

To the National Park Service Negotiated Rulemaking Committee.
December 12, 2008

My name is Michael Gery and I live on Roanoke Island. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee today. I speak for myself alone, but I do know there are many others who feel as I do about trying to keep as much of our national seashore as natural as possible so that people can see an ocean beach in its natural state. Experiencing a natural ocean beach is not so easy to do these days. But that's why this national seashore was established: to protect and maintain a beach for people to enjoy far into the future. And even those who opposed it back then probably would admit today that Cape Hatteras National Seashore is one of the best things to have happened to this area.

But since the popularity and subsequent invasion of SUVs beginning about 30 years ago, the experience of seeing a natural beach here has not only been threatened but is no longer possible in large sections of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

All we're asking is to return more of this beach to the peace and quiet it's supposed to have, and that means more stretches closed year-round to motorized vehicles. It does not mean closing the beach to people or to recreation or to fishing. We keep hearing our county commissioners, our tourist bureau, and some in the business community saying that the Park Service and environmental organizations have closed the beaches or have threatened to close them. These statements are not only irresponsible, they also are dangerous. And they may have kept many, many families from visiting here recently.

The Park Service has never once closed this beach to anyone who wanted to walk on it.

In fact, the Park Service has worked very hard to keep that access free and open, and to maintain these beaches so future generations can appreciate the beauty of this place.

Driving on the Cape Hatteras National Seashore beach has never been a right. It has been a privilege. The responsible beach-driving people – the ones who respect the beach and its regulations, and who help keep it clean and natural – understand it is their privilege to drive on the beach. It's way past time that the National Park Service, as it has in parks nationwide, institutes a permit and fee system for driving on the beach here. Just as we pay for a license to drive on the highways or to fish in the coastal waters as a way to maintain and protect the roads, the fisheries and the waters so others besides us can use and enjoy them in the years to come, people should pay for the privilege to drive on the beach and take responsibility for maintaining and protecting the beach.

It's been interesting to see how this committee has drawn sides, generally speaking, between those representing their own narrow self-interest and those representing the interest of the general public. The Audubon Society, The Natural Resources Defense Council, the Southern Environmental Law Center, are longtime, respectable organizations who have consistently upheld their commitments to represent constituencies larger than narrow recreational or business interests. And it's interesting that some of their most vocal opponents continually belittle the role of science and

research in this process. Criticizing those who carefully report their research findings is like telling your doctors they don't know what their talking about when they say "I can't say this for sure, but if you continue smoking cigarettes, you might face health problems."

The historic events of this fall – the economic crisis and the national election – seemed to send a very clear signal to all Americans. That message is that it is no longer in our best interest to behave like bulls in a china shop, or like bullies on a playground, whether overseas or in our own backyard. It seemed to say that the real American character respects our neighbors and our communities, our history, our beliefs, our environment and our system of government. So we are a majority now who look forward to a new administration in Washington that will reflect that true, respectful American character. We look forward to a new administration that will restore dignity to the Department of the Interior and will allow the National Park Service to do what it does best: to once again manage and protect this national treasure we have in our backyard.

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