

Jacksonville Florida Times-Union

Saturday, July 22, 2023

Letters

Possible development among ongoing critical issues for Cumberland Island

The public should be aware of important issues that Cumberland Island National Seashore Superintendent Gary Ingram is leaving behind as he ends his nine-year tenure.

During his term, the Seashore was subjected to well-justified scrutiny. Among Ingram's most irresponsible acts was agreeing to construction of a private dock for residential development.

Cumberland Island National Seashore is intended to be conserved in a primitive state except for areas used for public recreation, as declared by Congress in adopting the 1972 Seashore Act.

In 2015 Lumar LLC applied for a permit to construct and use a dock within the Seashore to serve one home. There is a requirement under federal law for a public hearing, but the permit was issued without one — based partly on Ingram stating that the National Park Service had no objection.

Lumar then submitted a request to Camden County for a 10-home subdivision, made accessible by the unlawfully approved dock.

The Center for a Sustainable Coast challenged the Lumar permit in federal court, where the case is pending. Meanwhile, Camden County granted a hardship variance to subdivide the nearly 90-acre undeveloped tract into 10 parcels. This was appealed by multiple conservation organizations and citizens but remains unresolved, most likely pending the Sustainable Coast's action in federal court.

If the dock's use is approved by the federal court, officials are likely to greenlight development proposed on remaining privately owned tracts on Cumberland Island — directly undermining the Congressionally declared purpose of the Seashore.

~ Jessica Howell-Edwards, program director, Wild Cumberland