



Commissioners Ask Eglin Air Force Base if Okaloosa County Can Manage Beach Property by Destin Bridge

Several years ago, in May of 2020, Eglin AFB decided to close the beach to the west of Destin Bridge due to large amounts of trash and unauthorized commercial activity on federal property. Fences and barriers went up to keep the public from entering the area that locals have longed called Redneck Beach. Local residents groaned at the loss of this magnificent beach property which had long been a favorite destination for family outings for decades.

During a regular Tuesday, January 16th Board Meeting, Commissioners considered and passed a motion to send a Letter of Intent to Eglin AFB to open the beach. This area of beach lies in my district and has been a problem area for a number of years.

A 1988 Congressional Act designated the land to provide for continued public access. In recent years a lack of resources to handle visitors forced the closure. There have been many discussions on what it would take to re-open this land to make it safe, clean and preserve the natural beauty. The county believes we now have a workable plan that will provide for more public beach while managing the natural resources of the area. Safety is foremost in the minds of everyone, as there have been many tragic drownings in the East Pass over the years.

I am hopeful for the reopening, not just for the expanded beach for the public but also for the 12 foot wide Bike Path on the south side, which will soon be a part of Hwy 98 from Beasley Park to the Destin Bridge. With ADA compliant, organized and lined parking spaces and turn lanes, this will provide for a turn-around or resting space for bikers.

The county will invest in infrastructure to improve and manage the area. The improvements will be paid for with Tourism Development Dollars. Some of the proposed amenities will include lifeguards, stationed marine patrol, county maintenance, which includes trash removal and control, bathrooms, and entrance signs. The area would have barriers to landscaping, designated environmental areas, law enforcement and park rangers, turtle safe lighting and educational information. The proposal includes cameras in the parking area and fencing where necessary. Once again, a sign will announce the entrance to "The World's Luckiest Fishing Village".

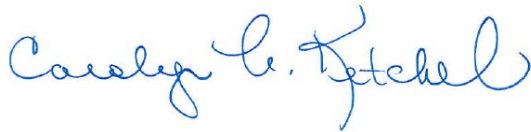
Destin area residents have long needed more public beach access. This property, well managed, will be a big win for the Destin community. The availability of this open beach will help alleviate the necessity of

Destin area residents traveling further westward on Okaloosa Island to enjoy the many lovely beaches with ready access ways on the Island.

If you have ideas of what you would like to see as part of the beach on the west end of the Destin (Marler) Bridge, please let me know. We enjoy many wonderful partnerships with Eglin AFB and we want to be good stewards of this land. I believe that with this proposal for management we have struck just the right balance for a compatible solution that will be win for the military, residents and tourists.

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



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