, state funding, or assistance from the CSO, I look forward to increased support that will help grow the rate of successful nests.

The interns at the Park did an amazing amount of work this past year, including screening the nests, but the predators are very clever. I know there is more we can do to minimize turtle exposure to predators. I hope that by including year-round predator control in the Unit Management Plan, the Park can request consistent funding for this activity from the state. It is a defensible request based on data.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,  
Lisa Kreiger

Brad

Brad Cornell  
Southwest Florida Policy Associate  
Audubon of the Western Everglades/Audubon Florida  
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**From:** [margi29@aol.com](mailto:margi29@aol.com) [mailto:[margi29@aol.com](mailto:margi29@aol.com)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 15, 2016 11:39 AM  
**To:** [karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:karen.schanzle@dep.state.fl.us); [valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:valinda.subic@dep.state.fl.us)  
**Cc:** [ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us](mailto:ezell.givens@dep.state.fl.us); [millercornell@mindspring.com](mailto:millercornell@mindspring.com)  
**Subject:** Plovers gone, dune systems being destroyed

Valinda and Karen,

I was remiss in not copying you on the email I sent Mr. Givens yesterday explaining my grave concern over the loss of habitat on Cayo Costa's south end as a result of hundreds of people being newly offloaded along the island's narrowest section. As you know, this section was directly hit by Hurricane Charley in 2004 and is struggling to recover. As well, the newly rebuilt dock runs between private properties and is creating a dangerous divide. The sea oat dune line which has been forming the past two years has been destroyed where this path comes out and all of the dunes are trampled on.

When I was there in January and many times over the past five years, I have witnessed as many as 12 pairs of nesting snowy plovers. In January there were between 8 and 12 I saw along this stretch of beach. This past weekend I SAW NONE. Because most of your bird surveys were not done along this area, it is important to use empirical data such as our sightings to account for these endangered birds and the others who call Cayo home.

There are no other sites this pristine (or were pristine) that can act as a natural nesting area that are not over-run with people, lights, buildings and such. Cayo is probably one of the ONLY place their numbers are growing because their other habitats are disappearing rapidly.

The turtles are the same way. Would you pick a beach with lots of lights or one that is dark to lay your eggs on if you were a turtle?

YEs, I am emotional. Yes, we will see that something is done but after more than a week no one from the department has done anything. The trampling continues, the destruction continues. There is even ATV tracks landward of the dune lines showing park staff has no respect for these valuable, irreplaceable resources.

As well, the Captiva Cruise captains sit on their boat, there is no oversight of these people who are continuing to trespass on private property, trample the dunes and leave trash for us to pick up.

Please help. THIS NEEDS TO STOP IMMEDIATELY

Margi Nanney

From: Stephen Kent  
To: [FL State Park Planning](#)  
Subject: Submission of solicited public comment on proposed Cayo Costa State Park management plan  
Date: Tuesday, April 3, 2018 5:49:41 PM

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Florida Department of Environmental Protection staff members  
and  
Members of the Acquisition and Restoration Council:

Following are my comments in response to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's solicitation of public comment on the proposed park management plan for Cayo Costa State Park.  
Deadline for submission: April 4, 2018.

Submitted on April 3, 2018, by:  
Stephen Kent  
1111 Stephen Dr.  
Niceville FL 32578

Background: I have been a visitor to what is now Cayo Costa State Park since the early 1960s, when it was a Lee County park.

Comments on proposed 2018 management plan for Cayo Costa State Park:

**1) "Optimum boundary."**

The proposed plan should not concern itself with proposing expansion of the park to an "optimum boundary" (p. 48 and following). Rather, the plan should concentrate on results-oriented plans for management of the park as it exists. In any case, no justification or cost estimates are set forth in the proposed plan for expanding it. Further, I was unable to find a statutory basis authorizing a park management plan to recommend an "optimum boundary" that identifies by implication public and private lands for acquisition. The authorizing statutes cited on page 2 of the proposed plan seem to require a performance-oriented management plan, not a wish list. A proposed budget for effecting and operating such an expansion is not included in this plan. Acquisition by the park would increase costs for an already-strained parks budget. Several years ago, the state proposed selling its "surplus" parcels on Cayo Costa and North Captiva. Why does this plan now propose expanding the park?

**Recommendation: References to a park "optimum boundary" should be stricken as unfounded and unnecessary.**

**2) Acquisition of submerged lands.**

The proposed plan should not recommend expansion of the park to include Florida sovereign submerged lands. The new plan proposes expanding the park by extending it westward, under the waves, to include the 25-foot strip of sea bottom bordering the entire Gulf shoreline adjoining publicly owned and privately owned lands (pages 78 and 95; map on the unnumbered page preceding page 95). No case is made for this other than "resource protection." These are garden-variety submerged lands already held in trust by the State of Florida, and protected as such. Acquisition by the park would increase park costs, subject these lands to additional regulation and access controls as parkland, and achieve no substantial additional public good. No case is made that such expansion would benefit park users, park resources, or the citizens of Florida in general. A budget for administering the expanded area is not included in this plan. I was unable to find a statutory basis for including such a proposed expansion in what is supposed to be a performance-oriented plan specifying measurable outcomes.

**Recommendation: References to expanding the park to include sovereign submerged lands should be stricken as unfounded and unnecessary.**

**3) Long-lasting ATV tracks carved on the beaches.**

The plan includes no proposals for what, in recent years, have become semi-permanent tracks of state-operated all-terrain vehicles on the park's beaches. In years past, park personnel patrolled the southern portions of the island typically at low tide, careful steer below the expected line of the next high tide, so that the vehicles' tracks would be erased by the waves within hours. Sadly, this is no longer the case. Now is it standard practice for operators of park ATVs to travel on dry sand at any time. As a result, many visitors arriving on this remote island expecting to find "the old Florida" are instead confronted by ATV tracks. (Recent photo attached.)

**Recommendation: Add as a goal that beach patrols on ATVs take place at low tide, and traverse below the expected line of the next high tide, emergencies excepted.**

**4) Recommendation: Operation of private motor vehicles, including private all-terrain vehicles, should be prohibited on the beaches of Cayo Costa State Park.**

Thank you for your kind attention.

--Stephen Kent  
[stephenkent@earthlink.net](mailto:stephenkent@earthlink.net)

## Baxley, Demi

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**From:** margi29@aol.com  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 12, 2018 9:13 PM  
**To:** Alsentzer, Daniel  
**Subject:** CAYO COSTA STATE PARK ADDITIONAL UMP COMMENT - Margi Nanney  
**Attachments:** LETTER FROM VIRGINIA PADILLA MORTON.pdf; ADDITIONAL LETTERS.pdf; MARGI NANNEY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON PLAN.pdf; Murdock Crocodile 8-13.JPG; Murdock Crocodile2 8-13.JPG

Daniel,

Many apologies for the delay in getting this to you. I was able to finally scan the attached documents to send them electronically. You are receiving 3 pdf "folders" and 2 .jpg images of the American Crocodile August 2013

Folder 1: Virginia Morton letter and supporting materials

Folder 2: Additional letters received by me from others after the March 21st meeting

Folder 3: Margi Nanney additional comments and plan suggestions

JPG #1 American Crocodile - image 1 (Sighted and photographed in Murdock Lagoon August, 2013)

JPG #2 American Crocodile - image 2 "" ""

Please let me know if you successfully receive all of these documents.

I know there is still a lot to be done on your end prior to seeing further recommendations. You told me you are meeting with Eric Draper soon to tell him about the public hearings and input. He and I corresponded recently and I told him how great you have been during this process thusfar. Thanks again and we do hope for the best outcome possible for Cayo Costa's future.

Thank you and I look forward to next steps.

Kind regards,

Margi Nanney

## VIRGINIA PADILLA MORTON

Pine Island, Florida

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this to add my comments to the public record regarding the Cayo Costa State Park Management Plan. It is very important to me to preserve the island as close to the way it has always been for thousands of years and to preserve the history of the families who settled there.

I am the great granddaughter of Toribio "Captain Pappy" Padilla and Laina "Juana" Perez. They were the first pioneer fishing family who settled on Cayo Costa Island in the 1800s. My great granddaddy was born in the Canary Islands in 1832 and his wife was born in Mexico. They lived on Cayo Costa and raised their children there who in turn married as the family grew over the years. Everything revolved around fishing. Times were hard and at times the weather and mosquitoes were almost unbearable. Many of the Padilla and Darna families are buried over on Cayo Costa. I am sending a copy of two stories written about Dolores Willis, the first white child born on Cayo Costa in 1882. Toribio Padilla was her maternal grandfather. She died in 1981 at the age of 98. This tells a lot of the history of my family and how it was on Cayo Costa many years ago. Please keep it for the record on Cayo Costa's history.

It is important to preserve the land and history of Cayo Costa. These are the things I am most concerned about:

1. Build the Heritage Nature Center – in the plan it calls for putting up a building where the ranger station is now. That is good but it must have a museum where the history of the island's people are told. This includes the Calusa, fishing families and others who have done a lot to help the island.
2. Protect our family cemeteries – over the years the old gravesites have been destroyed by people, storms and water. I ask that they be studied and marked so they can be protected and preserved. Please inform our family when these things are being done.
3. Buy up as much land as possible to keep it from being developed. There used to be a big effort to do this but lately word has it there are more and more places being developed. That ruins the land. Keep it as natural as it can be. Only have groups go to the park facilities on the north end to keep human impact at the widest point of the island. Leave the rest natural. Stop taking large groups to the south end of the island which is eroding.
4. Keep our families informed of changes to these things that are important to us.

I was not able to come to the meeting but ask that you add these comments to the record. I am 80 years old and have told our family's story many times. Cayo Costa means a lot to me and my family and we want it preserved and protected for all time.

Sincerely,

Virginia Padilla Morton (239) 910-4107 April 3, 2018



Submitted to: FSP, Cayo Costa State Park  
Mgmt. Plan Advisory Committee  
April 3, 2018 by Virginia Padilla Montor

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## The First White Child Born In The Area

Dolores Willis was born in the closest thing to Utopia that has ever existed in this area.

One of the fishermen played a guitar while another squeezed a lilting melody out of an accordian. The warm June breeze blowing in off the sea carried the strains of the music to the island women who chattered excitedly in their native Spanish.

A great event was about to take place, an event that would call for a "fiesta grande." It was 1882 and the first Caucasian child to be born on Cayo Costa was about to make her debut.

The first earthly sights that greeted Dolores Aquilo upon her arrival were the friendly faces of scores of relatives staring at her. By the time she saw the clear blue sky and the crystal waters washing the white sand beaches, she listened to the happy music that heralded her arrival and decided that she liked the people, the island and the music and decided to stay.

Dolores remained in the island paradise created by her maternal grandfather, Torvio Padilla, for 22 years, until she moved to Charlotte Harbor community in 1904, which was then known as Hickory Bluff.

Thought to be written by Fred Farri's, Sun Staff writer - late 1970's?

Torvio first came to Cayo Costa from his native Canary Islands before the American Civil War, when he was a strapping youth of 19. He swore that someday he'd return. And return he did shortly after he went back to the Canary Islands to pick up his family, which included Dolores' father-to-be, Joe Aquilo, then 16 and eager for adventure. Joe would leave a deep imprint upon southwest Florida.

It was no doubt the Padilla Fish Ranch that was visited by Commodore David Perry in 1824 when he was sent to local waters by the navy to look for pirates in the Charlotte Harbor area. Perry reported that instead of pirates he found an orderly, well-organized Spanish community where fishermen pursued their trade peacefully. peacefully.

Dolores said her childhood on the island was wonderful. She explained that there were other children brought to the fish ranch from the Canary Islands and from Key West where some other Canary Islanders had settled.

"We spent carefree days, gathering shells, swimming, sailing boats and doing all the other things that children left to their own devices do," she said, her dark eyes sparkling as memories stirred her.

She said there were pumpkins, sweet potatoes and tomatoes grown by her grandfather, along with pigeons, doves, chickens, geese and ducks. She added that there were plenty of deer, wild hogs, game birds, sea turtles, turtle eggs and, of course, fish, so food was never a problem.

Explaining how they hunted game, she said the fishermen would stretch one of their long nets across a narrow part of the island and stand

have screens in those days so they made netting to protect us from insects."

Dolores said her first assigned duty, when she was five, was on Sundays when she would go to visit the fishermen who lived on the outer fringes of the ranch. Her job was to thread needles for them so they could repair their clothing.

"Our house was made of regular lumber," she explained, "but the fishermen on the ranch lived in houses made of palm logs and thatch. The whole place was just beautiful."

She said there were usually at least two big fiestas a year with people coming from all over to celebrate whatever they decided was appropriate.

"There was always music. When someone felt like playing, they played. When someone felt like dancing, they danced. We did this out of pure joy. We didn't need a fiesta to be happy. Happy was a constant with us.

"There was a sponge boat with an organ on it. At least somebody told me it was an organ. Anyway, it would anchor offshore at night and we could hear the music coming across the water. It was nice. It sounded so beautiful. I imagine that I can still hear it sometimes."

She said she and her friends once found a cannon ball. They recovered it from the sea, she said. "It was a big old iron round thing and we were told it was a cannon ball. We had no idea where it originated. One of my uncles found a solid brass harpoon. He harpooned a big devilfish with it and the manta broke the line and carried away his fancy spear.

"John Gomez, who claimed to have been a cabin boy for the pirate Jose Gaspar, visited our ranch."

# First child born on Cayo Costa died Saturday

BY FRED FARRIS  
Sun Staff Writer

Delores Willis, 98, the first Caucasian child born in Cayo Costa Island, died Saturday in Medical Center Hospital. Mrs. Willis, nee Dolores Aquialo, was born on Cayo Costa on June 17, 1882.

Mrs. Willis lived in the island paradise created by her maternal grandfather, Toriva Padilla, for 22 years until she moved to Charlotte Harbor, which was then known as Hickory Bluff, in 1904.

Torvivo Padilla first came to Cayo Costa from his native Canary Islands before the Civil War when he was a 19-year-old stripling. A man of vision, Padilla recognized the potential of the area. He returned to the Canary Islands as soon as was practical and returned with other members of his family, which by then included Mrs. Willis' father, Joe Aquialo, a strapping young 16 year old who was to leave his mark deep in the sands of time in southwest Florida.

The family established "pescadores grandes," or Fish Ranches, as their camps were known.

The Padilla fish ranch was visited by Commodore David Perry in 1824 when the U.S. Navy sent him to investigate alleged acts of piracy in the Charlotte Harbor area.

Perry reported that instead of pirates he found orderly, well-organized Spanish speaking communities where fishermen pursued their trade peacefully.

Mrs. Willis once told this writer about the wonderful life she lived on the island.

"We spent carefree days, gathering shells, sailing our small boats, swimming and doing all the things that children do." (Other children had been either brought from the Canary Islands or were born in Key West.)

She said there were pumpkins, sweet potatoes and tomatoes grown by her grandfather, along with pigeons, doves, chickens, geese and ducks. She added that there were plenty of deer and wildfogs on the island as well as game birds, sea turtles and their eggs—and, of course, plenty of fish.

Explaining how they hunted, she said they'd spread their fish nets across a narrow part of the island and drive game into it, taking only what they needed for the larder and releasing the others.

"We never sat down to a meal without company," she said with a twinkle in her eye. "visitors were always welcome at the ranch. They came from Fort Myers, Punta Gorda, the other islands and

(Continued on Page 2)



DELORES WILLIS

Charlotte Sun  
March 4, 1981

June 17, 1882 - Feb 28, 1981

**BARBARA MATHEWS TRECOTT**

ATTORNEY AT LAW  
P.O. Box 1182  
Fort Myers, Florida 33902  
(239) 850-3496  
[bamtrecottlaw@gmail.com](mailto:bamtrecottlaw@gmail.com)

April 2, 2018

State of Florida, Division of State Parks  
Department of Environmental Regulation  
Tallahassee, FL

Re: Public Input - Cayo Costa Island State Park Management Plan

Dear Director of State Parks;

I am a homeowner on Cayo Costa Island and a Florida resident for 63 years.

My concerns are the 98 people that are ferried to the 'Narrows' by Captiva Cruises twice a day --- up to 49 passengers per trip twice a day for a 4-hour cruise. This concession is a menace to the pristine beach near the south end of Cayo Costa Island known as the 'Narrows.' It will become narrower the more people who trample through the mangroves and across the protected zone of small dunes for several hours of "non-stop fun." This type of activity is already provided by Captiva Cruises at the north end where the concession is supported by legal public docks, paths, restrooms and park facilities.

The use of the Narrows for profit by a subcontractor (\$49.00 per person) is contrary to the customary use of the area as passive use. The newly constructed dock located at the Narrows did not replace an existing dock as it was destroyed by Hurricane Charley in 2004. Captiva Cruises has tarnished our State Park with this commercial concession totally disturbing the back-bay waters. The new dock was not part of the Cayo Costa Island State Park Management Plan before and it should not be there now, or in the future. (see page 87 under **Existing Facilities**, to wit: Two docks offer facilitated boat access to Cayo Costa- the main park docks on Pelican Bay **and another dock near the south end of the island, which is reserved for authorized ferry boats.**) The Plan needs to eliminate reference to this dock and cease this travesty.

I ask WHO authorized this abhorrent activity and WHY does our beautiful island State Park have to pay for it through destruction of its delicate ecosystem by 49 people on the beach twice a day? WHO brought this commercial operation at the expense of the Public Interest in preserving OUR State Park? (\$2,401.00 per trip twice a day = \$4,800.00 PROFIT) Questions need to be answered. This ferry "service" to the Narrows opens the door for more prop dredging and ongoing destruction of our natural resources. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Barbara Mathews Trescott

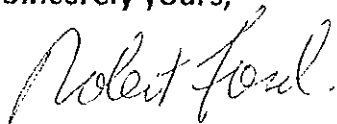
## CAYO COSTA

Our friends of Cayo Costa have had presence on this island since 1979. Collectively through the years many friends and their families have enjoyed the quality of life on Cayo Costa. Among our group are owners and past owners of property and houses on the island from Pejuan Shores, North to the park. Each and everyone of us have strong feelings for the future of this island.

The shoreline of Cayo Costa offers all the features of a remote island including tidal flow, scenic sunrise and sunset, excellent shelling, fishing, bird watching, walks along the beach, pleasant water and weather conditions. The access to the Beach by pleasure boat is unequaled in this area. Other friends of Cayo Costa include Lee County residents at St. James City, Bokelia, and other nearby locations.

We collectively wish to maintain the island as is, with all the natural beauty provided by this location. In addition we are aware that private companies are taking advantage of dropping off paying customers to walk the beach and use the seashore. This event is repeated twice daily, dropping off a large number of people on the beach. There are no park facilities these locations. We believe that the park should direct the tour boats to use the facilities at the North park area. Currently the areas of landing are environmentally sensitive and impacting the quality of Nature on the island.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Ford".

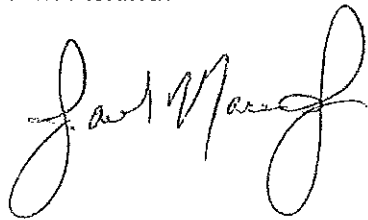
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Sincerely yours,



813-333-3908

Jack Mace

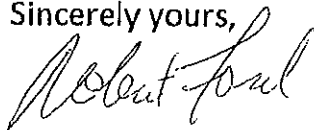
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Sincerely yours,



For:

HERB DONAT SR.  
HERB DONAT JR.  
ISABEL DONAT  
DIANE FORD  
RYAN FORD.

RYAN HOSSEMAN  
BRANTON MEASE  
CHAD SEVERINO  
MIKE THORPE  
STEVE SPANGLER.



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Sincerely yours,

Wesley Abai  
Frost proof, Fl. 33843

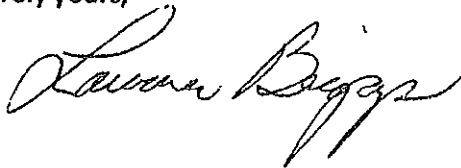
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Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laura Biggs". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the "Sincerely yours," text.

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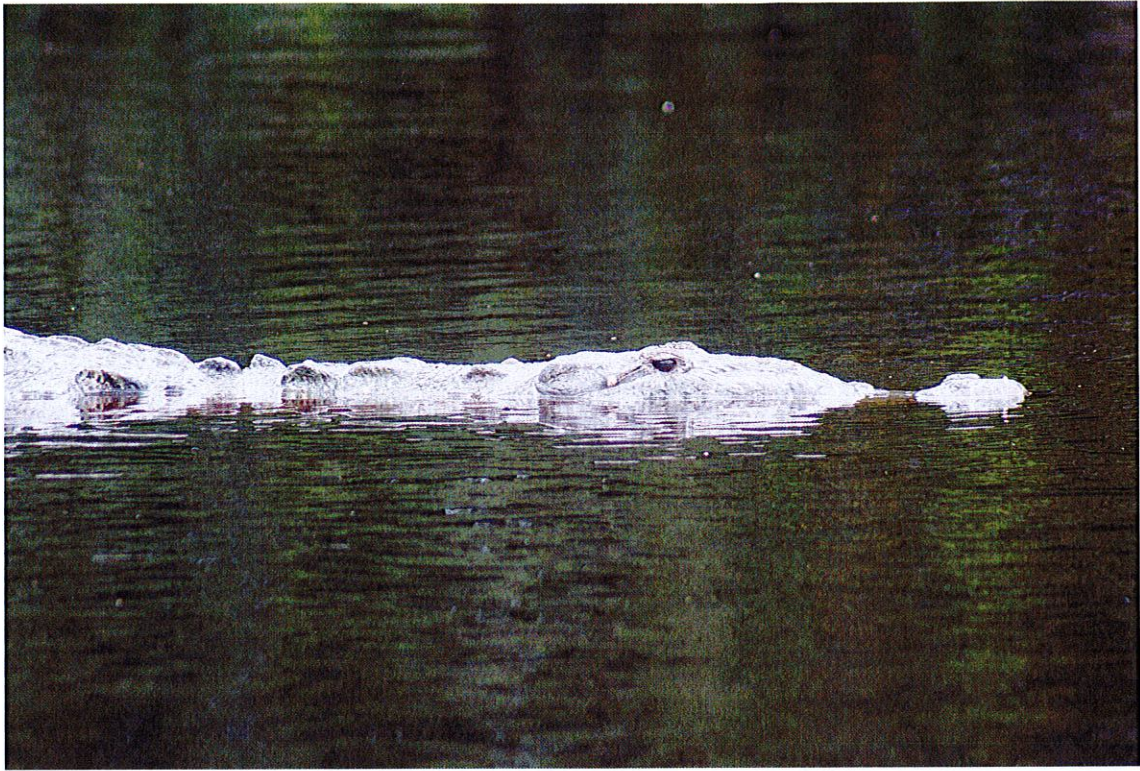
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Sincerely yours,



Kevin A. Dorsett







**STUART AND ASSOCIATES**  
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[www.StuartUrbanDesign.com](http://www.StuartUrbanDesign.com)  
March 15, 2018

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE 03/2018 CAYO COSTA STATE PARK DRAFT UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Prepared for: Daniel Alsentzer, Park Planner

Office of Park Planning \_ Division of Recreation & Parks; FL DEP

**INTRODUCTION:** As a twenty year resident of Matlacha, on scores of occasions I have taken advantage of my home's close proximity and ease of boat access to take family and friends to Cayo Costa State Park. I have explored the tropical hardwoods, fished around the bayside mangrove swamps and have played on the beaches with my children and grandchildren. The island and state park is a true gem, unique not only to Florida but to America as a whole! As a land use planner with over 33 years of professional consulting experience (see [www.StuartUrbanDesign.com](http://www.StuartUrbanDesign.com)), I have a unique perspective on Cayo Costa Island, both as a planning professional and as an avid recreational user. Consequently I am taking this time to offer my comments and recommendations in response to the Cayo Costa Advisory Group's Draft Unit Management Plan. I look forward to participating in the public planning process and the 20 March workshop. My reports emphasis revolves around the Draft Unit Management Plan's Resource Management Component basis (page 11, para. 4):

*"Because park units are often components of larger ecosystems, their proper management can be affected by conditions and events that occur beyond park boundaries. Ecosystem management is implemented through a resource management evaluation program that assesses resource conditions, evaluates management activities and refines management actions, and reviews local comprehensive plans and development permit applications for park/ecosystem impacts."*

The issue(s) that I am concerned about and am offering recommendations through the public participation process concern larger ecosystem/recreational use management issues and the rela-

tionship of these issues to outside commercial public access, public communications and economics. Specifically, the purpose of this brief is to introduce an appropriate Resiliency/Distance-decay Recreation Management Approach, more cost effective management through an enhanced interpretive signage program, and a new, much needed funding mechanism.

**CAYO COSTA MANAGEMENT GOALS AND BEST PLANNING PRACTICES:** In summary, the key Cayo Costa State Park management goals are: (a.) to restore and maintain the islands natural communities and habitat, (b.) to maintain, improve or restore imperiled species populations and habitat, (c.) to provide public access and recreational opportunities, and (d.) to develop and maintain capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the goals and objective of the management plan.



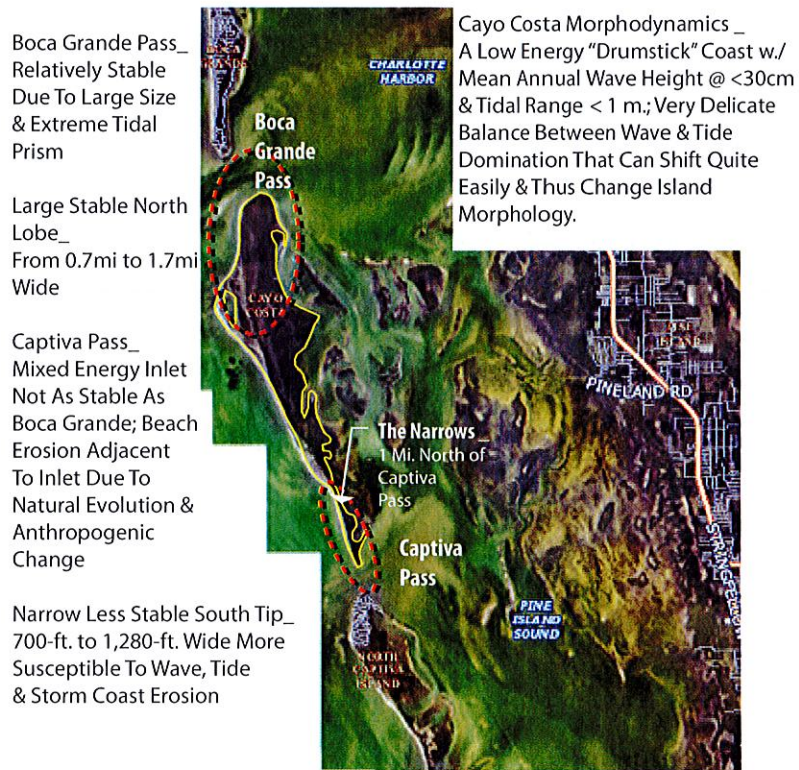
*Fig. 1 Cayo Costa Island's Murdock Point and The Lagoon Looking South*

From a land use and park planning and management perspective, there are instances where the afore referenced goals are in conflict with each other. As will be discussed, for various island recreation management zones the objective of providing public access and recreational opportunities can be in direct conflict with the objective of maintaining and restoring habitat. Consequently, it is of vital importance that the 2018 Cayo Costa Unit Management Plan specifically identify the area(s) that recreational users and public access conflict with conservation values and objectives. From such explicit identification, better management planning will evolve.

There are a number of factors to be evaluated when assessing and planning for recreational visitor utilization of lands with high conservation values. They are: (i) the conservation value of the site, (ii) its resistance to use, (iii) its recovery from use, (iv) its susceptibility to erosion, (v) the severity of direct and indirect impacts associated with specific activities, (vi) the amount of use, and (vii)

the ecological dimensions to the timing and total area of use (*10 Factors That Affect The Severity of Environmental Impacts of Visitors In Protected Areas*, Catherine Pickering; *Ambio*, 02/2010, 39(1)). For the purpose of this brief, these seven evaluative factors form Best Planning and Recreational Management practices for the author's recommendations to the 2018 Cayo Costa Unit Management Plan.

**ISLAND SYSTEMS AND COASTAL DYNAMICS:** The new Unit Management Plan is based on clear environmental, habitat and systems documentation. In order to strengthen the proposed draft, it is important integrate upland systems and coastal processes into a unified recreation management framework. The SW Florida barrier island morphodynamics analysis by Richard Davis has led to a more sophisticated understanding of Cayo Costa coastal processes (*Morphodynamics of the West-Central Florida barrier System: The delicate balance between wave and tide domination*; Richard A Davis, Jr. Dept. of Geology Un. of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620 20 Jan. 1988). This work needs to be better factored into State Park recreation management planning as it pertains to coastal erosion, and coastal user and activity locations.



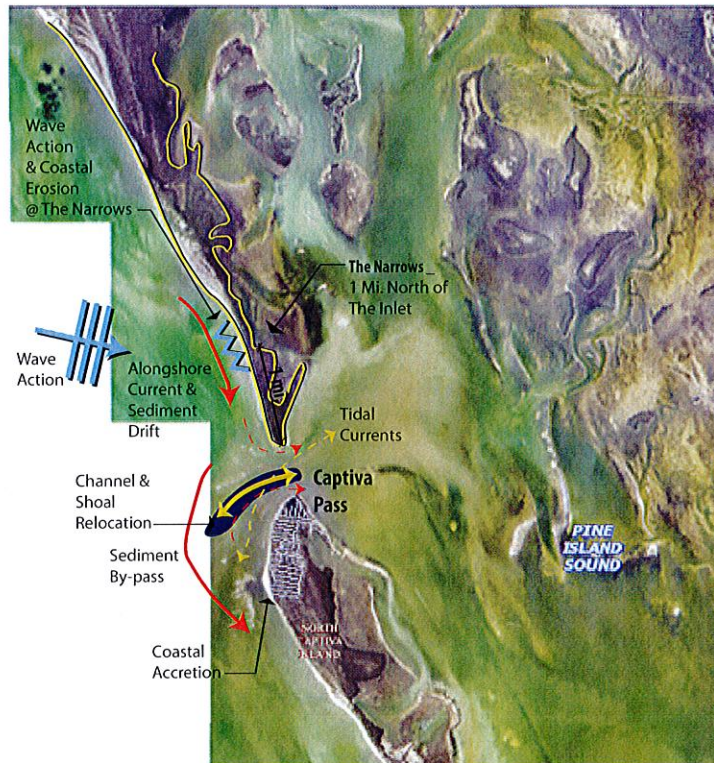
**Cayo Costa Island** \_ A Complex & Ecologically Diverse Barrier Island Featuring Marine Tidal Marsh, Beach Dune, Coastal Grasslands, Maritime Hammock & Mangrove Swamp Systems.

Fig. 2 The Cayo Costa Island Inlet Morphology



As the Davis study notes, the island narrows from a maximum north end width of 1.7 mi +/- to a minimum south end width of less than 500-ft.. In doing the island's ecological systems become more exposed to risk caused by greater exposure to severe tides, storms sand burial, and unconstrained user recreation activities. Generally speaking, for the southern end of the island (one mile north from Captiva Pass to past The Narrows) there is an absence of east to west upland systems depth which creates less resistance to use, longer recovery period from use and impacts, and susceptibility to coastal and upland erosion.

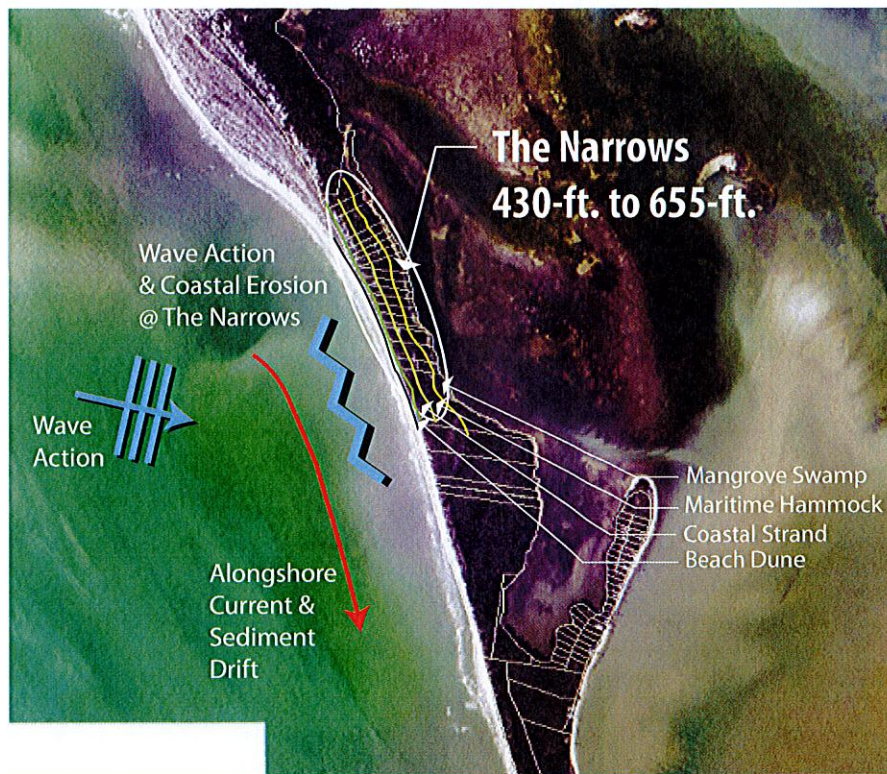
The south end of the island is bounded by Captiva Pass, a highly dynamic inlet system with associated beach erosion due to mixed conditions of natural evolution and anthropogenic change (*Evaluation of Beach Erosion Up-drift of Tidal Inlets In Southwest and Central FL*; Mohamed A Dabees and Brett Moore Humiston and Moore Engineers, 5679 Strand Ct Naples FL 34110 2017). Of particular note is the coastal cove area south of Murdock Bayou and within The Narrows geographic area. Due to wave action and north to southwest alongshore current, the curve of the coast is more susceptible to and has demonstrated a higher degree of coastal erosion. From the authors casual observations over time, it is clear that the lower and upper beach zones are regularly disturbed by high tides and storm waves. From an ecological perspective The Narrows upper beach zone recolonized by drift line annuals and trailing perennials. Above the reach of annual wave action is a very limited and thin fore dune area, consisting primarily of sea oats. From the authors observations, this zone exists under constant burial from sand blown off the beach and trampling from recreation users.



**The Captiva Pass Inlet System** \_ A Complex Coastal Inlet System w./The 480-ft. +/- Wide Management Zones CC-10A & CC-10B Corresponding To The Narrows , An Area Noted For Dynamic Coastal Change Approx. 1 mi. North Of Captiva Pass

Fig. 3 Captiva Pass Inlet System Dynamics

The Narrows area is approximately 3,400-ft. in length, and 430-ft. to 700-ft. + in width. The Narrows consists of a Beach Zone, a Beach Dune Zone, a Coastal Strand Zone, a Maritime Hammock zone, and a Mangrove Swamp system. The Beach Dune zone is a predominantly herbaceous Sea Oats community occurring on the upper beach and fore dune. Due to the narrow geography and beach erosion, the Beach Dune community is limited in size and width. This area is not that stable, being disturbed by seasonal or storm high tides at least every few years. Behind the Beach Dune zone is the Coastal Strand shrubby community. It too is narrow and is occupied by grasses and trailing shrubs with a scattering of taller shrubs and cabbage palms. Located in front of the Mangrove Swamp system is the Narrow's Maritime Hammock. This includes the shell mound community identified in the Management Plan's Cultural Resources elements, along with FLUCCS 425 (tropical hardwoods), and 427 (live oak). Other than the dense Mangrove Swamp system, the Narrow's Maritime Hammock has an area and dimension that grants it a comparatively higher degree of resiliency when compared to the Coastal Strand and Beach Dune zones.



### **The Narrows Upland Systems** \_

- \* Due To Narrow 430-ft. + Width Low Resistance To Recreational Use & User Impacts, Limited Recovery Potential & Susceptibility To Erosion
- \* Management Zones CC-10A, CC-10B & CC-10C
- \* FLUCCS 425 Tropical Hardwoods & Some 427 Live Oak, and Coastal Strand Behind The Dune Zone w./Scattered Grasses (grama grass and sea oats) & Shrubs (FL lantana); Beach Dune Zone Species of Concern Include Gopher Tortoise In CS and Roseate Tern, Piping & Snowy Plover, & Loggerhead, Green and Kemps Ridley Sea Turtle

*Fig. 4 The Narrows Upland Systems*

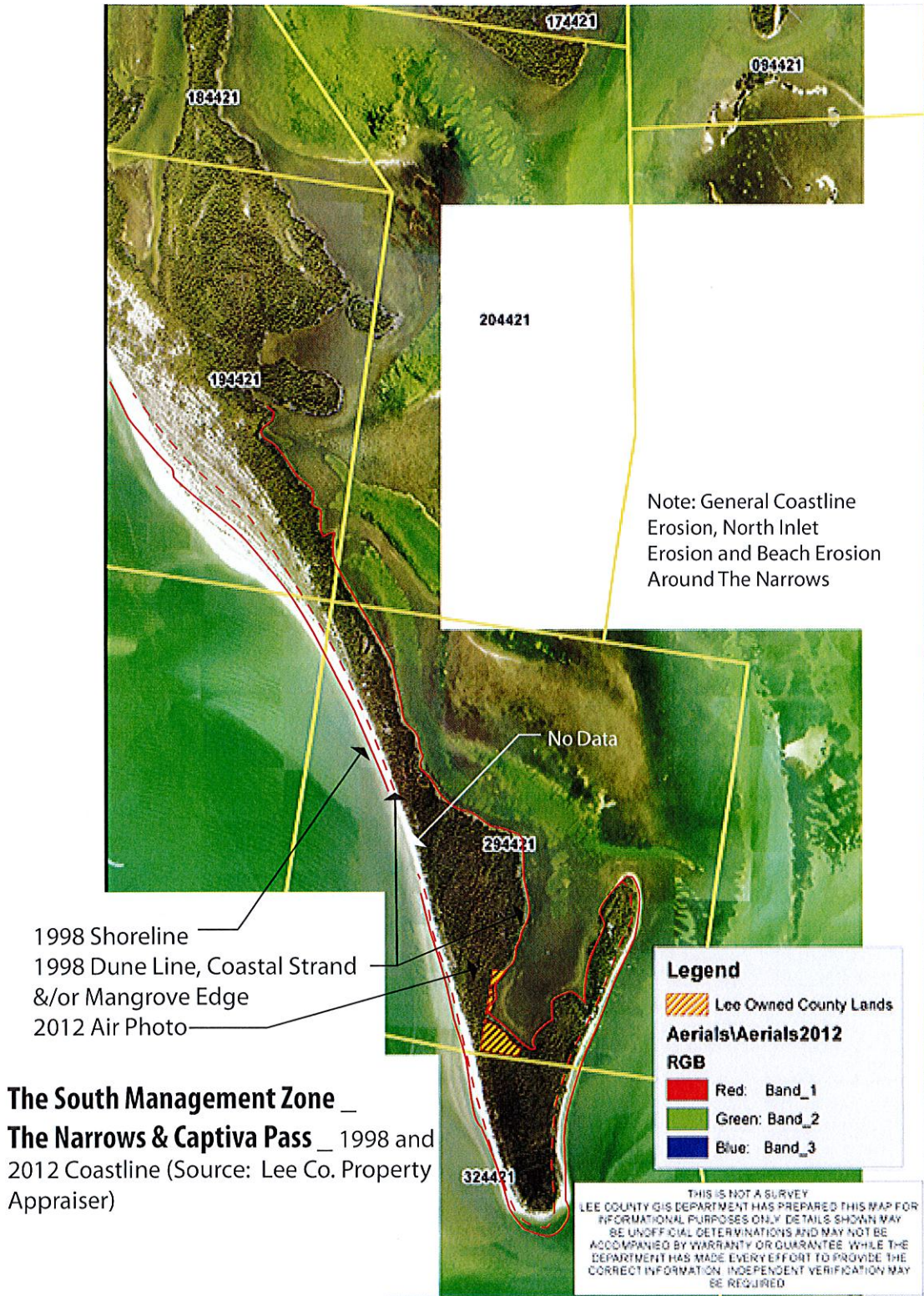


Fig. 5 The South Zone Coastal Erosion

### THE RESILIENCY DISTANCE DECAY RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT:

The utilized recreational management assessment is based on an integrated, systems analytical approach that factors in Cayo Costa Island geography, island morphology and coastal processes, ecology, habitat, and user activities. Referring to Figure Five, based on the island's "drumstick" form, Boca Grande Pass and Captiva Pass Inlet systems, the island's macro-geomorphic processes, and ecological systems, habitats and state park facilities and infrastructure, it is very clear that the north end of the island has the highest resilience to recreational uses and coastal processes.

The analysis divides the island into three "Resiliency Zones". The first zone is located in the island's north end. It is the widest part of the island, ranging from 0.7 mi. to 1.7 mi. in width. It contains approximately 1,500 acres, equal to 2.3 square miles. The North Zone is characterized as having high recreational user resiliency because of its width that grants superior habitat resiliency in area and depth. Due to its larger area and width, ecological zones and habitats have enhanced resistance to user activities, have better recovery from use and impacts, and have limited proportional impacted areas due to size. The North Resiliency Zone is noted for beach accretion due to south Boca Grande Pass coastal processes. The North Zone has a large variety of hardened trail systems, and good, back-bay boat docking and support facilities. These factors grant the north end superior user resiliency when compared to the middle and southern portions of Cayo Costa. Hence, it is logical to have the park's active and passive recreational facilities in this zone. The draft 2018 Unit Management Plan is correct in focusing park improvements within the north zone while building upon existing infrastructure. Furthermore, by clustering recreational facilities within the north, maintenance, monitoring and management objectives and tasks are more easily achievable. It is recommended that all group activities, commercial activities, including boat charters, should take place within the north zone area.

The Middle Zone has average user resiliency when compared to the north island. The area is generally comprised of Management Zones CC-07, CC-08 and CC-09 (a & b). It is on average 0.5 mi. to 0.8 mi. in width, has average sized upland mesic systems (Maritime hardwoods and Mesic flatwoods), some hardened trail systems and north to south/southwest longshore coastal sand drift. In the absence of back-bay dock facilities, boat access is restricted to shoreline anchoring. With an average distance of over 2 miles from the campsite area, the Middle Zone remains proximate to effective park management, maintenance and monitoring tasks.

The South Zone has poor user resiliency when compared to the two afore referenced zones. This is due to geography, coastal morphology and processes. The South Zone is very narrow, being less than 1/10th of a mile to 3/10th's of a mile wide. The curvature of the coast and proximity to Captiva Pass, causes greater sensitivity to wind, wave and tide coastal erosion. Historically it has little if any beach accretion. As the 2018 Draft Unit Management Plan points out, the south end of the island is starved of sediment (pg. 16 para. 4). The zone's narrow geography lends itself to poor resistance to user activities, has limited recovery potential from user activities and larger proportional impacted areas because of its small system size. The relative "thinness" of the Dune, Coastal Strand, and Maritime Hammock systems, and the relative absence of coastal grasslands, make the South Zone highly sensitive to negative long-term recreational user impacts. The fact that the South Zone is well over five miles from the campsite area makes the area more difficult for efficient management and monitoring. This fact is especially germane given the recent commercial boat charter use at the old Narrows back-bay dock. Since 2016 the dock has allowed multiple boats per day and with up to forty persons per boat, to have direct access to the least user resili-

ient part of the island. Clearly, the recreational management objective should be to reduce, and not to encourage, user impacts within the State Park's least resilient area.

## THE CAYO COSTA ISLAND RESILIENCY DISTANCE-DECAY MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT

An Integrated Systems Management Analysis Based On Island Geography, Island Morphology, Coastal Processes, Habitat and User/Activities

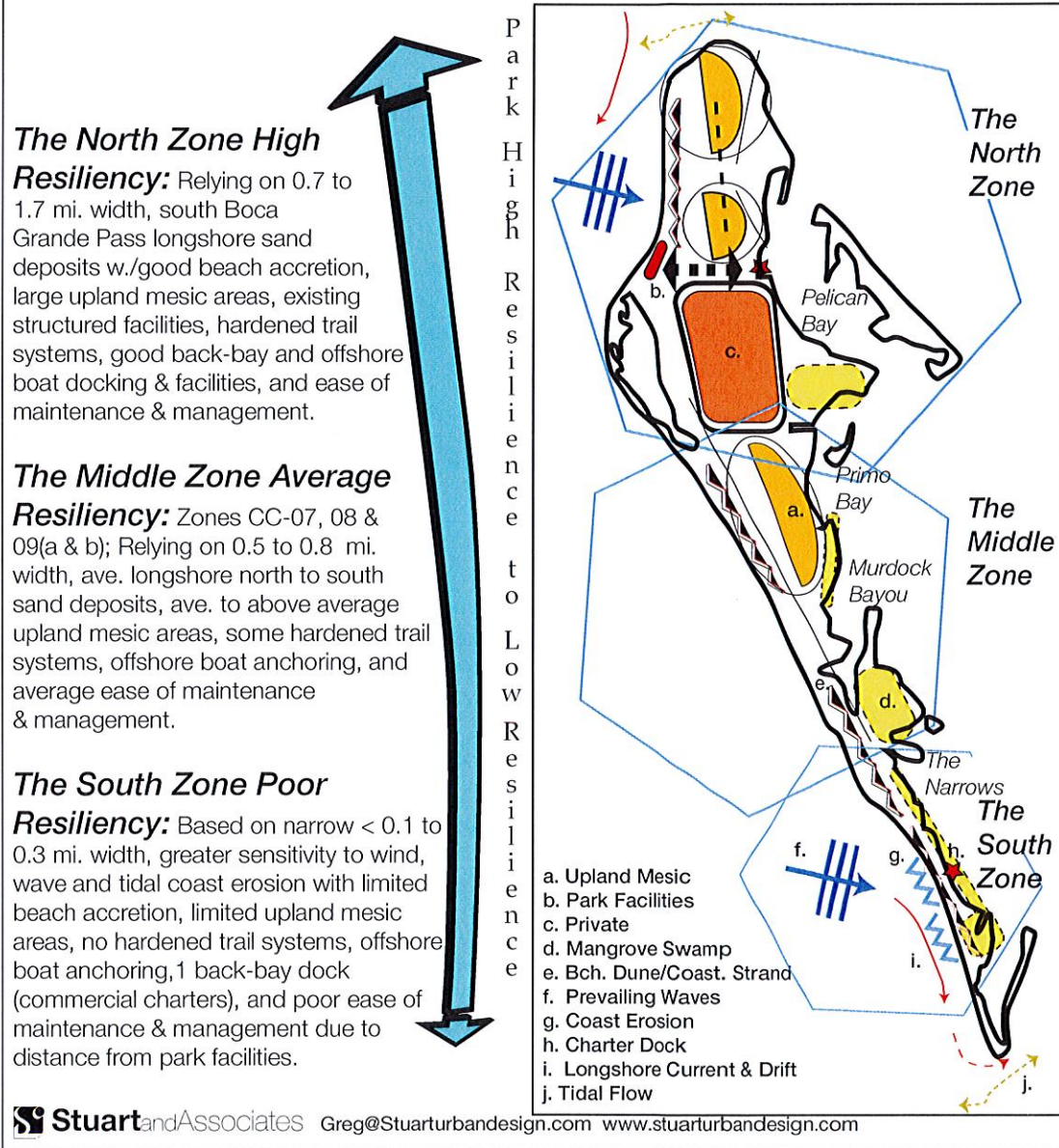


Fig. 6 The Resiliency Distance-decay Management Assessment

## RECOMMENDATIONS - THE DISTANCE DECAY RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT

**PLAN:** As a supplement to the 2018 Draft Unit Management Plan, (UMP) the author's proposed recreation management plan utilizes and builds upon the 2018 Draft UMP's objectives, policies and programs. The proposed recreation management plan uses a distance-decay resiliency approach; i.e., a geographically based, north to south recreation management plan. The plan is based on conservation values, existing facilities resistance to use, recovery from user impacts, potential severity of direct and indirect impacts, erosion resiliency, amount of use to proportionate area, and ease of management and monitoring.

Utilizing the three zonal approach (see Figure 6), the plan calls for the State to continue recreation management facility maintenance, improvement and expansion efforts directed toward the north end of the island. This is to include the State's proposed dock facility expansion, but with particular emphasis on ensuring suitable commercial charter boat docking and associated on-the-ground transportation facilities to assist commercial passengers in getting to the beach. Public access and recreational use is very important objective. Obviously, the best and most user resilient island area is the North Zone. For private boaters the North Zone's shoreline presents a highly resilient area for island recreation, so the area around Murdock Point and north, should be encouraged for anchoring. The Middle Zone is suitably resilient for medium active and passive recreation uses. Corresponding to CC-07, 08 and 09(a & b), the State should place much greater public communication, education and management emphasis via an enhanced interpretive signage program for the Middle Zone's Dune, Coastal Grass, Coastal Strand and Maritime Hammock habitat areas. The focus should be on systems education and responsible use, encouraging proper anchoring locations and the relationship of user to system impacts. If done properly management benefits will be significant. The plan calls for, from Murdock Bayou northward, commercial charter boats shoreline anchoring. South of Murdock Bayou commercial charter boats anchoring off the shoreline is to be prohibited due to the island's decreasing resiliency. The key new recreation management objective and policy for the South Zone is to limit The Narrow's boat dock to private recreation boater use. Commercial charter boats should be prohibited from using the dock based on acknowledging that two to four 40-person charter boat access ultimately is not sustainable for the South Management Zone. This is due to The Narrow's and South Zone's poor group user resiliency, the areas limited ability to recover from over-use, due to geography, proportional larger impacted areas because of limited habitat size, pronounced coastal erosion, large boat navigational sea grass impacts, and difficulties in effective management and monitoring. (see Figure 7). Succinctly, large group commercial charter boat access should logically be where the facilities and infrastructure are to support large groups; i.e., the North Zone and State Park dock. As with the Middle Zone, the State should place much greater public communication emphasis via interpretive signage. The focus should be on systems education and responsible use, encouraging proper anchoring locations and the relationship of user to system impacts.

Interpretive signs create great management value for the dollar. As such, a new funding mechanism is needed to implement an enhance public communications interpretive signage program and better management programs in general. In coordination with Lee County, the State should implement a Cayo Costa State Park Boat Access sticker program. When one is annually registering a boat, a \$20 optional surcharge for State Park use should be part of the program. Based on 2015 county boater registration data with 44,743 registered boats and assuming 15% of registered boaters go out to the barrier islands and Charlotte Harbour, \$134,229 dollars may be generated. Even

if one-half of the value is raised, the State Park can use \$67,000 + for it's various programs, including the new and enhanced interpretive sign program.

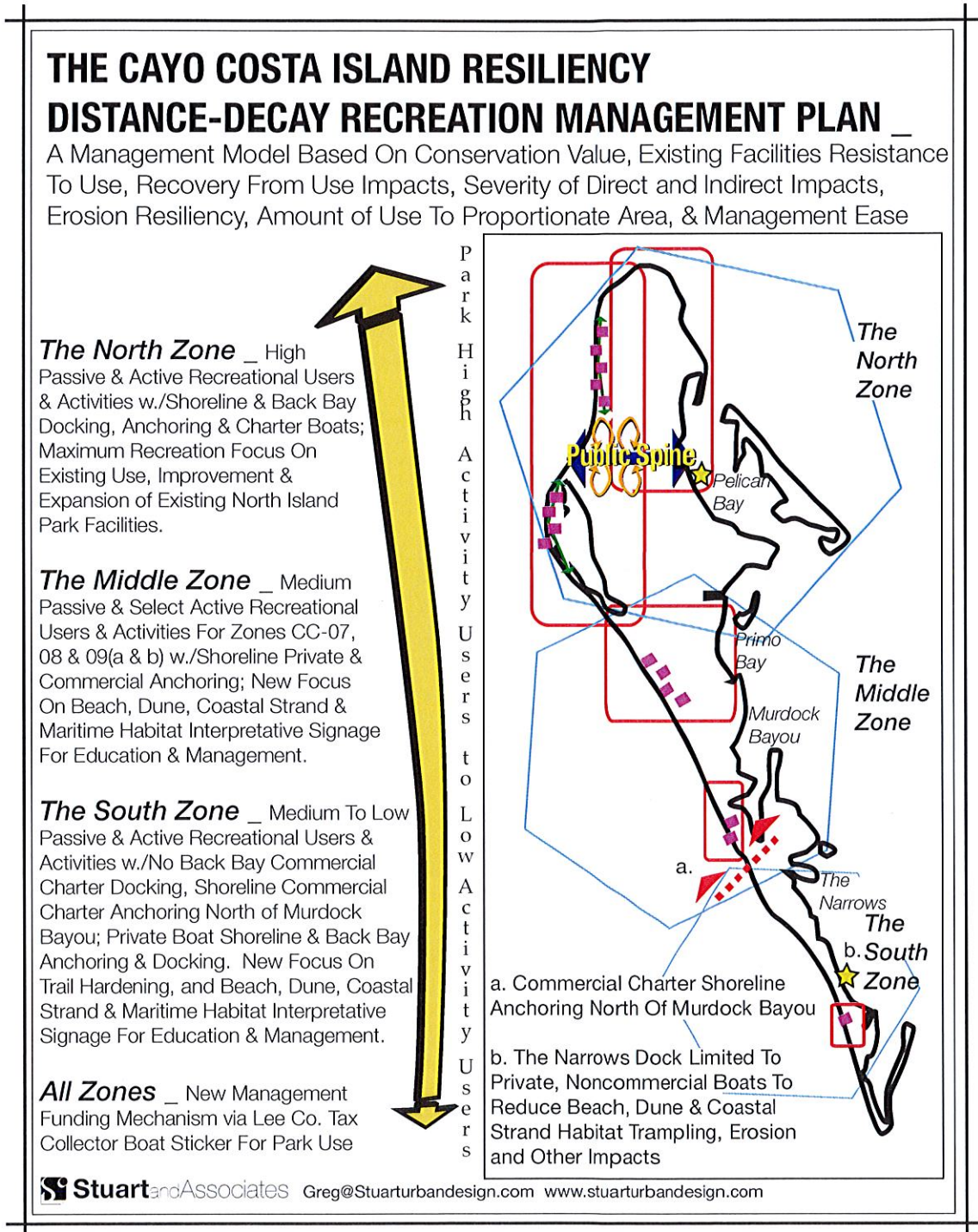
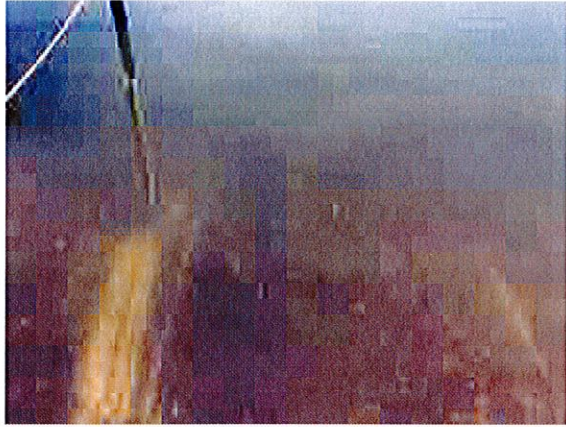


Fig. 7 The Cayo Costa Distance-decay Recreation Management Plan



Large Charter Boat Seagrass Impacts



Habitat Management & Monitoring Difficulties



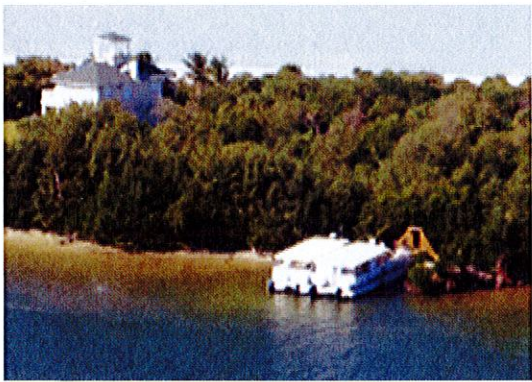
40 Person Charter Boat v. 4 to 6 Person Private Boat



Large Scale Group Recreation @ The Narrows



Increase Trampling, Dune & Herbaceous Grass Impacts



Multiple Charter Boats w./Larger User Impacts At The Narrows

 **Stuart** and Associates [Greg@Stuarturbandesign.com](mailto:Greg@Stuarturbandesign.com) [www.stuarturbandesign.com](http://www.stuarturbandesign.com)

Fig. 8 The Narrows/South Recreation Management Zone Pictures



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CAYO COSTA MANAGEMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES IMPLEMENTATION:

**Goal One: Provide administrative support for all park functions.**

- New Objective C \_ In response to user coast impacts and limited south island system resiliency, expand administrative monitoring and management support for the South Zone and The Narrows/Capita Pass area.

**Goal Two: Protect water quality and quantity in the park, restore hydrology to the extent feasible and maintain the restored conditions.**

- New Action Four \_ Recognizing that viable seagrass beds are essential water quality components, coordinate with Lee County to implement new back-bay seagrass monitoring programs and programs aimed at reducing boater seagrass impacts.

**Goal Three: Maintain, improve or restore imperiled species populations and habitats in the park.**

- **Objective D \_ Continue to improve protection and awareness of sensitive shorebird and sea turtle nesting areas.**
  - New Action One \_ Implement enhanced interpretive signage program with particular emphasis on the South Zone/The Narrow/Capita Pass area's species and habitats.

**Goal Six: Provide public access and recreational opportunities in the park.**

- New Objective E \_ Concentrate all group and commercial group charter boat access to the North Zone/State Park Dock and Facilities Area.
  - New Action One \_ Off-shore Charter boat group access permitted from Murdock Bayou north; off-shore and back-bay charter boat group access prohibited south of Murdock Bayou.

**Goal Seven: Develop and maintain the capital facilities and infrastructure necessary to meet the objectives of this management plan.**

- New Objective E \_ In coordination with Lee County implement a new Cayo Costa State Park Boat Access sticker program to generate revenues for an enhanced interpretive signage management program.

March 4, 2016

Mr. Chad Lach, Park Manager  
CAYO COSTA STATE PARK  
Lee County, FL

**OBJECTION TO CHANGE IN USE OF SOUTH CAYO COSTA DOCK**

Parcel # 29-44-21-00-00001-002B

Mr. Lach,

Thank you for arranging this meeting today regarding the change to commercial use of the dock on the south end of Cayo Costa. It is our hope we can resolve this today.

On January 10 we were notified of a construction barge with lumber at the tiny “state dock” on the south “narrows” portion of Cayo Costa. When I contacted you, you stated the structure was being rebuilt for use by Captiva Cruises *only* when inclement weather precluded them from traditional south point shore landings.

Upon visual inspection a few weeks later I saw vegetation that had been cut along the path to the beach, a completed dock/boardwalk and a gate structure erected with a locked gate. The refuse lumber from the old dock was piled up in the mangroves. Immediately following, two 50’ boats per day began to offload as many as 100 passengers each day at this site. As well, a large private party for dozens of people was held by Captiva Cruises on February 27 & 28 with a large tent erected and other items which heavily impacted dune systems and encroached on private properties. Visitors are typically unsupervised and there are no facilities. The destruction of the natural resources and protected species is evident.

The recent activities are clearly not “inclement weather only” usage and represent a complete change in use of what was once a casually used public access dock. If allowed to continue the human impact will have deep adverse effects on Cayo Costa for future generations and we are willing to take whatever measures are necessary to see the land protected. The north park facilities are designed for such tour boat operations where large numbers of visitors coming by charter traverse trails and sensitive dune areas. Previously Captiva Cruises had success using shoreline landings on the south point.

Since these events began to occur the public dock users and private property owners have expressed deep concern at the commercial overuse of the dock, the degradation of the natural resources, trespass and the locking of the gate. Even though the gate has been “temporarily unlocked, the threat to relock it again “if it becomes necessary” remains. You can’t lock the public off their land. I understand there is also a locked public gate at Stump Pass that only benefits Captiva Cruises? Is that true?

More disturbing was the fact that there was no communication with or input sought from stakeholders on this change to commercial usage on a parcel that is located amid protected resources, a large shell mound and in between six private properties. This clearly represents poor park management practice which is resulting in negative public relations for the park. We will outline our thoughts and expectations in the following pages and hope to resolve this as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,  
Margi Nanney

cc: Don Forgione, Valinda Subic

NOTE: This document contains excerpts from several sources including the current Cayo Costa Unit Management Plan (UMP), Stanley Herwitz's Natural History of Cayo Costa 1971, DEP & Other websites, detailed references available upon request.

## 1. MISSION OF THE FLORIDA PARK SERVICE

### MANAGEMENT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

#### *“Management Authority and Responsibility*

*In accordance with Chapter 258, Florida Statutes and Chapter 62D-2, Florida Administrative Code, the Division of Recreation and Parks (Division) is charged with the responsibility of developing and operating Florida's recreation and parks system. These are administered in accordance with the following policy:*

*It shall be the policy of the Division of Recreation and Parks to promote the state park system for the use, enjoyment, and benefit of the people of Florida and visitors; to acquire typical portions of the original domain of the state which will be accessible to all of the people, and of such character as to emblemize the state's natural values; **conserve these natural values for all time**; administer the development, use and maintenance of these lands and render such public service in so doing, **in such a manner as to enable the people of Florida and visitors to enjoy these values without depleting them**; to contribute materially to the development of a strong mental, moral, and physical fiber in the people; **to provide for perpetual preservation of historic resources.**”*

## 2. CAYO COSTA ISLAND: BARRIER ISLAND CRITICAL TO THE PROTECTION OF CHARLOTTE HARBOR

### EXERPT FROM UMP:

#### *“Special Natural Features*

*.... the entire park is an exceptional natural resource. **Few barrier islands remain in Florida that has as little disturbance as those in the park.** Of particular interest are the listed species, such as bald eagles, manatees and marine turtles. Also significant are the pre-Columbian mounds.”*

- Cayo Costa State Park/Cayo Costa island, is vital to the protection of the Charlotte Harbor Estuarine System, Pine Island Island and mainland areas. The very nature of its dynamic configuration demonstrates the fact that it is ever changing and fragile.
- Cayo Costa is the largest undisturbed barrier island in Florida and remains intact because of the remote/bridgeless nature of the land. *“It is a learning laboratory for scientific study...”*
- Cayo Costa is under pressure from climate change and human impact as well as the ever present threat of natural systems such as hurricanes
- Cayo Costa has 12 natural ecosystems. The area where the “south dock” is only has two predominant systems (Beach/Dune & Mangrove) rendering it vulnerable to erosion.
- The “NARROWS”, the small spit that forms the fragile south end has undergone intense pressure since Hurricane Charley hit it directed on August 13, 2004.

- The “south dock” site is the exact location where Charley came on shore with 150+ mph winds
- **Charley completely destroyed all the mangroves, vegetative canopies, dune vegetation and decimated the habitats for the wildlife which have struggled to come back since Charley and other extreme weather conditions such as the storms of January 2016.**

EXCERPT FROM UMP:

*“Charley, a category four storm, made landfall on Cayo Costa just south of Murdock Bayou. Winds gusts in excess of 180mph and sustained winds of 145mph buffeted the island and adjacent areas during its advance. Areas to the south and east of the storm center sustained major wind damage, including toppled trees, damaged structures and major erosion. The southern half of Cayo Costa and North Captiva were overwashed by storm surge. The narrow beach at the center of North Captiva (described by Morrill and Harvey (1980) as Overwash Pass) was breached and a new pass approximately 800 feet wide was created. Although the storm surge was predicted to be much worse, the north half of Cayo Costa was spared extensive flooding, primarily because the dune system was in tact and not breached. Hurricanes Frances, Jeane and Ivan also contributed to erosion and some additional wind damage to the beach and shoreline vegetation.*

*In the storms’ aftermath, native vegetation, wildlife and shoreline changes should be researched and monitored. It is anticipated that the loss of native vegetation may accelerate the advances of invasive, exotic plant species. Although it may be too soon to predict the long term impact to wildlife species, the 2004 data indicate that more than 50% of the marine turtle nests on Cayo Costa were lost and all were lost on North Captiva. Bald eagles and colonial water birds will also be impacted due to the loss of suitable nesting trees that were felled and/or stripped of their leaves. Accelerated erosion will also impact future shorebird and marine turtle nesting.*

### 3. CAYO COSTA’S SOUTH END SHOULD BE PROTECTED FROM AS MUCH HUMAN INTRUSION AS POSSIBLE

EXCERPT FROM UMP:

*“From time to time, fingers of sand from the shoals approached the shore. These act as natural groins and obstruct the southward drift of sediments. As a result, much of Cayo Costa south of Johnson Shoals was subjected to severe erosion over a period of 40 years. Comparison of Cayo Costa’s shorelines in 1958 and 1959 reveals that the entire sector of the island south of Murdock Lagoon was over 500 feet wider and much less concave than during the period of Johnson Shoals. Herwitz speculated that the next breaching of the island might occur at this narrow point south of Murdock Bayou, a location where several private dwellings have been built.”*

- Over the past 20 years the “point” south of Murdock Lagoon has shifted south and southward moving shoal areas critical to protecting the “narrows”. As a result an emerging dune line is beginning to develop that runs along the area where the houses and the dock in question are located. It is critical that these sensitive areas be left undisturbed for the defense mechanism of the barrier island system as well as the critical role this portion of the island plays in the propagation of the protected plant and animal communities.

With the exception of a few private homes the island south of Murdock point is relatively the same as it was when the Calusa were here many years ago.

The Cayo Costa SP Unit Management Plan (UMP) calls for the acquisition of all remaining privately owned property from willing sellers. Except for about a dozen homes concentrated on the wider north end, the Pejuan Point wing and a few on the “narrows” the state land acquisition program should seriously focus on purchasing remaining private properties to protect the natural resources of this island park.

The few private home owners in the “narrows” are proven stewards of the area and act as volunteers since understaffed park service personnel are not able to keep watch on the south end. As well, the majority of these homes have been in place since the 1970s, are not rentals and have the same owners as they have when they were built. They understand and respect the land and advocate for it. As a result, they are familiar with the island patterns and human impacts.

Private boaters who access Cayo Costa via the “south dock” and anchor offshore are “casual” users of the island and practice “pack in/pack out”, “leave no trace” visits. They do not arrive in droves nor do they leave heavy impact on the resource the same way 50 people at a time do using commercial charters. Most of them have been coming to Cayo Costa for generations and respect and appreciate the natural beauty.

The “channel” into the narrows is not a marked access, it is a naturally occurring swath of water that has created a very shallow, narrow passage. Historically it has been used by fishermen, private boaters and for private home access. Never have large, 50’ twin-engine charter boats been allowed to offload hundreds of people using these waterways on a multiple trip/daily basis. Much remains to be discovered to see if the Coast Guard, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers or Fish and Wildlife would allow such activities that are surely creating negative impact on the fish populations, seabed/grassflat communities and wildlife reserves. No due diligence has been done by park service to explore the negative impacts this new commercial use is having on the waterways or water quality of Pine Island Sound. As well, the land/path have been cleared of their native plants and there is no evidence a mapping of species was done to assure protection of endangered plants/animals in the area. ***This new dock and cleared land/path are the equivalent of an interstate system running through the island that could contribute to the island’s breach should a storm like Charley come through again. The state would be liable to stakeholders should this be warranted as a contributing factor.***

***The empirical evidence from the casual users and private home owners is that there has been more negative human impact to the natural resource since January 2016 when this dock was changed to commercial use than in the history of the island.***

***If Captiva Cruises or any commercial enterprise is allowed to continue bringing large barge size vessels into this channel/dock it will constitute the ruination of what should remain as one of Florida’s last examples of barrier island beach shore habitats.***

*To bolster this argument, clearly the offloading of Captiva Cruises “shelling trips” for the past 15 or so years may have contributed heavily to the erosion underway at the south pass where historically their large groups have congregated.*

*Allowing this to occur sets a dangerous precedent for future park activities. Doing the right thing and stopping this excessive use of the resource should occur immediately to protect the park/island for future generations.*

#### **4. SOUTH DOCK LAND ACQUIRED FOR PRESERVATION**

The property where the south dock exists was acquired with EEL Funds in 1978 from a private land owner who bought the property in 1971. The dock was built for that former land owner as a private dock access to the property. See definition of EEL below which does states the funds should only support preservation and not be used for recreational use.

*DEP WEBSITE:*

##### ***“Environmentally Endangered Lands Program (EEL)***

In 1972, the Florida Legislature passed the Land Conservation Act, which created the Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) program. Later that year Florida voters approved a ballot referendum that authorized the sale of \$200 million in EEL bonds and another \$40 million in recreation bonds. Debt service on the bonds for both programs continued to be paid from proceeds of our documentary stamp tax on real estate transactions.

**The EEL program was designed specifically to protect environmentally unique and irreplaceable lands in the state and was not designed to have outdoor resource-based recreation as its primary goal. “**

#### **5. PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES & PROTECTED HISTORIC RESOURCES**

The most compelling reason human impact should be limited at the “narrows” is because the area supports a host of protected/endangered species of shorebirds, turtles, plant communities and is in the vicinity of a historic pre-Columbian Indian mound that has recently shown evidence of more human impact. The emerging dune line moving south has brought the nesting and foraging patterns of the shorebirds further south. The UMP plan addresses some of these issues but the park has done little to support the preservation of these critical areas of concern. Working with Audubon an effort is being made to mark these areas and to keep all human activity off these areas. There is a case for a blackout period during shorebird and turtle nesting seasons to preserve critically endangered species.

EXCERPT FROM UMP:

##### ***“Designated Species***

*Designated species are those that are listed by the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC), and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDA) as endangered, threatened or of special concern. Addendum 5 contains a list of the designated*

species and their designated status for this park. Management measures will be addressed later in this plan.

### **“Special Natural Features**

**As indicated in the above sections, the entire park is an exceptional natural resource. Few barrier islands remain in Florida that has as little disturbance as those in the park. Of particular interest are the listed species, such as bald eagles, manatees and marine turtles. Also significant are the pre-Columbian mounds. According to the Florida Master Site File (FMSF), the present boundaries of Cayo Costa State Park partially or entirely encompass sixteen recorded cultural resources. **Fourteen of these recorded sites lie on Cayo Costa Island and two lie on North Captiva Island; there are no recorded sites located on the park’s holdings on Punta Blanca Island or Pine Island.**”**

### **“Management Needs and Problems**

**Cayo Costa is a relatively large, relatively undisturbed barrier island. As such, it is a living laboratory for the study of barrier island dynamics and biodiversity. The broad resource management thrust is to protect and maintain this aspect of the island for scientific study and for education.”****Erosion poses a threat to many of the archaeological sites located in Cayo Costa State Park. The terrestrial and submerged sites located along the northeastern edge of Cayo Costa Island are adversely impacted by receding shorelines, tidal activity, bioturbation and sediment deposition caused by boat wakes and the dynamic process of barrier island formation. Sites located elsewhere along Cayo Costa and North Captiva Islands’ shoreline are also affected by daily tidal influxes and changing sea levels. The park’s shell and earthen mound sites are gradually eroding from the effects of wind and water, uprooted trees, unauthorized digging, animal activity, and vegetation. Unauthorized human activity poses a threat to the park’s cultural resources in the form of vandalism, artifact collecting, and digging. In the past, cemetery gravestones have been defaced by graffiti, mounds have been potholed and an illegal excavation discovered.”**

### **NARROWS SUPPORTS MANY CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES:**

**BLACK OUT PERIODS FOR SHOREBIRD AND TURTLE NESTINGS AND DUNE SIGNS/MARKED AREAS SHOULD BE PUT IN PLACE TO PROTECT ALL OF THESE HABITATS**

- **Snowy Plovers** – The snowy plover is listed as critically endangered and ***is one of the rarest shorebirds in North America.*** Over the past 5 years increasing numbers of these nesting birds have been seen along the “narrows”. Because they lay their tiny eggs directly on the sand near the dunes their numbers suffer greatly from the effects of human impact and habitat loss. This should be a priority conservation effort by Cayo Costa State Park.
- **Least Terns, Wilson’s Plovers, American Oystercatchers** – These three types of shorebirds are also endangered and are found on Cayo Costa’s south end. They should be protected from increased human impact.
- **Sea Turtles** – Cayo Costa SP volunteers have documented a number of sea turtle nests along the narrows. The island attracts a large number of nesting turtles because of its wilderness nature. The Loggerhead is the most prevalent but reports of the **KEMP'S RIDLEY** (*Lepidochelys kempfi*), the rarest sea turtle in the world and most endangered and green sea turtles nesting on

the island have been reported. Minimal human impact will increase the success rate of these turtles' ability to have successful nesting seasons.

- **Manatees** – The waters around Cayo Costa support the endangered Manatee. Increased boat traffic especially by Captiva Cruises large, twin engine boats, could harm these marine mammals who are struggling to come back after the recent freezing winter season. They are seen along the Gulf and channel at the south dock on a regular basis.

## **6. CONCENTRATE GROUP VISITS TO NORTH END FACILITIES, INVEST IN MORE INFRASTRUCTURE TO PROMOTE THE PARK, EXPLORE NEW REVENUE STRATEGIES**

***THESE PORTIONS OF THE UMP CLEARLY SHOWS THE ACTIVITIES THAT INVOLVE LARGE NUMBERS OF VISITORS ARE TO BE CONCENTRATED ON THE NORTH END FACILITIES DESIGNED FOR SUCH GROUP ACTIVITIES:***

EXCERPTS FROM UMP:

### ***“Recreational Uses***

***The northern end of Cayo Costa Island is the focus of recreational activity for park visitors. This area provides the public opportunities for beach access, tent camping, rental cabins, fishing, picnicking, swimming, boating, and nature study. A number of jeep trails crisscross the interior lands of Cayo Costa. Portions of these trails have been incorporated into the park’s trail network”***

***“Seek funding to expand recreational and interpretive opportunities through the improvement of programs and the development and/or improvement of use areas and facilities, as outlined in this management plan.***

- 1. Enhance the visitor experience on the park tram by improving the road, developing a tram-based interpretive tour and converting to alternative fuel vehicles.***
- 2. Undertake a comprehensive redesign of the entrance area on Cayo Costa Island that improves visitor orientation, circulation, interpretation and the aesthetics of the area.***
- 3. Improve access and reduce social trails to the beach.***
- 4. Improve aesthetics and shade within camping and cabin area through native landscaping and additional shelters.***
- 5. Reorganize tent camping area by relocating flood prone sites.***
- 6. Upgrade restroom facilities in the camping and cabin area.”***

It is clear millions of dollars have been spent to build the infrastructure on the north end of the island. The UMP clearly states this is where the focus of visitor services is to take place. Here the physiology of the land is more conducive to handling large numbers of visitors who continue to increase with each year. The north end of the park proper is more than a mile wide, has 12 distinct ecosystems and a large, new ferry landing protected by Punta Blanca. Recently, successful grant awards from Lee County Tourist Development Council have provided a Ferry Waiting Area structure, trams capable of taking large numbers of people back and forth to the beach and camping areas and other locations. The park service compound, vehicles and ATV’s are stored and maintained here. Restrooms and running water



are available on both the bay and beach side and there are designated camping areas with amenities. A recent renovation of the Ranger Station and Concessions building have made it convenient for visitors to get information and purchase sundries. There are well marked, designated trails for visitors to traverse with plans for more interpretive activities.

With the recent budget cuts at the DEP level, the CCSP staffing has been severely depleted. There is no hope coming from Tallahassee that this will change any time soon. There are barely enough rangers and volunteers to keep things running smoothly at the Park (north end) and it becomes difficult to patrol the entire park, including the south end. The reliance on volunteers such as this group who keep track of and call in areas of concern for the south end is great.

The formation of Friends of Cayo Costa State Park (FOCC) in 2012 has resulted in a fund dedicated to the future construction of a permanent Visitor's Heritage Center. The group holds regular events to fund other projects and is a division of the park's overall Citizen's Support Organization (CSO) Barrier Island Parks Society who supports all 5 parks in the Cayo Costa system. All efforts to improve the park by these groups have historically been concentrated on the north end of the island.

Historically, the southern end of Cayo Costa has remained wilderness and has been used casually by visitors who access the park by boat by anchoring out in the Gulf and fish along the shore lines. This usage is appropriate as it provides recreational opportunities without depleting the natural resources. An example of this is at Cumberland Island National Seashore in Georgia. The large bridgeless barrier island is also relatively undisturbed but park service is strict about only having certain access points to minimize impacts to the resources. There are many examples of this in the nation. It is not necessary to unload large groups off onto wilderness areas where the destruction of once-pristine resources are depleted.

## EXPLORING REVENUE STRATEGIES

Florida Parks are under constant pressure from the top to increase visitor numbers and revenue streams. Because Cayo Costa is a bridgeless island park, Captiva Cruises exclusive contract is subsequently pressured to bring more people and money into the park. While we understand this, it can't be a reason to deplete natural resources and threaten the pristine nature of the park which needs to be preserved as much as possible for the future. For this reason, all income producing opportunities should minimize these impacts. Look to other parks for "best practices", get creative and money will flow.

The park visitor fee is easily collected, accounted for and paid to the Park service via Captiva Cruises because they have a captive audience. They should concentrate their groups at the north end and no group activities should be allowed outside the north park proper. The north end park access is the best place to concentrate these fee collections along with the sale of event contracts, rentals and other concessions. It is where they bring the visitors we are concerned with. There are also private users, mostly boaters, who also may be willing to be paying a fee as well if pay poles were available.

We suggest returning the south dock to casual use like it was before where only boats designed for the small dock can tie up. Park service should installing a pay tube there and also at the south point. This is already being done at the north end successfully. This works at many parks and money is collected on a regular basis by park staff. As well, boaters who use the dock and beach anchor-off areas would be

willing to pay for a decal of some sort as an option to collect more revenue. Anchor tie-offs in Pelican Bay can also be sold by the day. These are all suggestions as to how to get more revenue and all are easily accomplished. There is no argument that bringing more people to the south end will produce more revenue until these avenues have been discussed.

## EVENTS

The concessionaire or others should not be allowed to hold “events” using the south dock at all for the reasons stated in this document. The north end infrastructure is made for group activities. Perhaps explore having Captiva Cruises and/or Friends of Cayo Costa SP build a beach pavilion like the one at Don Pedro/Stump Pass to use for events. This will be much easier for guests as it will provide electricity, restrooms, shelter, other rentals and emergency services if needed. As well, it will prevent further degradation of resources on the fragile south end of the island. The event that was held at the south dock February 27 & 28 was a good example of how damaging to the natural resources this practice could become if allowed to continue.

## 7. USE PROPER PLANNING PRACTICES AND DEVELOP LONG TERM GOALS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RESOURCES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The current Unit Management Plan (UMP) for Cayo Costa SP is the guiding document for park planning. In this case, this guideline was not used. Rather, a unilateral decision was made between the Park Manager and the Concessionaire to create a new commercial use without any input or planning. Below are excerpts from this plan that clearly show the proper process was not used when this decision was made. In a Public Hearing forum it would become clear this new commercial use is a bad idea.

### EXCERPTS FROM UMP:

*“Land use planning and park development decisions for the state park system are based on the dual responsibilities of the Division of Recreation and Parks. **These responsibilities are to preserve representative examples of original natural Florida and its cultural resources, and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for Florida's citizens and visitors.**”*

***The general planning and design process begins with an analysis of the natural and cultural resources of the unit, and then proceeds through the creation of a conceptual land use plan that culminates in the actual design and construction of park facilities. Input to the plan is provided by experts in environmental sciences, cultural resources, park operation and management, through public workshops, and environmental groups.***

*With this approach, the Division objective is to provide quality development for resource-based recreation throughout the state **with a high level of sensitivity to the natural and cultural resources at each park.**”*

*“During the development of the unit management plan, the Division assesses potential impacts of proposed uses on the resources of the property. **Uses that could result in unacceptable impacts are not included in the conceptual land use plan. Potential impacts are more thoroughly identified and assessed through the site planning process.**”*

### ***Protected Zones***

***A protected zone is an area of high sensitivity or outstanding character from which most types of development are excluded as a protective measure. All decisions involving the use of protected zones are made on a case-by-case basis after careful site planning and analysis.***

***At Cayo Costa State Park, the beach dune, coastal berm, coastal strand, coastal grassland, maritime hammock, shell mound, marine tidal marsh, marine tidal swamp, marine unconsolidated substrate and known cultural resources have been designated as protected zones as delineated on the Conceptual Land Use Plan. Protected zones account for nearly 90 percent of total park acreage.”***

***“As a state park, a balance is sought between maintaining and protecting natural and cultural resources and providing resource-based recreation. Maintaining the natural character of these barrier islands is important to the visitor experience, **and should remain a priority for all future land use planning.**”***

## **8. REBUILT SOUTH DOCK SHOULD RETURN TO FORMER USE**

The dock is not designed for large numbers of people to disembark nor appropriate for large commercial charter boats to use. As well, the channel is narrow and shallow in this area and the large boats coming at frequent intervals have having an enormous negative impact on the seabed and surrounding seagrass areas. The human presence in these numbers will disrupt the wildlife habitats, especially the protect species.

The rebuilt dock should be accessible for smaller vessels with appropriate capacity. The Park Manager should not be allowed to restrict public access using this dock to one vendor/entity. We request the dock and land return to the same casual use as before. Remove the “gate” structure completely. There should be no alterations to the land, no structures added. Use “leave no trace” philosophy.

## **9. CEASE AND DESIST COMMERCIAL USE ON SOUTH DOCK IMMEDIATELY AND MEMORIALIZE AGREEMENT IN WRITING**

For the reasons stated in this document and many others, we implore the Department of Environmental Protection/Division of State Lands, specifically Cayo Costa State Park officials to cease all concessionaire/commercial activities at the south dock and surrounding areas. We ask that we work together to draft this agreement in writing and that is be included as an Amendment to the Concessionaire’s Agreement. Protection should be in place should violations occur including trespass, group activities, taking over of south dock or other activities that harm the south end of the park lands due to commercial use.

## **10. WORK TOWARD NEW UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN THAT LEAVES A LEGACY OF RESPONSIBLE PLANNING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

### **TIME FOR PROPER LONG RANGE PLANNING**

The Big Picture...what will Cayo Costa SP look like 25 years from now? 100 years from now?

Maybe this is a wake up call. Now is the time to consider all of the aspects of Cayo Costa SP's fragile anatomy and take a proactive approach in protecting this irreplaceable resource for future generations. The next Unit Management Plan cycle is coming up this year. Regarding the long range plan for Cayo Costa State park, it will be important to put practices in place that promote a healthy future for the entire park, Pine Island Sound and surrounding communities.

**For all of these reasons, the case for LESS not MORE human impact on the south end of Cayo Costa's "narrows" and south end can be made using documented data and research.**

**Now is the time to act to ensure that this unique barrier island remains pristine.**