Local Grassroots Organization Gaining Ground against Big Government
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 Two months ago, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection began a campaign on Shell Island to crack down on people who bring their family dogs with them to frolic at the water's edge. Using all-terrain vehicles, binoculars and GPS satellite systems, armed policemen trolled this tranquil paradise, issuing warnings and tickets to citizens who have been enjoying the island for generations with their family pets.

The charge against those receiving tickets is a second degree criminal misdemeanor, meaning that the case goes to criminal court, where the defendants have had to appear along with sex and drug offenders to explain their crime of loving their dogs. Some have been put on probation for six months and forced to write an apology letter to the DEP.

A local grassroots organization emerged from the community to stand up for individual freedoms. Bay Families with Dogs, Inc. has been operational since late May, signing up members and making their case on television news programs and in the local newspaper.

Since then, the Bay County Board of Commissioners has voted unanimously to send a letter to the Florida DEP to request that they to come to the table and work out a solution. And yesterday, gubernatorial candidate Tom Gallagher toured Shell Island and took a stance in favor of allowing people to bring their dogs to the beach. Bay Families with Dogs has also received the support of the Federalist Society, a national organization that believes that the state exists to preserve freedom, and that individual liberties should be safeguarded.

Stephanie Somerset, Director and founder of Bay Families with Dogs, says "every American should care about this issue because this is a case of the little guy standing up and saying 'no' to Big Government".

More information can be found at www.bayfwd.org.

Spencer and his dog, Bailey, playing at Shell Island in happier days.

(photo submitted by Ryan Sandling)