

## Protect People Not Sand

Congratulations to the Bay County Commission for bringing some common sense to the problem of **dogs** on Shell Island.

First, I would like to address the state and Department of Environmental Protection for putting **dogs** before people. We had one drowning and one close call recently at the kiddie pool at St. Andrews State Park. The state has said it cannot provide lifeguards or other protection because of a lack of personnel and funding. Amazing that it can provide a posse of ATV-mounted dogcatchers to patrol the beaches and hand out fines and warnings. Too bad they don't have time to patrol swimming beaches where they might save a life.

One of the claims is that **dogs** destroy nesting areas of birds and turtles. I published the "Florida Outdoor News" newspaper until 2001 and in 1990, I had a front-page photo of the old pass on the eastern end of Shell Island when it was nearly 100 feet wide and 20 feet deep. My headline proclaimed that "Shell Island will be gone by year 2000." I missed it by a year.

Shell Island was gone in 1999 when it connected with Tyndall. My other prediction came true when coyotes, foxes, raccoons, bobcats and every other predator crossed the bridge and wiped out a huge colony of nesting black skimmer gulls and least terns. They also wreaked havoc on turtle nests. Those birds now nest on buildings at the mall and Wal-Mart.

I haven't heard of **dogs** hurting people or anything on the island. Let's hope the state will spend its money and manpower protecting people and not sand.

Jim Wilson, Panama City