

Karl Burgess
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Coastal Resources Division
One Conservation Way
Brunswick, GA 31520
September 25, 2015

Dear Mr. Burgess,

We are writing to you on behalf of the members of the Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island State Park to register our opposition to private vehicles serving a commercial purpose being allowed to operate on Jekyll Island's beach. Specifically, we object to the Westin Jekyll Island's use of a motorized vehicle to provide on-the-beach services to the hotel's guests, an enterprise approved by the Jekyll Island Authority and authorized by the DNR's Coastal Resources Division through a Letter of Permission that was issued on March 23, 2015, and expired on September 23, 2015.

Unknown at this time is whether the Westin will file for a permit with the Shore Protection Committee (SPC) in order to resume its beach services next year, but if it does, we ask the SPC to take the following factors into account.

Commercial traffic on the state park's main beach will inconvenience beachgoers and interfere with their enjoyment of one of Jekyll's prime assets as a tourist destination. This would be particularly true at or near high tide when the narrowness of the dry beach along the transport route would require the vehicle to weave its way through the chairs and blankets of people who are trying to enjoy a day at the beach. Not only would beach aesthetics and public convenience be negatively impacted at these times but so would Jekyll's image as a family-friendly seaside destination.

It is not only unreasonable for beach goers to suffer the annoyance of commercial traffic but unnecessary as well, for there is a feasible alternative to vehicular delivery of the beach services the Westin wants to provide.

- Three of Jekyll's hotels currently provide hand-delivered beach services and have been doing so for years. Those properties are farther from the beach

than the Westin and have dune crossovers that are more difficult to traverse than is the one on the Westin's north end. If those hotels can provide on-the-beach guest services without using a motorized vehicle, clearly the Westin can do so as well.

- The Westin actually relied on hand-delivery of its beach chairs and umbrellas for the last two months of the summer season, when the delivery vehicle was out of commission for reasons unspecified. Since these guest services were, in fact, transported to the beach by hand, it seems reasonable to conclude they can be delivered that same way for the entire summer season.

Given the Westin's close proximity to the beach and ease of access, reauthorization of the hotel's motorized beach services would set the "permit bar" so low that the SPC would be poorly positioned to deny this same privilege to other oceanfront hotels on Jekyll, all of which are farther from the beach and have less convenient access than the Westin.

The Jekyll Island Authority has indicated that it does not intend to approve motorized beach services for other hotels or to allow the Westin to expand its on-the-beach business. However, the area covered by the Letter of Permission (LOP) authorizing the Westin's beach driving activity for this past summer included the beach just to the south of the Westin, which is adjacent to the soon-to-be built Jekyll Oceanfront Suites. Authorizing beach driving for both of these hotels would be cause for grave concern for folks who prize the serene, non-commercialized character of Jekyll's main beach.

Perhaps the best indicator of why commercial traffic on Jekyll's beach is problematic are the results of a recent survey conducted by the Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island regarding the Westin's motorized delivery of beach services. More than 1,000 people participated in the survey, including visitors from around the state and across the country. Ninety-five percent of the respondents objected to a private vehicle serving a commercial purpose being allowed to operate on Jekyll's beach. Many of the survey's participants provided comments regarding the "nuisance factor," the availability of alternatives to vehicular delivery of beach

services, and the degradation of the integrity of Jekyll's beach that would attend commercial traffic on the beach. These people are representative of Jekyll's clientele, so it seems reasonable to ask the SPC to give their views careful consideration regarding the issue at hand.

Lastly, the Westin and the Jekyll Island Authority have indicated that hand-delivery of beach chairs is not feasible because the access ramp adjacent to the Westin hotel is too narrow to accommodate beach chair delivery and passersby at the same time. Assuming this contention is valid, we suggest that the functional width of the crossover ramp in front of the Westin be expanded from its current 45 inches to match the functional width of the ramp at Jekyll's Great Dunes Park, which is 76 inches. Widening the ramp would make access by hand cart or similar devices easier and could resolve this issue to everyone's satisfaction.

Thank you for giving this matter the attention it deserves.

Respectfully,

Diane Shearer, Chairperson

David and Mindy Egan, Co-Directors

Initiative to Protect Jekyll Island State Park



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