

Young, Bernie C

From: pmerrifield@acsi-usa.com
Sent: Friday, May 22, 2020 4:06 PM
To: Welch, Kenneth
Cc: Welch, Kenneth; Peters, Kathleen; Eggers, Dave; Long, Janet C; Gerard, Pat; Justice, Charlie; Seel, Karen
Subject: Ft Desoto/ Bunces Pass Boating

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Hello Commissioner Welch,

Thank you for your response, and willingness to consider thoughtful approaches to making as much of our county accessible.

I am pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming interest by fellow citizens (with over 5000 signatures on a petition regarding this matter) – it means a lot to many of us.

https://www.change.org/p/pinellas-county-commissioners-bunces-pass-is-for-boaters?recruiter=5441203&recruited_by_id=0dc15ad0-2513-11e5-ba62-83b6162c744a&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=copylink&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_abi&utm_term=share_petition

I listened to a good percentage of the meeting on line, so I have a decent understanding of what the park representative was saying.

I have been a frequent boater out to the lagoon at Bunces. In the many times I have been out there I haven't seen anything that even somewhat represents that video (which was as I understand it from a few years ago).

This location is one of very few that has a number of factors going for it

1. It is reasonably close to town – and easily boatable.
2. There is very little current here – unlike even the other side of bunces pass which can have very strong currents.
3. It is somewhat remote, enabling us to 'get away from' the rat race of our work weeks, without a lot of effort.
4. there is not a lot of wave action, which provides for smooth waters – again somewhat unique to the area. While some would think that we have a lot of open beaches where we can anchor easily, many have significant wave action which often make it undesirable to stay on board a boat and also can be irritating to stand in surf.

Locations such as this could be considered Unicorns (very difficult to replicate; hence the overwhelming desire to keep the access open).

Most of us that patronize the area come by boat at a reasonable, safe pace to the area; we anchor our boats and either stay on board, or exit to stand in waist deep water to socialize with friends. We are responsible citizens that are concerned for both our safety and those around us – in this world of litigation, most of us are very concerned about even the appearance of being unsafe. First and foremost, we are there to relax, not cause problems.

Essentially, most of us are just taking a different mode of transportation to Ft Desoto than those that come by car. It's really just a water parking lot for the vast majority of us. Instead of gathering on the beach, or at one of the villas on land, we prefer to stand waist deep on the sand bar.

We have FWC, Pinellas County, and St. Petersburg law enforcement representative who provide and enforce the rules in place throughout the waterways. We appreciate and support them!

I believe that after listening to the Park representative's presentation, the primary concern was safety to swimmers, and the 'Potential' for injury in the future (not that any injury is known to have taken place to this point). He also brought up a topic of seaplanes, which I believe that he indicated that this closure would also not be able to affect (I have no suggestions for seaplanes).

Closing this area to boats due to the potential danger to swimmers is akin (in my view) to closing the streets at the park due to the potential danger to pedestrians, but I don't think anyone is considering that, are we? Instead we have reasonable speed limits.

In response to your request for suggestions, **I would offer that a reasonable means to address the concerns would be to put in a speed limit- for boaters a 'No Wake Zone' in as large an area as there is concern** – similar to how we regulate speed limits on the roads to support other pedestrian concerns. This is a common practice in delicate waterways today throughout the county.

We have had a few similar locations shut down over the years, and it appears to be having the opposite of the intended result. Because locations that have the characteristics that I've listed above are limited, when one is closed, it results in larger groups congregating at the remaining locations. Instead of reducing the amount of congestion, the remaining accessible options get more traffic.

Pinellas county is one of the greatest places to live in the country. Our citizens love living here. We have great beaches and waterways. Most, if not all of us, appreciate and respect the opportunities that we have here, and we don't want to jeopardize it. From what I heard on the call no specific or repetitive actions have taken place that would warrant a prohibition. We've just been through 2 months of heavy restrictions; I don't think anyone wants to be limited in their ability to assemble any more than is necessary – especially when there are less restrictive options.

Summer is here! We've all been cooped up for months. The beaches just reopened; Let's not shut down some of the best parts of the county – especially without significant justification. The people that live here respect the opportunities that are unique to us. Our law enforcement representatives do a great job; let's put in a slow zone in any areas of concern and trust the citizens who consider themselves lucky to live in this paradise we call Pinellas!

Thank you for your consideration, and have a great weekend!

Respectfully,
Pete Merrifield
33711

From: Welch, Kenneth <kwelch@co.pinellas.fl.us>
Sent: Friday, May 22, 2020 2:28 PM
To: pmerrifield@acsi-usa.com
Subject: Re: Overreaction - Bunces/Ft desoto

Thanks for your email regarding the Commission's recent decision regarding Vessel Exclusion Zones at Ft. Desoto park. I supported the recommendation in the interest of boater and swimmer safety. The item was properly noticed and discussed in public, televised meetings on both June 19th and June 14th.

Your email however, and the volume of email responses that I've received makes it clear to me that many in the boating community were not aware that the ordinance was under consideration by the BoCC, and I'm open to reviewing the issue. Safety is still my priority - I have seen video and photos of boaters, swimmers and even seaplanes in the same area. That appears to be a potentially hazardous situation.

Given that, I would ask you for any suggestions that you have to address the issue of safety for both swimmers and boaters in the area. Thanks for reaching out with your concerns.

KT

Commissioner Kenneth T. Welch

Pinellas Board of County Commissioners

[727.464.3614](tel:727.464.3614)

Please note: all mail sent to and from Pinellas County government is subject to the public records law of the State of Florida.

Sent from my iMac

On May 20, 2020, at 4:40 PM, pmerrifield@acsi-usa.com wrote:

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Hello Commissioners,

As a citizen in St Petersburg, I understand that a decision was recently made to restrict all boater access to an area near Bunces Pass/Ft Desoto /Outback Key

If this is accurate, I request you reconsider the decision to restrict boaters access to the area around Bunces pass and Outback key. We boaters make up a large portion of the populace in the city, and the repetitive closures of any location where boaters gather to socialize is somewhat draconian. When problems arise, there should be a way to work things out rather than outright prohibitions. From what I heard in the BCC meeting is that the request to close this area was due not to actual damages or injuries, but rather 'potential' problems. Again, a full shutdown seems extreme – especially for a town that is so intertwined with the water and water activities.

Can we please reconsider this decision and work together towards a mutually beneficial solution – if there is even a problem?

The Sherriff's comments seemed that he was unaware of an issue in the area.

Ft. Desoto is a huge park– with miles of beach all around it. Why is it that the one ½ mile area where boats accumulate is the one spot where drastic moves must be taken? Boats go slow in the area (except maybe skis).

Boaters like calm areas to relax and socialize, and closure of this location is probably going to further compress the boaters in another area– providing another excuse by someone to say that location needs to be shut down.

Multiple times over the past few years I have seen areas where boaters identify as a place to gather and socialize are deemed as a problem – when no real problem is truly identified. Nor is there an effort to work together – only a prohibition.

Continued activities of this type will result in more boats being restricted to fewer areas resulting in what I fear will be the desire to continue to restrict access to those locations.

It sounded like the biggest potential danger was high speed Jet Ski's.

IF this is the real problem, why not have no wake zones to answer the concerns? Or shut down the very inside of the zone where most boats can't get to?

Instead of working against us, can we work together? At least shouldn't there be a study or team assembled that could work through this?

I appreciate your feedback and assistance!

Thank you for your consideration.

Pete Merrifield
33711

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