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## Preserving Cumberland is imperative

For anyone who's been to Cumberland Island, the importance of preserving this spectacular natural wonder should be abundantly self-evident.

In 1972 Congress designated Cumberland, the largest barrier island in the northern hemisphere, a National Seashore in recognition of its unspoiled natural beauty – characterized by windswept live-oaks, massive dunes, and diverse native species inhabiting expansive maritime forests, marshes, and shorelines.

Subsequently Congress designated a portion of the island as Wilderness Area, further evidence of the reverence for Cumberland as an outstanding national conservation treasure.

Cumberland provides the rare experience of witnessing undisturbed nature, a breathtaking exposure to primordial coastal ecosystems as they've existed for thousands of years. This unique natural asset is so treasured that it's attracted millions of visitors from across the nation and well beyond. Primitive camping sites are available, accommodating overnight stays and luring thousands of return enthusiasts yearly.

In establishing the National Seashore, a few patches of privately owned land were left intact. Most of these legacy properties are to revert to public ownership over time. But some 1,000 acres remain in "fee-simple" ownership, which affords owners possible consent for resource-disturbing development activities.

We now face a proposal for subdividing a parcel into ten lots intended for individual homes, to be decided under the authority of Camden County and its planning commission.

If approved and built, this development would fundamentally reverse the 46-year-old agreement to safeguard Cumberland Island as America's premier example of responsible coastal stewardship. The National Park Service must be held accountable to tax-payer obligations by implementing a plan that prevents development.

Some \$100 million in federal and land conservation funds have been spent to secure and maintain a pristine future for Cumberland Island. Passively allowing the hard-won and costly national struggle for Cumberland's protection to be negated by a careless local-government decision made in disregard for national priorities would be both shameful and absurd.

Can there be any doubt that once additional real-estate development is permitted at the Cumberland National Seashore, similar proposals will further undermine the future of our unsurpassed coastal treasure? Would we tolerate such threats to Yosemite or Yellowstone – comparable national assets?

Resolutely defending the promise and longstanding public trust that Cumberland will not be developed honors our national identity and our word. It would be deplorable and demoralizing if we allowed this glorious gem of Georgia's coast to be stripped of its enchantment. The serene experience of Cumberland must not be debased by the destructive disturbance of more residents, more buildings, and more vehicles.

If we're truly committed to safeguarding places of exceptional natural beauty, surely we will hold Cumberland Island sacrosanct. The opportunity to experience one of America's most magnificent places must not be lost to this and future generations.

As Americans and Georgians we must reassert our conviction that such revered natural treasures must not be irreversibly degraded in the misguided pursuit of private objectives benefitting a few at the expense of the many.

Cumberland guardians should voice concerns by contacting Camden officials via the clerk's office, [kberry@co.camden.ga.us](mailto:kberry@co.camden.ga.us).

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