

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR - Thursday, April 13, 2017

1. Commissioners aren't listening to constituents Dear Editor, In response to Camden County commissioner Jimmy Starline's comments, and the actions being taken by all the county commissioners and the county planning committee at the April 4 meeting: He should not blame the National Park Service for not purchasing the remaining private property on Cumberland Island as an excuse to grant the paved road access variance to Lumar LLC for development on Cumberland Island or to rezone. Things such as federal budget cuts, elimination of eminent domain by Congress and faith in the local government of Camden County all played a significant role in that regrettable decision. The National Park Service and the citizens of Camden County trusted the Camden County commissioners to uphold the stipulation of required paved road access in order to develop private land. This was to be a permanent requirement so that the island would be forever protected, as outlined by Congress, when it was made into a national seashore park decades ago. All the commissioners have to do is deny the variance. Leave the requirement of paved road access in place and the island will be saved from future development forever. Deny the variance; it's that simple. They deny variances all the time in the county. The company Lumar LLC purchased the property with the knowledge of "buyer beware," that it could not be developed. That was their choice, and that is why they paid the absolute minimum in taxes for ocean property for all this time. There is no "new revelation" of a hardship case. The only "revelation" is that the elected officials of Camden County are not listening to their own constituents as they speak out against this proposal to allow development on their treasured Cumberland Island National Seashore. Why is that? Gaila Brandon St. Marys
2. Keep island a national treasure Dear Editor, My family is closely tied to Cumberland Island as my great-great-great-grandfather once owned the land where the Greyfield Inn now stands. I am writing to ask that you please do not rezone any part of Cumberland Island. Please keep Cumberland — in its entirety — a national treasure. Please do not allow this "hardship variance" to be passed. Because as good as Sam Candler's intentions may be, someone else's will not be, and the next thing you know, we have another Hilton Head. I am horrified this is even being considered. Kim Patton Durham, N.C.
3. Grant helps kids experience park Dear Editor, Cumberland Island National Seashore was awarded a travel grant through the National Park Foundation for a program called Every Kid in a Park. The hero? Robin Barker, a ranger at Cumberland who applied for the grant. There were three components for the program: a pre-visit to each classroom, a field trip day and a follow-up visit in the classroom. The winners? All the current fourth-graders in Camden County. There were other individuals who had the opportunity to make a difference in the students' lives. My husband and I are Cumberland Island volunteers. After training with Robin, for each trip we were assigned a group of students to lead on their field trip. Some of these students had never been on a boat. The ferry ride was so exciting with dolphins and sea birds. Some had never seen the ocean. We left the ferry with our groups. Each group voted on a name — Dolphins, Leatherbacks, Crabs and so on. We entered the maritime forest, a place where a fragile ecosystem exists with live oaks, palmetto understory, bubble gum pink lichen, birds and even armadillos. The students made a food web using yarn to learn about the ecosystems and how

they link to show relationships. Walking further into the forest, animal adaptations were discussed using skulls, animal pelts and feathers. What a special time for all. We walked over the boardwalks — protecting the dunes — to the beach and ocean. Their eyes opened, exclamations of excitement and joy were almost overwhelming to my husband and I. The students played a game called “Oh Crab,” learning about basic resources and how ecosystems control how many creatures can survive there. Shells to bring home. A time to appreciate this jewel of a national park for all, including teachers, parents, volunteers and park rangers. These students will be the ones to preserve our environment with the knowledge learned in these meaningful outdoor experiences. We need to provide more of these opportunities to those who will be stewards of our national parks and seashores. Thank you to Robin and Cumberland Island National Seashore for an experience of a lifetime. Ed and Dianne Torgersen St. Marys