



## Letters and Opinions

### Jekyll Beach now subject to truck traffic

I never thought I would live to see the day when Jekyll's Island's beautiful public beach—the state park's most precious natural asset—would be degraded by private truck traffic and commercialization.

But that's exactly what is about to happen thanks to the owners of the high-end Jekyll Westin Hotel, who have received a "Letter of Permission" (LOP) from DNR's Coastal Resources Division (CRD) allowing on-the-beach truck delivery of 'beach services' to rent to the hotel's customers.

The Westin's owners, the Jekyll Island Authority and CRD have a shared responsibility for this commercial venture that violates the intent of Georgia's Shore Protection Act and will alter the look and feel of Jekyll's central beach.

The Westin is at fault for claiming there's no feasible alternative to on-the-beach truck delivery of beach services consisting of chairs, umbrellas and tables. Using an apples to oranges comparison, the Westin claimed that because beach chairs were difficult to hand-deliver

at the Jekyll Hampton Inn, which is owned by the same group as the Westin, the same would hold true at the Westin. Really? The dune crossover at the Hampton is by far the longest and steepest on the island and is not at all analogous to the one at the Westin, which consists of a short, gently sloping ramp, making hand-cart delivery of beach chairs and umbrellas as easy as it gets.

In truth, hand-delivery of beach chairs and umbrellas on Jekyll is obviously feasible since it has been done for years at the Jekyll Club Hotel's beachfront facility, which, ironically, is also owned by the same group as the Westin, and where the dune crossover is longer, has steps and is much harder to traverse than at the Westin.

What may have spawned this profit-generating LOP request is not the lack of a feasible alternative but poor planning by the Westin's owners, who either forgot to include an on-site storage facility for their beach amenities or assumed they could be stored off-site for free on JIA property and then truck-delivered on the beach with JIA and CRD approval.

The JIA is at fault for going along with the Westin's "no alternative" rationale and for discounting the ramifications of allowing the Westin to truck-deliver its beach services and set up shop ON the beach. As a result, the JIA is poorly positioned to deny similar requests by other oceanfront hotels on Jekyll, all of which have dune

crossovers less suited for hand cart delivery of beach services than is the case at the Westin.

By letting the proverbial camel's nose under the tent, the JIA has made possible the expansion of "beach services" to be offered ON Jekyll's beach. What's next – spiffy food, drinks with those tiny umbrellas in them, and recreational beach amenities?

And, by allowing private truck traffic ON Jekyll's beach, the JIA has placed at risk assorted critters, including burrowing clams, crabs and the occasional sea turtle hatchling that is foolish enough to break ground in the morning and crawl toward the ocean during truck time.

To the JIA's credit, the Westin's ON the beach rental service has been approved as a one-year trial. Let's hope that next year the JIA puts an end to this ill-advised venture and compels the Westin to store its beach amenities on the hotel's leased property.

Prime responsibility for the Westin affair rests with CRD, which sidestepped the formal permitting process by issuing on its own authority a LOP allowing the Westin to set up a for-profit venture within the dynamic dune field governed by the Shore Protection Act.

Since there is no public comment period or even a public meeting prior to issuing a LOP, and because the applicant does not have to meet the standards that attend the Shore Protection Act permitting process,

CRD was able to approve the Westin's request without providing an opportunity for concerned citizens to register an objection or defend the public interest.

Seemingly, this whole deal should be short lived since, by law, a LOP is for "a project or other temporary activity that concludes within six months...." Unfortunately, there is a huge legal loophole which allows an applicant to file for a renewal of a LOP year after year, making permanent what was supposed to be a temporary activity.

If the Westin's permit to set up shop ON Jekyll's beach is to actually be temporary, then CRD must honor the intent of the law by denying year after year renewal of a LOP. If that doesn't happen, then the statute should be amended so as to make clear that a "temporary activity" is just that.

As Shore Protection Committee member Stan Humphries said recently regarding LOP abuse, "What was intended for a special limited use has become a routine way of doing business. This is shortsighted and wrong." Truer words were never spoken – it's time to set things right before exploitation of our public beaches for the sake of a buck becomes commonplace.

David Egan  
Jekyll Island

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