

Our View: Relaxing the rules

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It took two years, but it's good to see Florida finally has decriminalized many violations of rules at state parks.

The impetus for a new law that took effect July 1 was the 2006 crackdown at Shell Island in which several visitors were charged with second-degree misdemeanors for simply bringing their dogs to the sandy spit, which is part of St. Andrew's State Park. The state Department of Environmental Protection's heavy-handed enforcement sparked the creation of a local group, Bay Families With Dogs (BFWD), that advocated for a relaxation of the law.

In response to public complaints, the DEP agents became less citation-happy. In 2007, the Legislature decriminalized many offenses, including dogs on the beach, but Gov. Charlie Crist vetoed it because of concerns of a South Florida preserve. The legislation was fixed and became law this year. Many park regulations remain too restrictive, but at least violators are no longer considered criminals. Credit BFWD for this modest, but important, progress.

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