

# Letters

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no idea where their ancestors originated from. The chimneys are considered by archaeologists as one of the most preserved slave settlements in all of the United States of America. However, even after archaeologists excavated and stabilized the chimney ruins, upon their return one of the few intact chimneys was made into a makeshift barbecue grill.

I am grateful for the efforts private property owners, past and present, made in preserving Cumberland from future development, as most barrier islands have fallen prey to over-development over time.

If anyone has had the opportunity to view the Ken Burns' national parks documentaries being aired on public television, in celebration of the 100th year anniversary of national park history, you will be enlightened with the knowledge that there was a time when only the wealthy were privileged enough to enjoy recreation at national parks for its natural beauty.

A major part of preserving land for national parks was to prevent it from being spoiled by developers. Partly because of the philanthropy of wealthy private landowners, national parks were made available to everyone to experience the solitude and unspoiled wilderness.

The history of Cumberland Island goes further back than the Gilded era of the Carnegies, Rockefellers and Candler families and others who purchased this land after the end of the Civil War. Recorded history dates as far back as the Spanish missions of the 16th century.

Cumberland Island is more than pristine secluded white sand beaches hiding behind towering sand dunes and palm trees. American history is embedded deep within the interior of the island as well.

The notion of building modern homes, swimming pools and tennis courts on this island is a travesty in the making. Unfortunately as it is, we can also expect more ATVs, pss and nighttime light intrusion as well as fences. With that comes the cutting of centuries old hardwood trees, land clearing, water wells, septic and continued construction adjacent to the Sea Camp area.

I was appalled at the decision of the Camden County Planning Commission to grant a variance for paved road access. The federal government entrusted our local government with providing reasonable oversight for the protection of Cumberland Island National Seashore.

I am disappointed in the Camden County Commissioners for letting this escalate, and muddying the waters with re-zoning. Their decision is a major step backward for the protection of Cumberland Island. The citizens have spoken, and the Camden County Commissioners need to listen to their constituents. That's why we elected them, to represent us.

*Gaila Brandon  
St. Marys*

## Looking forward to an ordinance for Cumberland

Dear Editor,

On Tuesday, June 13, in response to a request by the National Park Service, Camden County Commissioners voted to delay a pro-

posed rezoning of private property on Cumberland Island. The park service's desire to interact with the island's private property owners is encouraging and significant, but should not be a substitute for ongoing county involvement. A change to the island's zoning is a necessary step in the long-term protection of the national seashore.

Like it or not, the National Park Service is unlikely to use eminent domain to condemn private property on the island. Therefore, the only way to reduce the overall number of future homes is to encourage the voluntary donation of land to the park service or the voluntary donation of conservation easements to an accredited land trust, like The Nature Conservancy.

As an incentive for conservation, the federal government provides tax benefits to private landowners who donate property or give up development rights. Zoning is one key factor that informs the Internal Revenue Service's scrutiny of the value of the relinquished property rights.

The county has a very important role to play in defining reasonable development rights through zoning. Without these rights, a landowner has little incentive to take future construction off the table.

As drafted, the county's proposed ordinance may include a density higher than many are comfortable with when thinking about an eventual build-out of the island. However, there are stronger provisions in the ordinance that have been largely overlooked. These include incentives for conservation easements and a prohibition of any future subdivision of private property. As such, the draft ordi-

nance could be a strong tool. If passed, it would be one of the most conservatively written zoning ordinances in the nation.

Now, with a strong draft ordinance in our back pockets, it is time for the National Park Service, One Hundred Miles and others to work with the landowners to come up with a comprehensive solution whereby land is donated to the park, voluntary easements are placed on private property and the county zoning regulations facilitate continued protection of the park.

Like many, we would like to drastically limit the number of potential homes within the Cumberland Island National Seashore. Low-density zoning — even the one unit per 15-acre density proposed by the county — can offer a solution for both those with an interest in donating development rights and those who want to build an additional home or two for their children.

The long-term preservation of Cumberland Island requires that all stakeholders — both public and private — are acknowledged and considered. The Camden County Commissioners represent an important constituency in this debate and should be commended for their forward-thinking, conservation-oriented approach.

We are grateful for more time to negotiate, but look forward to the eventual passage of an ordinance similar to the draft on the table. Protecting and preserving Cumberland Island requires that landowners have the tools they need to make permanent conservation a viable option.

*Megan Devoters,  
president and CEO  
One Hundred Miles*