



Island wrestles with land

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“Cumberland Island is your park. You need to know that,” island superintendent Gary Ingram told the Camden Roundtable earlier this month. “It sits off of your coast, your community but at the same time, it belongs to taxpayers across the country.”

Thousands of those taxpayers visit the national seashore each year

— an experience that could be impacted by a move to build houses on 87 privately held acres just north of the park’s Sea Camp dock, visitor’s center and campground. In December, the county planning commission approved a hardship variance to divide the acreage into 10 lots. The property owners plan to construct houses on the land though a zoning change would be needed. The variance has since been appealed to the



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county commissioners.

“The National Park Service has no authority on private land. Period, whether it’s here or in Alaska or anywhere else in this country,” Ingram said. “... One thing I’ve told the county, one thing I’ve told all parties involved is that we may not have authority over there but you’re still our neighbors and we’re your neighbors and I’m looking for people to respect the values of the management of the park and the people who come to visit our national park, your national park.”

With ongoing discussions about the variance taking place, Ingram said he believed cooler heads would prevail and called those involved “smart, fantastic” people. He said the park’s position hasn’t changed.

planning commission in December. “That being said, we want to preserve and protect the island for future generations.”

Answering a question from the audience, Ingram said the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior do have money to purchase land for parks but it’s a political decision that is sometimes made with a willing seller.

“No one has come forward and said, ‘Hello, we’re willing to sell,’” Ingram said.

Ingram also touched on the challenges staff faced after Hurricane Matthew in October. Both the Sea Camp and Dungeness docks sustained significant structural damage and parts of the dock sank into the water. On the mainland, the storm affected the elevator in the visitor’s center and flooding damaged the carpet and possibly drywall in the museum. All of the exhibits were fine.

“The docks, oh, boy, the docks about killed me

Ingram got a second opinion on the docks and the second company said they could fix the Sea Camp dock for \$25,000 and restored ferry access by the end of October. Federal highway money will be used to fix most of the Dungeness dock, which had recently been renovated.

Responding to another question, Ingram said park service staff have only heard back on one of the approximately 30 questions they submitted about the spaceport project. That question was about noise and staff are reviewing the noise study.

“My cursory overview of the thing now looks like it’s going to get loud,” Ingram said “They’re rockets, right?”

A spaceport could impact Cumberland in many different ways — including having to close off parts of the park — and Ingram said he wanted answers to those questions.

“It’s important to the park, it’s important to me

“They have to manage their properties in accordance with federal laws that we have on the island and from what I’ve seen in the two years that I’ve been here, they’ve been very good neighbors,” Ingram told the

when I heard the initial six months, mostly like a year shutdown,” Ingram said. “That was a disheartening thing to hear, knowing people in the community, how they rely on that source of income.”

but it’s also important to the community,” he said. “So people who are pro rocket, I respect what their position is and understand where they are coming from but I would hope that they would do me and my folks the same.”