

Published Commentary
By Center for a Sustainable Coast
On Issues Related to
Cumberland Island National Seashore

Posted January 27, 2017 06:46 pm
By [a Georgia environmentalist](#)

Saturday's Lead Letter: Preserve Cumberland Island

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.

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.

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 opens the possible consent for resource-disturbing development activities.

We now face a proposal for subdividing a parcel into ten lots to be used 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.

It would be shameful and absurd to allow the hard-won, costly struggle for Cumberland's protection to be negated by potentially careless local government decisions in disregard of national priorities.

Undoubtedly, 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?

Cumberland's serene beauty must not be irreversibly debased by the destructive disturbance of more residents, more buildings, and more vehicles. The opportunity to experience one of America's most magnificent places must not be lost to this and future generations in the misguided pursuit of private objectives benefitting a few at the expense of the many.

Cumberland guardians should email their concerns to Camden officials at kberry@co.camden.ga.us ASAP.

David Kyler
Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Coast

THE BRUNSWICK NEWS

Saturday, May 27, 2017

Cumberland Island should not be rezoned for development

Published comments about proposals for developing as much as 1,000 acres of fee-simple property on Cumberland Island have lacked appropriate emphasis on several salient factors.

First, the acreage in question is within the boundaries of a “National Seashore” of unique conservation value to the public, as declared by Congress in making that designation in 1972. Some 60,000 visitors ferry to the National Seashore annually to experience the breathtaking beauty of a barrier island in its natural state – including rare maritime forests, diverse wildlife, windswept live oaks and magnificent sand dunes.

Aside from the substantial value of that tourism to the local economy, consider that hundreds of millions of federal taxpayer dollars and tens of thousands of hours of effort – by civil servants, non-profit groups and volunteers – have been invested in creating the treasured national park.

Furthermore, both a master plan for Cumberland Island National Seashore adopted by the National Park Service and the Camden County Comprehensive Plan – sanctioned under Georgia law – call for conservation of all undeveloped areas of the National Seashore. When the Cumberland property was zoned “conservation-preservation” in 2008 under a “unified development code” adopted by Camden County, none of the property owners objected or mentioned intentions to develop.

Property owners constrained by the circumstances described above cannot expect to have the same development options as those who own land without such vital “pre-existing conditions.” Clearly, assumptions and assertions about “property rights” must be reconsidered in light of relevant legal factors.

Cumberland should not be rezoned to allow more development.

David Kyler
Center for a Sustainable Coast

SAPORTAREPORT

Valued voices share insights about Atlanta and beyond

Guest Column

Prevent proposed development to preserve majestic coastal beauty of Cumberland Island

May 28, 2017

By Guest Columnist **DAVID KYLER**, *executive director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast, located in St. Simons*

Georgians must resolve to protect Cumberland Island as a rare natural treasure

Among my most cherished memories as a kid growing up in western Pennsylvania is a series of summer treks to the New Jersey shore. Reflecting on these memories, it's evident that from my earliest days I found the attraction of the land-sea boundary instinctive and insistent – a place where some of nature's most beautiful, dynamic, and, at times, powerful and destructive forces could be witnessed.

This deep-rooted allure has been a dominant factor in the trajectory of my entire 70 years on earth. For the past four decades, I've lived and labored in coastal Georgia as a resident of Saint Simons Island. Over these 40 years I've worked in environmental planning and conservation of Georgia's dazzling coast. In retrospect, it's now evident that my childhood fascination with the natural features of coastal areas fundamentally shaped adult decisions determining my place of residence as well as my life's work.

Saint Simons is one of a chain of barrier islands along Georgia's coast. Barrier islands are the products of wind and water shaping sand, soil, and vegetation over vast periods of time – though relatively brief by geological standards. Interceding between the ocean and the mainland, these islands serve as “barriers” which, together with tidal marshlands, protect landward areas from the destructive forces of the wind-driven waves of major storms.

Georgia has eight major barrier islands, only three of which are developed, having causeway access. (Note: Sea Island and Saint Simons are considered as one barrier formation in this description.)

RALLY for CUMBERLAND ISLAND!



**Add your voice as we oppose development
on Cumberland Island National Seashore.**

WHEN: Saturday, June 24, 10 am – 4 pm

WHERE: Howard Gilman Waterfront Park, St. Marys, Ga.

- Free “Don’t Develop Cumberland Island” T-shirts (for the first 400 attendees)
 - Entertainment by The Friese Studio of Music
 - Booths & Exhibits • Face-painting • Food trucks*

*Tony’s Outrigger-Seafood, Chet’s BBQ, Sweet Luncheonette, Bar None Vending & More.

Advocates of plans to preserve Cumberland Island’s natural beauty, and halt planned development, plan to rally in St. Mary’s on June 24. Credit: David Kyler

Among the world’s most majestic examples of the raw beauty of barrier islands, and Nature’s “crown jewel” of the east coast, is Georgia’s [Cumberland Island](#) – one of America’s few congressionally designated National Seashores. Cumberland is also remarkable as the largest barrier island in the [northern hemisphere](#), and yet among the least developed.

Despite the relentless urbanization that has overtaken much of the American coastline, Georgia’s coast – generally more by default than by design – has remained relatively undisturbed. Nowhere is our coast and its stunning beauty better preserved in its natural state than at Cumberland Island – which is the direct result of extensive conservation efforts and considerable taxpayer commitment since the early 1970s. I estimate that well over \$100 million has been wisely invested in acquiring and protecting Cumberland Island as a national seashore for the lasting fulfillment of this and future generations.

Cumberland provides the rare experience of witnessing undisturbed nature, a breathtaking exposure to primordial coastal ecosystems as they’ve existed for thousands of years. These complex barrier-island ecosystems, including both beaches and maritime forests, serve as habitat and nesting areas for a diverse array creatures – from [sea turtles](#) to shore birds and mammals such as mink, raccoons, and otters.

The unique natural asset of Cumberland Island is so treasured for its uncommonly pristine qualities 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.



The National Park Service describes Cumberland Island as Georgia's largest barrier island, a place where, 'pristine maritime forests, undeveloped beaches and wide marshes whisper the stories of both man and nature. Natives, missionaries, enslaved [African Americans](#) and Wealthy Industrialists all walked here. Cumberland Island is also home to over 9,800 acres of Congressionally designated Wilderness.' Special to SaportaReport

In establishing the National Seashore, a few patches of privately owned land were left intact. These "legacy properties" are to revert to public ownership over time. But some 1,000 acres remain in "fee-simple" ownership – and that now raises the ominous prospect of development activities that, if permitted, would fundamentally impair the celebrated natural splendor of Cumberland.

In December of last year the [Camden County](#) Planning Commission considered an application for a "hardship variance" to allow a group of Cumberland Island property-owners and family members to use 87 acres on the island to create a 10-lot subdivision. That area, zoned "conservation- preservation," is less than a quarter-mile from the Sea Camp ferry dock, where nearly all visitors arrive from the mainland. Even though the applicants failed to meet all five variance requirements, their request was granted by a [unanimous vote](#) of the county planning commission.

Camden County's Board of Commissioners has not voted on the recommendation from the Planning Commission.



Cumberland Island archeological stabilization area, 1999.
Photo courtesy John H. Jameson, Jr.

Older photos of Cumberland Island reveal that the woods and shoreline have been undisturbed for years. Credit: NPS via David Kyler

Minutes of the board's [Feb. 7 meeting](#) show lawyers for the Southern Environmental Law Center and the developer, Lumar LLC, saying they had met twice. Minutes of the [April 4 meeting](#) show 10 citizens attended to speak against the rezoning proposal. Minutes of the [April 18 meeting](#) show a lawyer for the SELC said discussions have been positive; 17 citizens spoke against the rezoning proposal.

Meanwhile, the threat of development on Cumberland has intensified, as county officials now consider a proposal to rezone all 1,000 acres of the island's fee-simple property. If such a proposal were adopted, the consequences would forever extinguish the extraordinary experience of being in this coastal wilderness. Moreover, such allowance would brazenly contradict Congress's intent when designating Cumberland Island a National Seashore.

It would be both shameful and irresponsible to allow the hard-won and costly national struggle for Cumberland's protection to be negated by a careless local-government decision made in disregard of national conservation priorities.



Lawyers for the Southern Environmental Law Center and the developer are in discussions over the future of 87.5 acres, which the owners want to develop into a 10-lot subdivision on Cumberland Island, home to the famed Oak Corridor. Credit: blog.elmonterv.com

Just as U.S. citizens wouldn't tolerate such threats to Yosemite or Yellowstone – comparable national assets – we must not abide the despoiling of Cumberland's uniquely profound beauty. Imagine arriving at Cumberland by ferry to witness the horrifying offense of chainsaws, heavy equipment, and falling oaks instead of hearing only the revitalizing tranquility of birdcalls and ocean breezes.

Resolutely defending the promise and longstanding intent to protect Cumberland against such development honors our national identity and our word. It would be appalling 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.



*Cumberland Island is about 300 miles southeast of Atlanta.
Credit: mapquest.com, David Pendered*

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. Development of Cumberland Island must be prevented by opposing the rezoning of any portion of the thousand acres of remaining private inholdings.

Cumberland guardians should voice concerns by contacting Camden officials via the clerk's office, kberry@co.camden.ga.us. All concerned are urged to attend a rally in St. Marys on June 24. For further information, go to <https://www.facebook.com/SaveCumberlandIsland>, hashtag #SaveCumberlandIsland.

Note to readers: The Center for a Sustainable Coast is a non-profit organization formed in 1997 to serve the six ocean shoreline counties and five major watersheds in coastal Georgia. Its mission is to promote the responsible use, protection and conservation of Georgia's coastal resources – natural, historic and economic. Visit the Center's Facebook [page](#) for information about the organization's 20th anniversary celebration event at a June 17 event in Savannah.

Posted January 27, 2017 06:46 pm

By a [Georgia environmentalist](#)

Saturday's Lead Letter: Preserve Cumberland Island

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.

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.

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 opens the possible consent for resource-disturbing development activities.

We now face a proposal for subdividing a parcel into ten lots to be used 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.

It would be shameful and absurd to allow the hard-won, costly struggle for Cumberland's protection to be negated by potentially careless local government decisions in disregard of national priorities.

Undoubtedly, 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?

Cumberland's serene beauty must not be irreversibly debased by the destructive disturbance of more residents, more buildings, and more vehicles. The opportunity to experience one of America's most magnificent places must not be lost to this and future generations in the misguided pursuit of private objectives benefitting a few at the expense of the many.

Cumberland guardians should email their concerns to Camden officials at kberry@co.camden.ga.us ASAP.

David Kyler
Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Coast

Issue of Jan 18 – 24, 2017

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.

David Kyler, Executive Director
Center for a Sustainable Coast