

Comprehensive Response to Public Meetings

PCR held two stakeholder meetings to gather public comments and answer questions on the Draft 2017 Shell Key Preserve Management Plan Update. The first meeting was held on September 20, 2017, to introduce the draft Plan to the public. The second meeting was held on September 25, 2017, in which members of the Shell Key Advisory Group (SKAG) were invited to participate and develop a list of suggestions to be considered for incorporation in the Plan. This comprehensive list of comments, suggestions and questions received at both meetings and through e-mail is grouped by specific topics in each section of the Plan was compiled by Pam Leasure and Steve Harper.

Introduction Section

Beach Raking

Is there any beach raking? (Paul – SKAG)

Response: while prohibited by the lease during the nesting season, PCR does not rake beach at any other time of the year.

Put in the Plan no beach raking on Shell Key year round. (Falkenstein – SKAG)

Response: added this to General Information: State Policies section.

General Questions

Why was not a representative from Ocean View in this group? (Clark – SKAG)

Response: this group was represented by the Tierra Verde Community Association advisory group member.

When will next plan be updated? (Paul – SKAG)

Response: plan is updated every 10 years as indicated in General Information: State Policies section.

Will private in-holdings be identified to be acquired? (Paul – SKAG)

Response: yes, as indicated in General Information: Ownership section.

Were there any significant changes in 2007 Plan? (Clark – SKAG)

Response: major changes made in 2007 were the prohibition of pets and alcohol anywhere in the Preserve, and requirement for campers to obtain a permit.

Will the County enforce the sea turtle lighting ordinance for the new condos on Collany Island? (Falkenstein – SKAG)

Response: referred to the Building Services Department and the Development Review Services Department.

Why was Collany Island development allowed to extend the rock groins into the area that has now filled in? Were permits granted? (Citizen Comment – Information Meeting)

Response: Public Works Department's Environmental Management Section indicated that no permit was required to reinforce existing groins.

If mosquitos become a problem, do we need an Arthropod Control Plan? (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: added statement to Introduction: County Policies: Arthropod Control Plan Section.

General Comments

All of the aerials should reflect updated photos the 2016 are too old and don't reflect the current status of the Preserve and the new ones are available. (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: at the time the Plan was developed, 2016 aerial photographs were the most current images that were available from our GIS geodatabase.

Concerned that the County will write down all the issues the group has identified and concerned the will rush the plan through by putting all the comments into an appendix. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: this document includes County responses to all questions, concerns, and comments. The transcript of the SKAG meeting will be included in the Plan as an appendix.

Restrict lighting on Collany Island for turtles. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: referred concern to the Building Services Department and the Development Review Services Department.

There is a Manatee Protection Zone recently added to the east of the Preserve. (Citizen Comment – email)

Response: added statement to Introduction: Adjacent Land Use Section.

Natural Resources Section

Surveys appear to be an additive list as new species are observed they are added to the list, is there a plan to monitor loss of species or habitats? (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: this is not feasible with existing resources, but indicated if additional resources become available it could be accomplished in Resource Management: Monitoring: Species Inventories Section.

My observation is there is a decline in the number of manatees using the waters in the north part or the south waters of the Preserve. Has this been documented? (Clark – SKAG)

Response: added statement to Resource Management: Imperiled Species Protection: Manatee Protection Section.

Sea level rise has reduced beach size plus vegetation encroachment, hence colonial birds do not have enough space. (Citizen Comment – Information Meeting)

Response: this observation is consistent with our statement found in Resource Management: Monitoring: Beach Nesting Birds Section.

Exotic species control is discussed and need to include a discussion of other nuisance fauna species. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: control of nuisance fauna, specifically predators, is discussed in Resource Management: Imperiled Species Protection: Bird Protection Section.

Incorrect scientific name for beach naupaka. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: scientific name is correct per Florida Plant Atlas.

Resource Management Section

Restoration

Congratulations on removal of all of the Australian pines. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: this has been a major accomplishment over the past 10 years.

Prioritize species and specific communities annually to track restoration progress. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: added statement in Resource Management: Habitat Restoration and Improvement Section that other communities may be restored if funding allows.

Include your actions are focused on Australian pines in the plan. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: priority on FLEPPC Category I and II species clarified in Resource Management: Habitat Restoration and Improvement: Exotic Species Control Section.

Are there plans to enhance seagrass and dunes or are you just letting mother-nature mold it? (Clark – SKAG)

Response: added statement in Resource Management: Habitat Restoration and Improvement Section that other communities may be restored if funding allows.

Regional Resources

Since 1990 significant beach nesting bird nesting activity has declined, and could be predators difficult to keep off the island. The surrounding regional resources mean that Shell Key is not an isolated piece but part of Boca Ciega Bay, including Ft De Soto and Outback Key. Plan should look at all of these resources. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: by necessity, this Plan focuses on the natural and cultural resources of Shell Key Preserve and how best to manage these resources. Added statement indicating importance of other regional resources and PCR participation in collaborative meeting focused on regional management activities in Resource Management: Habitat Restoration and Improvement: Bird Protection Section.

Warrants further discussion in the plan on how species fit into the regional picture of Fort De Soto, Outback Key and Egmont. Some questions have implications for conflicts between public uses and natural resources, more information from adjacent resources should be included. (Burke – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

More needs to be done in the Plan. This is a regional problem with the birds. The County needs to look at all of the regional beach nesting bird issues and find the problem. We can't look at Shell Key as an isolated island. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Number of successful bird nesting is concerning. Birds could be utilizing other regional resources. More research is needed to understand or specify in the management plan approach to address the cause. (Burke – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

I realize this is a plan for Shell Key. There is no reason you couldn't include in the introduction section the bigger regional issues. (Burke – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Black skimmers now found on beach (Ft. De Soto) with 5-10,000 visitors. We have an increase in sea turtles, more volunteers and County giving more access. (Falkenstein – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

With the shoreline changes of Shell Key and an increase of birds nesting at Outback Key, the County should approach the State to have Shell Key include Outback Key for management. You could include all of the resources under one management plan. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: Outback Key is managed by the State of Florida, not Pinellas County. Since it is not located within the official boundary of Shell Key Preserve, its management is not relevant to the current Plan.

Imperiled Species Protection

There are mammalian control issues, and these are made more difficult with the land bridge. Nesting will remain down until predators removed from the island. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: we address control of mammalian predators in Resource Management: Imperiled Species Protection: Bird Protection Section.

There is an increase in coyotes, and the land bridge enabled coyotes to cross over and have an abundant food source. TVCA is working with FWC to address coyote issues. County and state will not trap and remove coyotes that are nuisance or predators, what is the County's policy? What portion of the budget is set aside for coyote removal? (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: added statement of support for TVCA efforts in Resource Management: Imperiled Species Protection: Bird Protection Section. County's policy is to not remove coyotes as indicated by the educational program by Animal Services Department called "Coyotes: They are here to stay in Pinellas County." Specific funds for coyote removal at the Preserve have not been identified.

I am working with FWC to educate neighbors, workshops, brochures, websites to secure garbage, no outdoor cats and keep palms trees trimmed. (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

An effort should be made to reach out to TV neighbors to help control raccoons and coyotes through education. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: added statement that additional outreach could be accomplished if additional resources become available in the Outreach and Education Section.

Need to eradicate the coyotes because the population is growing. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Audubon and sea turtle trackers go into the non-public use areas to conduct monitoring and species protection. (Falkenstein – SKAG)

Response: these volunteer partners have permission from PCR to access non-public areas of the Preserve.

Sea turtle nesting has increase while bird nesting has decreased. (Davidek – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Coyotes are known predators of nesting shorebird eggs and chicks as well as sea turtle eggs and hatchlings. (Citizen Comment – email)

Response: added statement to Natural Resources: Wildlife: Mammals Section.

Monitoring – Birds

The management plan is intended to provide opportunities for shorebirds to nest. The Plan needs to describe a way to better utilize the island for its intended use. Need to determine the bigger reason for failure, figure out what is happening to include in the Plan. The County needs to get funding to find out why failure of nesting. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: PCR is practicing adaptive resource management using best available techniques to protect beach nesting birds. PCR collaborates with other resource managers and volunteers in the region to discuss successful and non-successful approaches to management.

PCR staff post areas as soon as the next day when nesting has been reported. (Davidek – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Because the island has changed so dramatically, are reduced nesting activities due to these changes? (Davidek – SKAG)

Response: the loss of suitable nesting habitat is discussed in Resource Management: Imperiled Species Protection: Bird Protection Section.

Monitoring – Water Quality

What months were the water quality samples collected? (Markham – SKAG)

Response: added statement in Resource Management: Monitoring: Water Quality Section.

The map shows only one sample site for 2016. I talk to residents regularly and the northeastern cove stench is bad and the water quality is bad. How much money is the County spent on water quality sampling at Shell Key Preserve? (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: Public Works Department's Environmental Management Division staff indicated exact cost of monitoring within the Preserve is difficult to calculate as it is part of the larger countywide sampling program. The overall program budget is approximately \$1M.

Most likely water quality will degrade with the closing of the pass. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Random sampling of water quality is not adequate to support any conclusion whether dredging will improve or degrade water quality. The error and degrees of freedom are too high to make management decisions. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: added data provided by Public Works Department's Environmental Management Division detailing the water quality results obtained from sondes deployed in the northeastern cove of the Preserve. Results and discussion of this sampling effort is added to the Resource Management: Monitoring: Water Quality Section.

You are not sampling in the northeast cove and the random sampling is not covering that area. We don't know if the water quality is changing because you are not monitoring. Unless you are doing sampling. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

The Plan should provide the data collected by the sondes. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

I urge you to include the additional sampling (sondes) in the Plan. Show the data from the sondes, such as Chl-a, temperature, and dissolved oxygen. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

I have taken water temperatures just south of closure and was found to be 96 degrees. That same day the temperature on the north side of pass was 89.8 degrees. The dissolved oxygen is lower with high temperature and reduced flow. There are not a lot of fish in the water because it is too hot. (Markham – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

I support additional, consistent water quality monitoring should be implemented to monitor changes due to the closure of the pass in the north preserve. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Monitoring – Seagrass

The seagrass map does not show if seagrass gain is patchy or solid. It could be important to know how that changes in the future. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: the existing analytical approach used by Public Works Department's Environmental Management Division does not include this distinction.

Dredging

This all indicates that the County should not rush the management plan I urge you to wait for the inlet management study to be completed before the plan is finalized. (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: potential dredging of the north pass is just one of many management issues the Plan addresses. The Plan is being updated as part of its regular 10-year cycle. Results of Dr. Wang's study do not directly affect implementation of management activities as detailed in the proposed Plan. Study results will provide additional information that will be used to make informed management decisions regarding dredging. Feasibility of dredging will include not only environmental concerns, but also permitting (local, state, and federal agencies), funding, ongoing maintenance, and other political factors. Results of the study will be made available to the public. If warranted, the Plan will be updated to reflect dredging activities.

The lives of Tierra Verde residents have been impacted by the closing of the pass. The information that is being gathered is important. For the health of the Preserve the County should wait on the Dr. Wang study to be completed before rushing the plan. (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

The Inlet-Management study is too big to rush the plan. The study affects so many facets of the plan and I also urge the County to wait until the study is completed to have more public discussion of the dredging. What is timeline for completion of Dr. Wang's study? (Clark – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

What is the legislative requirement timeline for the Plan? I urge you to request an extension to incorporate Dr. Wang's study. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

What is the schedule for the management plan? It has not been tweaked to recognize data collected, once the study released do you have the ability to revise this plan? (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

The north pass closure is a critical issue at Shell Key. As you have contracted a major study to determine the potential consequences of reopening the pass. I support the Advisory Group suggestion that the Plan incorporate the results of the Wang study. It will indeed take years to implement opening the pass, it would be well to get it started as soon as possible. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Does the study look at structural alternatives? (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: alternative management scenarios are being evaluated by Dr. Wang's study, and these results will be presented to the Technical Advisory Committee by the end of the calendar year.

Are you not all in agreement we need to open up the pass to improve flow of water, improve water quality and to protect nesting birds from predators via the land bridge? It is obvious something has to be done. This has to be fixed. (Citizen Comment – Information Meeting)

Response: statement requires no response.

I live in the very north end of the northeastern cove. The water in the north end of the canal is nothing like it used to be. The water is brown, mucky, dead seaweed, smells bad and the birds are not as common as they used to be. I have a boat but do not take it out because it will tear up the seagrasses exiting along the southeastern Preserve. Bought the home for sunsets, viewing nature, birds, recreation, fishing and kayaking. We can't do the things we used to do. We are asking for help. We had many meetings and thought the Governor was going to help, but he turned us down. I'm upset and the County should consider opening the pass. (Citizen Comment – Information Meeting)

Response: statement requires no response.

The north pass needs to be open. The water quality seems stagnant. Open the land bridge. (Citizen Comment – Information Meeting)

Response: statement requires no response.

Look at major dredging operations in other counties going out into the Gulf, the success of the channel depends on angle and direction of the dredge of the channel. (Markham – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

The current shoreline and the island will change over the next 10 years. (Markham – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Security

Lack of enforcement seems to be due to budget constraints. How many officers assigned to monitor and is it done at night? (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: PCSO contracted deputies are discussed in Resource Management: Security Section. PCSO handles the scheduling of deputies. A statement was added to this section to pursue additional funding for security.

How many deputy hours are provided on Shell Key? It is obvious that need more deputies for enforcement are needed and will require more funding. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Tampa Bay Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan encourages the County to look for ways find funding sources to return additional deputies. (Burke – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Additional law enforcement should be added to deal with the new stressors. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Increase patrol to enforce the laws. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Without law enforcement this plan is useless. Lack of enforcement of the rules and it's like the wild, wild, west out there again. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

People are still bringing dogs on Shell Key. (Falkenstein – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Collany Island residents are seen walking dogs at night. It's not clear to these folks that they can't bring dogs on the island or in the preserve. (Renfrow - SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

There is a problem with commercial fishermen running through closed waters of the Preserve. There needs to be more law enforcement stop this as the offenders are aware there is a lack of enforcement. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Every July 4th there are fireworks set off at Shell Key with no enforcement of the rules. This is disruptive to the birds. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Public Recreation Section

Signs

The County needs to get the public invested in the Preserve and that will take communication and trust. The rules signs are bad, they are not inviting and a poor design. I could redesign signs (with input from TBW and others) and raise money to build and maintain them. The signs need to communicate to people and invite them to read the signs. Signs should blend in with the landscape, draw people to the sign and give people an investment in the use of the island. (Colletti – SKAG)

Response: statement of support for this approach added to Public Recreation: Public Access: Signs Section.

Make signs more positive and informative. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Northeast corner needs signs to clearly identify the rules for that portion of the island. (Falkenstein – SKAG)

Response: statement added to Public Recreation: Public Access: Signs Section.

Reduce access for the Collany Key new residents. An access ramp has been placed 10 ft. from the boundary. The County needs to post and enforce the rules. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

With the land bridge connecting the Shell Key Preserve to Collany Key, and the new condos now there, the Preserve rules must be clearly posted in addition to the park boundary signage. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Move the northern part of the No Internal Combustion Engines regulatory zone southward to make the existing natural channel available to boaters. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: added proposed changes to aquatic regulatory zones in Public Recreation: Public Access: Regulatory Zones Section.

Camping

Fees should be implemented and consider limiting the number of permits issued until you can raise the number of law enforcement. (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: Plan revised to include a fee-based camping permit and seasonally adjusted number of permits issued to limit capacity in the Public Recreation: Public Use: Camping Section.

I get the idea of fees as an investment and am open to being convinced charging fees would help to managing camping. (Colletti – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Make the camping capacity flexible. (Renfrow - SKAG)

Response: see response above.

I support camping on the preserve but would be in favor of requiring a small reservation fee, which would aide in funding some of these management plan priorities budget shortfalls. I would also be in favor of restricting camping or the duration of the nesting season, May through September. I love camping at Shell Key but think the regulations can be improved to better protect our natural resources. (Citizen Comment- -SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Support camping but with restrictions. Eliminate camping during nesting season, limit number of permits per day, enforce fees if it can help with enforcement or maintenance and need better monitoring and enforcement. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

There are conflicts with users and resources management goals with regards to the birds. Give some consideration of changing camping from June through September. (Burke – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

I agree you should do something to regulate camping during nesting season. The Sea Turtle Trackers presentation during the public comment period was alarming. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

County promised to manage camping, but with no law enforcement all management promises have been broken. Shut down camping from March through September during the beach nesting bird and sea turtle nesting season. By not shutting camping down, the County is not protecting the island. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Set a carrying capacity and improve the quality of the camping experience with marked sites so campers are not so clumped together. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: see response above. It is not feasible to maintain designated camping sites on Shell Key.

Need to educate people to feel responsible. Education is the key. The vast majority of users are abiding by the rules and respectful. It is a small minority that make the other users suffer their consequences of breaking the rules. (Colletti – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

If camping is to continue on Shell Key, Sea Turtle Trackers recommend the permits obtained by campers include: explanation of violations to federally protected species of wildlife commonly present on Shell Key, explanation of appropriate lighting for minimal impact to sea turtles and encouragement of its use after sunset by campers, explanation of negative impact of trash, especially plastics and balloons, left on beaches and encouragement to leave “no trace behind”, and permits be written in Spanish, as well as English. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: when permits are revised and issued through the new online reservation system, additional information will be included.

General Comments and Questions

Tour boats dropping tourists each day giving mesh bags to collect shells. Is it legal to collect shells/like specimens? (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: yes, as long as shells do not have live animals, as detailed in Public Recreation: Public Use Section.

Collany Island development plan called for plant barrier. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: statement requires no response.

Education and Outreach

Education

Someone from the County reach out to Collany Island residents for education and investment, the county should educate the residents. (Renfrow – SKAG)

Response: added statement to Outreach and Education Section.

The County should provide education to the Collany Key residents that are living next to Shell Key. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

Should reach out to recreational user groups and target all groups to education on how they may impact the preserve. (Savercool – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

The County needs to provide outreach to the new residents at Collany Island. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: see response above.

The management plan should reflect that TBW conducts 300 field trips school boating trips, cleanups, kayak and canoe trips, remove monofilament line and crab traps. (Clark – SKAG)

Response: added statement to Outreach and Education Section.

Boaters guide to Boca Ciega needs to updated and reprinted to provide education. Audubon can help with that. (Paul – SKAG)

Response: this is not a PCR publication, and is produced by others.

Volunteers

Use volunteers to patrol camping and dogs. Issue Warnings. (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: PCR does not currently utilize volunteers for enforcement activities.

For additional volunteer resources are you actively working with Tampa Bay Watch, Audubon, Sea Turtle Trackers, etc.? (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: PCR regularly works with many partners and volunteer organizations.

Budget Section

Funding

Obligation of the Management Plan to identify needs and address the needs. Need additional funding, and should look toward elected officials and grant opportunities to identify funding to support the management plan. (?:??:??).

Response: statement added to Budget: Funding Sources Section.

For additional funding resources are you actively working with NOAA/NMFS/Restoration Center (located in St. Pete)? (Citizen Comment – SKAG)

Response: the Office of Management and Budget's Grants Center of Excellence Team regularly reviews a wide variety of grant opportunities for PCR.