



EAST PASS PARK TO REOPEN WITH IMPROVEMENTS

In spring of 2020, Eglin AFB made a decision to close the park on the south side of Marler (Destin) Bridge, mainly because of the trash that had become unmanageable. Coast Guard personnel spent every Monday morning cleaning trash that had been left behind by weekend users of the area. As a mother of two Eagle Scouts, we taught our scouts to “leave no trace” which means the area visited should look better than when you found it. Sadly this idea was not adhered to by those using this property for recreation. The southern view, across from Noreigo Point is a stunning piece of property that locals enjoyed for a “day at the beach” for many years as we entered the “World’s Luckiest Fishing Village.”

The county has worked in partnership with Eglin AFB leadership to come up with a workable solution for managing the area and East Pass Park is set to re-open as a public beach. Okaloosa County has agreed to be in charge of the property. We intend to have paved parking spaces, bathrooms, lifeguards, park rangers and sheriff marine patrol. We will also have fencing, boardwalks, signage, trash receptacles, beach cleanup, turtle lighting and similar improvements.

The intent is a safe area that is clean and well attended that can be utilized by everyone. Our military partners at Eglin are pleased with the plan.

The park amenities will be paid for by Tourist Development dollars (TDC). We expect the cost of the park improvements to be somewhere between \$.5M and \$1M.

Many of you have followed the Bike Path that is being built on the Gulf side of Hwy 98 from Brooks Bridge to Marler Bridge. It is set to open late March or beginning of April. East Pass Park will also serve as a trailhead and eastern terminus for the bridge to bridge bike path.

Although we have had a number of years without the use of this area, the solution should make this a safer and cleaner environment for everyone. As locals know, the current of the east pass is strong when the tide rolls out. Over the years, there have been drownings and injuries in the pass. With the addition of lifeguards and sheriff marine patrol, we will provide happy memories, for our time, at the beach for locals and visitors alike in a well-maintained environment.

On another note under the category of community recreation, Okaloosa County is actively working on new waterfront parks in partnership with the Town of Shalimar at the Shalimar Bridge and the City of Mary Esther at Cristobal Lane. Using TDC dollars we hope to clear these

areas and make them a recreational amenity and beautiful areas for our community to enjoy. Cleanup and demolition has already occurred. Design and permitting is underway in Mary Esther and soon to be in Shalimar.

As residents understand, we benefit financially from the tourism dollars and it is a nice to see community and recreational improvements from those dollars. We are grateful for our partnership with Eglin AFB as the bike path becomes a reality and the East Past Park is opened on Eglin property. Local residents, including military personnel and visitors will benefit from our community recreational improvements

It is an honor to serve as your County Commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



Carolyn N. Ketchel

Vice-Chairman

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