

THE STATE PORT PILOT OPINION

EDITORIALS

Too many unknowns

If a ship performing seismic airgun tests caused one humpback whale to die and wash ashore at Oak Island, it would be seen as an environmental tragedy.

Cameras and video would roll, gawkers would crowd the beach and the whole drama would be covered from start to finish. Many would be left wondering why the authorities allowed it to happen.

Apparently, it could be acceptable to injure or kill about 1,086 humpback, sperm, sei, fin, blue and North American right whales, under the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) released by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management.

The report, prepared as a way to open the door for geologic testing for oil and gas in the Atlantic, contains troubling remarks about the potential effects of the high-volume airguns used to profile the deep areas of the seabed.

The EIS already calls for banning tests from November to April, when North Atlantic right whales migrate through our area. The right whale is one of the most critically endangered creatures on earth; roughly 500 still survive. The draft EIS states eight to 13 would be injured or killed in eight years, and another 1,800 disturbed or harassed.

Remarkably, this "would not appreciably reduce" the species or its recovery, the EIS states. Some marine biologists counter that the loss of even a few individuals could cause extinction. Equally troubling is that sound blasts louder than a jet engine could alter their behavior, including causing them to avoid areas where they usually feed, even when the tests are finished.

Then there are our friendly, charming dolphins. The report speaks of "severe consequences" if marine mammals threatened by airguns cannot escape, ranging from stranding to possibly fatal decompression sickness.

Estimated injuries or deaths of the bottlenose species alone total more than 40,000, the report stated.

Imagine the horror of a stranded dolphin pod at Caswell Beach. Then try explaining to a 12-year-old boy why we had to kill Flipper and his family so there would be cheap fuel for the minivan.

The EIS outlines a broad base of what we know about sea turtles and their response to loud noises, and seems to anticipate potentially harmful effects. Then, it deals with the question by stating that not enough is known to quantify the effects of airgun testing on sea turtles and their behavior.

We think the feds got at least one part exactly correct: not enough is known. That's why the communities of Caswell Beach, Carolina Beach and Wrightsville Beach have passed resolutions voicing concern.

People have done enough damage to the sea. Pressing forward with potentially dangerous tests without better assurances for marine mammal safety would be both wrong and against our own long-term interests.

Balancing act

At an all-day budget retreat last month, Brunswick County commissioners adopted their goals and focus areas for 2014-15. It wasn't all about dollars and cents.

Topping the list was support for economic development and a plan to attract new jobs to the area. How? By working closely with the Brunswick County Small Business Advisory Commission to create a more friendly and positive business environment in the county, and by developing strategies to recruit industries here.

There was an important stipulation attached: the county should pursue business growth, but at the same time protect our residential neighborhoods, since two of the main industries in Brunswick County are tourism and our growing retirement community.

Also on their list was a goal of strengthening the organization of county government and improving customer service. Commissioners noted one way to achieve this is by reviewing the county's unified development ordinance to make the UDO a set of rules that is clear, simple and easy to understand.

The Brunswick County Planning Department recently held roundtable discussions with the public to gather input on where UDO changes are needed.

The UDO was adopted in 2007 to regulate county growth by requiring setbacks and buffer zones between businesses and homes and mandating architectural and street standards for developers so that residential and commercial areas could co-exist in this rapidly growing but still overall rural county. No document is perfect, and some do require amendments or adjustments at times.

In light of concerns about the UDO's future, commission chairman Phil Norris stated what we all hope remains true. The UDO shouldn't be watered down under the guise of being pro-business. We absolutely need more jobs and industries, but we also need to protect why people are choosing to build homes and live here. It's a careful balancing act.

Norris said he has no intention, and we hope the board feels likewise, of doing anything to lessen property values in Brunswick County. Any upcoming changes or amendments to the UDO will be for the good of the county and its residents, he added.

That's a good way to judge if UDO changes are acceptable.



Your letters

Oak Island

No mega-houses

To the Editor:

We live full-time on the beach portion of Oak Island. We want to go on record as being opposed to the recommendation to allow 10-bedroom home construction on the island.

We live beside a 5-bedroom rental. Folks seem to save their energy and mischievousness for 51 weeks just to let loose during that one week of vacation. They drive vehicles on the grass, party until the wee hours, and make lots of noise. We can't imagine doubling the racket if it were a 10-bedroom rental.

If a family or group needs to rent 10 bedrooms, let them rent two houses. Our relatives rent three houses when they make their annual Oak Island migration. The reason they travel to Oak Island for vacation, and the reason we moved here, is because the island is quiet and not crowded. Let's keep it that way.

We are told that the town's planning board is comprised of Realtors and contractors. Their vision may be blurred by the opportunity to make money. We would guess that they chose to live here because it is quiet and quaint. Surely they are not willing to forego those amenities for profit.

Why lose the island's character and ambiance to such mammoth structures? Please return to the six-bedroom cap for new home construction.

Tommy and Marty Younts
Oak Island

Just not right

To the Editor:

We are part-time resident owners of homes in Oak Island and have paid town and county taxes since 1976, along with outrageous water/sewer fees, and now we have to pay 50 cents or a buck to walk out on the town-owned pier?

There are many others just like us. This is just not right, and should be changed.

Kyle and Bonnie Harris
Greensboro/Oak Island

Boiling Spring Lakes Coward's way

To the Editor:

It is quite apparent that the City of Boiling Spring Lakes is run by three people: commissioners Dave Putnam, Barbara Glidden and Mary Stillwell. I am ashamed to admit that I voted for these three, thinking that they would be their own person and make good decisions for this city that I love.

Monday night at the citizens forum they did away with the job of public works director. Larry Modlin was at the meeting and was totally blindsided by this decision, which was clearly made by the same three commissioners. This was a coward's way of getting what they wanted.

In Larry's stead, they want to hire a civil engineer, and made this decision without proper investigations and studies.

Larry and his wife live across the street from me and my husband. I can't tell you the number of times we have seen his work truck leave his property after work hours to go take care of a weather-related situation, and/or to open or close the gates at the dam. Is a civil engineer going to do this?

And what about the cost? The last regime lowered our taxes (a purely political ploy and I won't go into that), but you surely can ex-

Letters policy

The State Port Pilot invites its readers to share opinions on matters of local public interest. Lengthy letters may be edited for space, or may be returned to the writer if editing would significantly alter the content. The writer's address and/or telephone number must be included in case verification is required. No letters will be published without the name of the writer; street addresses and telephone numbers will not be published.

Send submissions to Letters to the Editor, The State Port Pilot, P. O. Box 10548, Southport, NC 28461. Our fax number is 910-457-9427. Our e-mail address is pilot@stateportpilot.com.

pect your taxes to go up!

I wish there was something that could be done about this coalition of commissioners, but there probably is no way to get them out of office. However, what we can do is write letters to the editor of *The State Port Pilot*, or send the commissioners an e-mail or text or phone call, expressing our concerns. In fact, I will make it easy for you to do one of the above:

— Barbara Glidden 845-8730; commglidden@gmail.com
— David Putnam 338-7790, commputnam@gmail.com
— Mary Stillwell 540-8326; commstillwell@gmail.com

The fourth commissioner is Mike Forte. You might want to contact him too. His phone number is 973-931-0144 and his e-mail is mforte61@yahoo.com.

I am truly sickened by what's going on in our little town. And, I wonder how the three commissioners can sleep at night.

Sharon H. Zakszeski
Boiling Spring Lakes

Next on the list?

To the Editor:

Monday night, a prepared statement by commissioner David Putnam put to vote that public works director Larry Modlin be relieved of his duties and be replaced by a civil engineer. The vote came in as a slam-dunk by commissioners Putnam, Barbara Glidden and Mary Stillwell. And to top it off, Glidden also had a "prepared" statement giving Mr. Modlin his salary until the end of June.

Now wasn't that a nice gesture on her part for a loyal employee of the city for over 15 years?

Well, Larry, the former mayor finally got you! And he even came to witness it with all of his old cronies. Who is next on his list?

Now let's address the fact that the board is hiring a civil engineer after it just voted at the last meeting to spend approximately \$50,000 for an engineering study! Is that not putting the cart before the horse? And is that engineer going to have to put up with never getting allocations for new equipment or even money for rags for the garage mechanic? You can't get much done if the "city fathers" don't spend the money to get it done! Or was that money withheld just to make Mr. Modlin look bad?

Not to mention that huge raise the ABC Board just got—also a Glidden, Putnam and Stillwell slam-dunk!

Not to mention all of the hullabaloo over

Spring Lake and all of the money already spent.

Boiling Spring Lakes residents, is this the way you want Mr. Putnam and the "girls" on the board to continue to spend your money? At the whim of their "friends" and the bidding of the former board?

I've said it before: you need to have coffee in Richardson's garage and beer at the VFW, because that is where your tax dollars are decided upon—certainly not by all of the commissioners working together for the good of all the residents at the commissioners' meetings!

Judith Thuer
Boiling Spring Lakes

Brunswick County Money's worth

To the Editor:

On May 6, voters in Brunswick County will have the opportunity to weigh-in at the polls on a quarter-penny tax levy. While the idea of any tax increase may be unsettling, there are actually many advantages of this proposed increase to address some of the shrinking state and federal resources available to our schools and beach communities.

The quarter-penny tax would bring Brunswick County to the same rate as our neighbor New Hanover County (7-percent) and would create a sustainable funding source for county officials to share between two of Brunswick County's most important economic drivers—public schools and our beaches. The beauty of the increase is that property taxes are not impacted, but rather the increase is shared with every citizen and visitor to our county.

Important to note is that gas and groceries are exempt from the increase and the reality of the increase equates to a \$.02 addition on an \$8.00 restaurant meal.

As chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Education, I can without hesitation make the case for over \$100-million of capital needs to ensure our schools have the necessary facilities to continue providing outstanding educational programs. These continually improving educational programs provided by our public schools contribute to the economic stability of our county, as they have for more than a century. The funds generated by the quarter-penny tax increase will allow us to leverage financing to cover the most pressing facility needs right away and delay and possibly reduce the size of what will be an inevitable bond referendum for our voters to consider in the coming years.

For these reasons and to support the continued efforts of our educators to prepare our children for their future, I urge you to vote "yes" on May 6.

John Thompson
Leland

School start times

To the Editor:

I just heard about the possibility of changing school start times again and wanted to share my opinion.

Last year, I fought to keep the schedule as it was because it worked for most working parents, as well as the children. I even suggested that the older students have the later start time because they do not require the supervision getting ready or onto a bus that young children do. I literally had to quit my job and

See Your letters, page 9A

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