

Owners pledge to keep Cumberland pristine

I am writing to respond to your [April 14](#) editorial regarding Cumberland Island. My name was mentioned in the editorial, and I thank you for an opportunity to respond.

Yes, I am one of many people who have been inspired by Cumberland, and I am thankful for citizens who are concerned for that special place. In working within Camden County zoning laws, my family and other families with private ownership have no intention of obtrusively disturbing the island's great majesty.

The beauty of Cumberland is the very reason we have quietly chosen to keep caring for the island. Years ago, I remember working with, and hosting, many friendly environmentalists as we kept the island from being developed as Hilton Head Island had been. We have participated in beach clean-ups, bird counts, turtle caring, and even in the maintenance of the historic African Baptist Church. We have assisted many a lost hiker, and we have allowed for a parallel hiking trail to cross our private properties. Finally, of course, our families have lived there; we have been baptized and married and buried on that island. It is a holy place.

The careful stewardship of Cumberland has certainly come from the public, and the National Park Service, but that stewardship has also come from private landowners over the years. Perhaps it is a testament to that quiet care of the island that many people have been surprised to learn that some of the island remains in private ownership. We have worked pleasantly and honorably with the National Park Service. Cumberland Island is quite large, and we believe that public-private stewardship can continue there.

The families who are currently negotiating respectfully with the officials of Camden County are clear that we are not developers. Our long history on the island demonstrates that. We do want the ability to build homes for our families, as anyone would who owns private property.

Our families would be as horrified as anyone if huge subdivisions were developed on Cumberland. Thus, we are investigating ways to limit the number of houses that might be built per year. Our goal is that any such home would be a quiet, unobtrusive presence on Cumberland. It is our understanding that such private inholdings exist throughout the National Park System. We believe the same, respectful, public-private co-existence can occur on Cumberland Island. In fact, it already has been in existence, for over 40 years.

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