

Consider all at stake

Panama City News Herald Viewpoints Letter to the Editor

June 2, 2007

Thank you for printing “Community should vote on Shell Island dog issue” in the May 23 News Herald. Such articles clearly show the need for some people to become better informed regarding what’s at stake on Shell Island.

Author Michael Monahan obviously dislikes all of the many animals he mentioned, especially dogs, and seeks to impose his hatred upon everyone. Such is his business, but in doing so he’s missed the entire point of the Shell Island debate. Bay Families with Dogs has done a marvelous job in promoting not only the continued use of Shell Island by families with pets, but also of assuring the future access to the island for all visitors, including those without pets. The group has also done a commendable job of cleaning up the island.

Absent from Monahan’s comments were any references to, or knowledge of, all the other restrictions the state sought to impose upon visitors to the island: penalties for anchoring near the island, penalties for having an adult beverage near the island, penalties for disturbing wildlife on the island (left up to the imagination of the issuing officer). Those are pretty much harsh penalties for just being on or near the island. I wonder if Monahan is aware that a proposed new law against playing a boat radio loud enough to comfortably hear near or on the island was just defeated?

What is his definition of “Bureaucracy Gone Wild”? How much government does he want or need? Bay Families with Dogs, with the support of other concerned citizens, has succeeded in assuring that all of us will be allowed to continue to enjoy the island as we have in the past, without being unfairly arrested and fined to the fullest extent of the law for the slightest of infractions. The changes in the severity of such penalties will go into effect on July 1, thanks largely to Stephanie Somerset and many other influential locals, including some island property owners and the Bay County commissioners.

Monahan should first weigh all the issues we’re dealing with — issues much larger than the family pet. Otherwise, he may soon find that he isn’t allowed near Shell Island. If that sounds extreme to him, it also sounded extreme to most other citizens when the full scope of the state’s original intent became clear. Personally, I’m very proud of the small part my family has played in upholding the continued access to and preservation of our beautiful Shell Island.

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