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[German U-Boat Commanders and Dogs](#)

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(Posted Sept. 12)--Now that I have your attention, there is a meeting tonight that you might want to attend – if you love boating, fishing, taking your dog to the beach or just having a beer at sunset on Shell Island. Tonight, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection is having a public meeting to discuss the future use of Shell Island. The meeting has been minimally publicized so here you go: it is being held at Gulf Coast Community College, at 7:00 p.m., in the Language and Literature Lecture Hall (Sarzin Lecture Hall).

For those of you that don't know, DEP has been issuing 2nd degree misdemeanor citations for having a dog – or an open beer - on the beach at Shell. This isn't a traffic ticket, it's a criminal offense. Ask a local criminal attorney what they charge to defend a criminal misdemeanor case through the Bay County Court system – it's typically \$5,000.

Got your attention now? If not, take a ride out to Shell and look at all the warning signs about anchoring in sea grass. This is the first step in setting up “motorized exclusion zones” that have proliferated throughout South Florida. Managing to find a place to anchor, you will notice that there are signs everywhere warning you not to enter any area that might harbor “resting birds”. Not nesting birds, RESTING birds. These signs cordon off any area that has a hint of a dune or growth of sea oats. Why? Because DEP can and will issue you a criminal citation for “walking on a sand dune”.

If you are still vaguely interested then you might want to be at this meeting. Anybody remember a poem by Pastor Martin Niemoller, circa WWII? Niemoller, a German U-boat Commander during WW I, would later go on to first support Hitler and then renounce him, ultimately to be imprisoned from 1937 to 1945. It starts out:

They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

...It ends by saying that when they came for him there was no one left to speak up.

I have a flagrantly maligned version:

They came first for the dog owners, and I didn't speak up because I didn't own a dog.

Then they came for the beer drinkers, and I didn't speak up because I didn't drink beer.

Then they came for the power boat people, but I didn't speak up, because I didn't have a power boat.

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak up.

If you doubt that some folks would rather you never visit Shell Island again, you have only to hark back to 1989. The local Audubon Society opposed boardwalks on the western end of Shell Island. The organization said they "would like to see the number of visitors to Shell Island limited".

"Limited". Who does this apply to? Tourists or Bay County citizens, or both? Dogs are the beginning, a false threat that they must vanquish. Instead of dealing with natural predators, which access the island and prey on shorebirds since the closing of the East pass, they go after domesticated dogs and dog owners. No one that has honestly studied this issue thinks your dog is even on the radar as a problem for the Snowy Plover or the Least Tern. But, Fido is easier to deal with than trapping and killing coyotes. No guts, no solution. I'll finish with this by Louis Brandeis, circa 1928.

"The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in the insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding."

Show up tonight, and help DEP know you "understand".