



STAFF PHOTO | MARK COURTNEY

This is one of several no-trespassing signs that was torn down on the north end of Carolina Beach. Many residents and visitors would like to see the north end closed to vehicles.

Majority rules?

Landowners: Close Carolina Beach's north end to vehicles

By Sam Scott
Staff Writer

CAROLINA BEACH | A majority of property owners at the undeveloped north end of Pleasure Island want it closed to vehicle traffic, proponents of the ban said Friday.

A primary advocate for banning beach driving, Lynda Bilbrough said she plans to present the owners' statements wishing to ban vehicles on their land to the New Hanover County Commissioners at their Monday meeting.

The North End of Pleasure Island begins with a band of property belonging to the town of Carolina Beach and continues as undeveloped private land. Together the properties are a favorite summertime hangout for thousands.

The land has belonged to several families for generations. With death and inheritances, it has not been clear what the owners want from the property, if anything.

But one of the owners, Lincoln Hill, said he tracked down owners of four of the seven properties and found that they also want the land closed to cars and trucks.

With the owners' intentions supposedly clear, Ms. Bilbrough and other members of the Citizens for the Conservation of the North End want deputies to enforce trespassing laws on the properties, which they see as a delicate ecosystem battered by improper uses.

"I don't believe that a beach is supposed to be a parking lot," said Ms. Bilbrough, who owns a home in a gated community across from the



STAFF PHOTO | MARK COURTNEY

Proponent Lynda Bilbrough said 'I don't believe that a beach is supposed to be a parking lot.'

beach.

With the property not part of the town of Carolina Beach, policing is left to the distant New Hanover County Sheriff's Department.

"It's a dangerous place," said Todd McLeod, a supporter of closing the beach. It's a free-for-all on weekends, he said, with beachgoers littering beer bottles, trash and human waste.

The town of Carolina Beach and many locals take a dim view of closing the beach, which is a popular draw.

Councilman Gary Doetsch said it seems as if some are trying to create a private beach for themselves at the expense of a tradition of open use.

He said the answer to criminal and safety concerns would be better enforcement, not new laws, he said.

The Sheriff's Department said it

writes an average of 1,200 to 1,400 citations at the north end of Carolina Beach during the summer months.

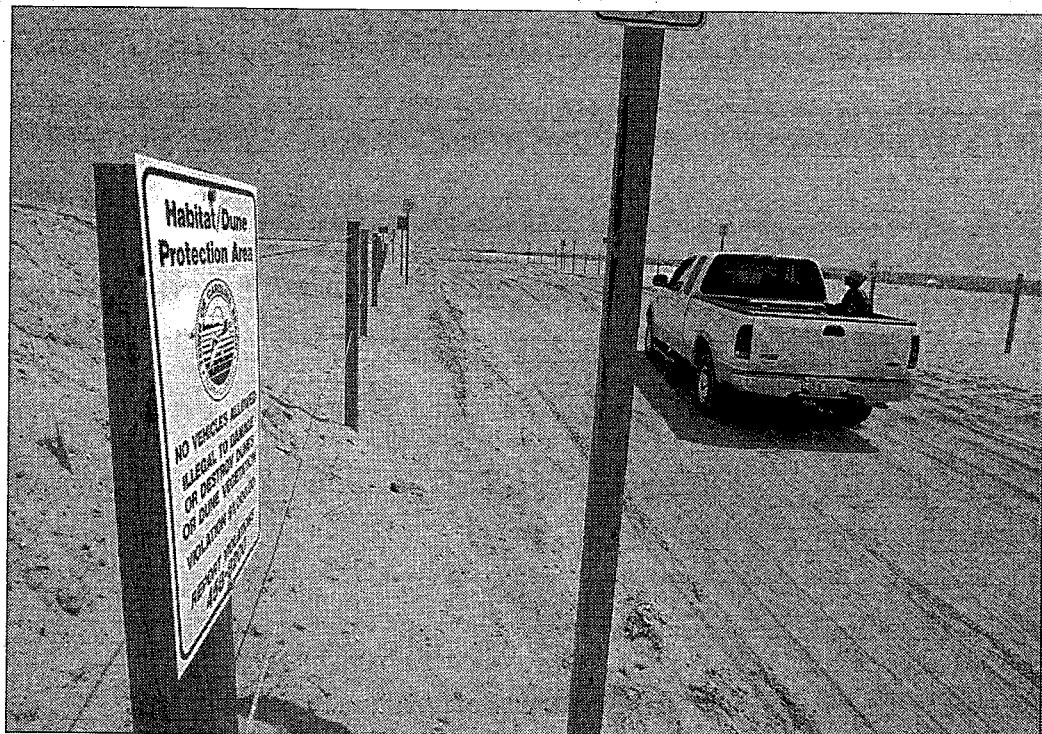
At their last meeting, County Commissioner Nancy Pritchett tabled a plan to ban camping and fires on the beach, saying the commissioners were working on a plan to please everyone, but she wouldn't elaborate.

On Friday, Commissioner Bill Caster said it was still too early to divulge the plan.

The problem was a difficult one, with the two sides so far apart, compromise was almost impossible, Mr. Caster said.

"It's been a hair-pulling exercise to try and solve it for everybody," he said.

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STAR-NEWS FILE

A habitat/dune protection fence is put up in May 2001 at the north end of Carolina Beach. The fence was put up to limit traffic flow in the four-wheel-drive area of the beach.

Push to ban vehicles continues

But some worry that limits may cut access to property

By Gareth McGrath
Staff Writer

With the New Hanover County Commissioners still mulling over their options, some concerned citizens Monday took the opportunity to again push for the banishment of vehicles from the north end of Carolina Beach.

The undeveloped sandy spit at the top end of Pleasure Island is a popular retreat for fishermen and beachgoers.

But Lynda Bilbrough, a member of Citizens for Conservation of the North End, said beachfront motorists are violating the property rights of the private landowners who own the parcels between Carolina Beach and the county-owned north end.

She said that she has contacted most of the absentee landowners and that they want vehicles kept off their property — wishes that have been relayed to county officials but not effectively enforced.

"How would you like having

vehicles driving through your yard while you're away?" Ms. Bilbrough asked.

She said the beach traffic, which can be very heavy on warm-weather weekends, is also damaging the area's vital dunes and making the undeveloped beachfront unusable by nesting shorebirds and sea turtles.

Citing a litany of federal, state and local statutes, Ms. Bilbrough said the county must enforce existing laws to protect the environment and the rights of the private landowners.

She added that neither her organization nor the impacted property owners were trying to close off access to the north end, but were trying to limit access just to pedestrians.

But not all landowners agree with Ms. Bilbrough's call for banning beach driving.

Jim Hines, whose family owns 60 acres along the north end, said he and his relatives are very concerned about vehicles riding through and damaging the

dunes.

But responsible visitors should be welcome, he said.

And what about the reports of crime and bad behavior that are reported to go on at the north end?

"You're always going to have a knucklehead," Mr. Hines said.

He added that his family's biggest concern had nothing to do with vehicles.

"We feel we may lose control of our property if she is able to block access," Mr. Hines said.

Carolina Beach officials also have said they aren't interested in banning vehicles from the north end.

The County Commissioners didn't ask any questions or make any comments after Ms. Bilbrough's presentation Monday.

The board earlier this month continued action on an ordinance that would have banned camping and open fires to allow the county to consider all alternatives to protect the environment — and to meet mitigation requirements tied to the Mason Inlet relocation project.

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