

# NEWS LEADER

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## THE WATER IS WIDE

River cleanup nets 8 tons of litter, debris, tires and more



JULIA ROBERTS/NEWS-LEADER

Hundreds of Florida and Georgia residents participated in the St. Marys River Cleanup effort Saturday that was sponsored by the St. Marys Riverkeeper and Keep Nassau Beautiful. View more photos on Page 6A.

**INSIDE:** Guest columnist Mollie Quealy Bork shares that Earth Day's origin was a rare political alignment.

JULIA ROBERTS  
News-Leader

Keep Nassau Beautiful, a local nonprofit, teamed up with the St. Marys Riverkeeper to pick up more than 8 tons of trash in Nassau and Baker counties in Florida, and Camden and Charlton counties in Georgia, to honor Earth Day.

The 23rd annual St. Marys River Cleanup was Saturday, and volunteers picked up trash and debris on the banks of the river, which winds through four counties in Florida and Georgia.

Lynda Bell, executive director at Keep Nassau Beautiful, said more than 250 volunteers gathered at 24 sites, contributing more than 570 service hours in the collection of more than eight tons of litter, debris, tires and bulk items from the river, watershed and surrounding waterways. In Nassau County alone, 138 of the participating volunteers cleaned up 3.8 tons of litter from 13 sites at a value of more than \$4,700, based on a \$16 per hour rate.

The St. Marys Riverkeeper and Keep Nassau Beautiful coordinated the cleanup with trash and tire disposal assistance from many local agencies and businesses including county and municipality road and sanitation departments, local landfills, Waste Management, Meridian Waste and Coastal Car Care.

"The event would not be successful without the support of volunteers, sponsors and local government agencies and businesses," Bell said.

Kendra Shafer with the St. Marys Riverkeeper echoed gratitude for the volunteers.

"It was fantastic to see so many volunteers come together with the intention of cleaning up the river," Shafer said. "We couldn't have the cleanup last year due to COVID, so it was in especially bad shape. Without those volunteers, we would not be able to keep the habitat as pristine as it needs to be."

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## City e-bike rules again reviewed by commission

JULIA ROBERTS  
News-Leader

Whether you can ride an e-bike on the Egans Creek Greenway will depend on which type of bike you have if a proposed ordinance is passed at its fifth reading.

At the April 20 Fernandina Beach City Commission meeting, an ordinance was considered that would prohibit electric bicycles on the greenway and impose a 10 mph speed limit on them on all paths and the beach. However, commissioners said some people, such as seniors and those with a disability, should be allowed to ride e-bikes on the greenway, which prohibits motorized vehicles, as long as they do not go too fast.

The bikes are categorized by Florida statute into three classes. Class 1 e-bikes are equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and reaches the speed of 20 mph. Class 2 e-bikes are equipped with a motor that may be used exclusively to propel the electric bicycle and that ceas-

E-BIKES Continued on 6A

## Permit fee waived for St. Marys signage

NIKKI MAIN  
News-Leader

The Nassau County Board of County Commissioners waived permit application fees at the request of the St. Marys River Management Committee during Wednesday's meeting.

Dean Woerhle - a member of the committee - said the application for each permit costs \$175, and the management committee can't afford it.

The permit request is to place "no wake zone" signs at four areas of the St. Marys River: Scotts Landing, Big Beach, Temple Landing - located on the Georgia side of the river - and three other bends east of Scotts Landing, Woerhle said.

The permits are reviewed by the county and then submitted to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for approval, according to county documents.

Committee member Rick Frey said the community raised concern about the speed of boats through swimming areas and added, "The wake also kicks up a lot of erosion and water movement, which might not be good for docks that have boats attached to them."

In a phone call Monday, Woerhle said the signs would require boats to slow down for swimmers' safety and would be

PERMIT Continued on 6A

## Santa Maria replica could visit Fernandina harbor

JULIA ROBERTS  
News-Leader

The Santa Maria might sail into the Fernandina Harbor Marina, if details can be worked out between the city of Fernandina Beach and owners of the ship.

Kevin McCarthy spoke to the city's Marina Advisory Board at its meeting Monday. McCarthy, former chairman of the board, said he has been in talks with James Crawford, who heads the St. Marys Tall Ship Alliance, about a possible visit from Nao Santa Maria in June. The ship is owned by the Nao Victoria Foundation.

"The flagship of Christopher Columbus, the (replica) Santa Maria, is scheduled to come to the East Coast the first week of June, and they would love to stop over here June 3 until June 13,"

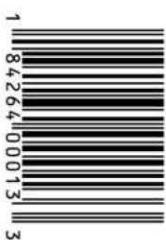
McCarthy told the advisory board. He said the ship is coming from Galveston, Texas, and after a trip to the East Coast, it will travel to Spain and not return to the U.S. for six years.

In an email to McCarthy, Crawford said Nao Santa Maria is a new Spanish 3 mast deepwater ship that is the replica from the Christopher Columbus exploration fleet. It was built in the Spanish province of Huelva in celebration for the 525th anniversary of Columbus' 1492 voyage. It was launched March 15, 2018, and became the third ship in the Nao Victoria Foundations' Historical Tall Ship fleet. Nao Santa Maria sails with a professional 20-member crew. The ship is 95 feet in total length with a 26-foot beam and has a rigging height of 89 feet.

VISIT Continued on 6A



The Nao Santa Maria could sail into Fernandina Harbor Marina this June. SUBMITTED PHOTO



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### LOOKING BACK 25 YEARS

City of Fernandina Beach officials were surprised to learn Nassau County officials were installing a roundabout at the intersection of Sadler Road and South Fletcher Avenue.

April 24, 1996

**E-BIKES** *Continued from 1A*

es to provide assistance when the electric bicycle reaches the speed of 20 mph. Class 3 e-bikes are equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when the electric bicycle reaches the speed of 28 mph.

In January, commissioners voted to ban e-bikes off all classes from the greenway. Then, in February, an ordinance that allowed the bikes, but placed a 10 mph speed limit on all bikes on the greenway, passed.

At last week's City Commission meeting, commissioners discussed the matter once again, with a proposed final reading on the ordinance to allow all classes of e-bikes. However, the matter was not put to rest.

Some members of the public spoke, both for and against e-bikes on the greenway, about personal freedom, public safety and environmental grounds. Vice Mayor Len Kreger said allowing the bikes on the greenway would be an environmental "disaster" and could result in injury to hikers.

"It (the greenway) was bought as a passive environmental area," Kreger said. "That's the great birding trail. You don't see a lot of birds any more. This (ordinance) all came about because the state said bicycles weren't motor vehicles. But what the state doesn't quite understand is e-bikes are bicycles with motors. They have motors, and motors have always been banned. I think we should do that. Environmentally, it's a disaster. I think, safety-wise, they are going to kill somebody."

However, Commissioner David Sturges disagreed.

"I don't think there is any way that these

e-bikes can damage the greenway," Sturges said, adding that he had, as a child, ridden dirt bikes in the area that is now the greenway. "I am not going to vote to support anything prohibiting e-bikes on the greenway because I think it's ridiculous. We've not had one incident on the greenway where somebody's gotten hurt by an e-bike yet. There were at least 30 people out here in favor of keeping e-bikes, to be able to use our natural resources." Sturges said he believed by voting to ban e-bikes, then to allow them, the commission is "in the middle of a bait and switch."

Mayor Mike Lednovich said he could not vote to ban access to the greenway to anyone, is concerned about Class 2 e-bikes, which operate with throttle only, and offered a compromise.

"I would like this to (allow) the Class 1 and (3) e-bikes, but prohibit the non-pedal, 30 mph bikes," Lednovich said. "I don't think those have any place on the greenway. I've seen my neighbor ride his bike 22 mph. Don't tell me a bicyclist going 22 mph isn't going to do any damage. We need the speed limit. We can't enforce it, because no one's going to be out there with a speedometer. The bikes don't have speedometers. But we can put up signs."

An amended ordinance, prohibiting Class 2, throttle-only e-bikes with a 10 mph speed limit, was passed 3-2 with commissioners Bradley Bean and Chip Ross casting the dissenting votes. It will be up for a possible final reading in May.

The commission heard a report from the Beach Access Committee, a community group tasked with studying the city's beach accesses and making recommendations about building and repairing them.

Committee Chairwoman Victoria Robas shared the committee's recommendations, which were

that no existing walkovers should be removed, recommended eight walkovers for short-, medium- and long-term construction, that two accesses previously unknown to be city property should be marked and added to the city's inventory, that a handicap accessible walkover be built on the south end and that walkovers should have ramps to keep people from walking on and destroying dunes.

During a discussion of an agreement that would allow Team Fernandina Stingrays to use the pool at the Atlantic Recreation Center, Ross pointed out the agreement, like similar agreements with other sports organizations involves "great organizations that do great things for kids." He said the city does not charge the organizations enough to pay for the facilities they use. While he supports allowing these groups to use city facilities, Ross said the cost of maintaining facilities and paying staff is increasing. He asked his fellow commissioners how the cost could be borne by the city without increasing revenue, such as a tax hike.

One suggestion was have non-city residents pay a higher usage fee, as a large percentage of those who use the facilities are Nassau County residents, but do not live in Fernandina Beach. Additionally, a request was made to the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners for financial support of the city's facilities. The county has not responded to that request. Kreger and Bean said they hope the county and city can work together on the problem. However, the mayor was skeptical.

"I'm less benevolent," Lednovich said. "Yes, we can hope the county will just say, 'Oh, yeah ... we realize all the participants we have that use your fields - here's some money.' That's a dream. We owe it to our taxpayers ... to have the county

pay for the city facilities and programs that they participate in. That should not be a burden on our taxpayers."

During the budget process, Lednovich said, the city should consider structuring its fee schedule so "we make the county pay, one way or the other."

The City Commission unanimously approved the facility use agreement with the Stingrays.

- In other business, City Commission:
- Honored Police Chief James Hurley, who will retire May 1 after 15 years with the Fernandina Beach Police Department;
  - Proclaimed April 2021 as Flood Awareness Month;
  - Received the first quarterly report from the PEG channel committee;
  - Approved a memorandum of agreement with the Tennessee Army National Guard for temporary tower air traffic control services at the municipal airport during the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance;
  - Approved a facilities use agreement for Bonhams & Butterfields for vehicle parking at the airport during Concours d'Elegance;
  - Awarded a \$1,164,845 bid to Scherer Construction to build hangars at the airport;
  - Approved a task order for \$69,395 for construction observation and administration at the airport;
  - Approved agreements with First Coast Railroad and the Florida Department of Transportation for the removal of existing railroad crossings and installation of new crossings on Front Street;
  - Appointed Travis Young to the Code Enforcement and Appeals Board.

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**PERMIT** *Continued from 1A*

enforced by law enforcement officials, with tickets being issued to boaters who do not adhere to them.

Woerhle told county commissioners signposts were approved 15 years ago, but because the date was not on the signs, they were not legally binding. Attorney Michael Mullin said, "The state won't enforce (the signs) unless you follow the letter of the law in the Florida administrative code."

County Commissioner John Martin asked Mullin if the board could waive the associated costs, but said he did not want to "open the flood gates" for future requests. Mullin said because a

government entity is asking for the fee to be waived, the board has it within its authority to approve the request.

"As commissioners, it is our responsibility to protect the health and safety and well-being of citizens so they can enjoy the rivers," Martin said.

The board voted unanimously to waive the fee.

"It seemed the right thing to do," Martin added in a phone call after the meeting.

Nassau County spokeswoman Sabrina Robertson said it's the first time the permit fees have been waived for a "citizen application for a boat-restricted area" since the fees were implemented in 2018.

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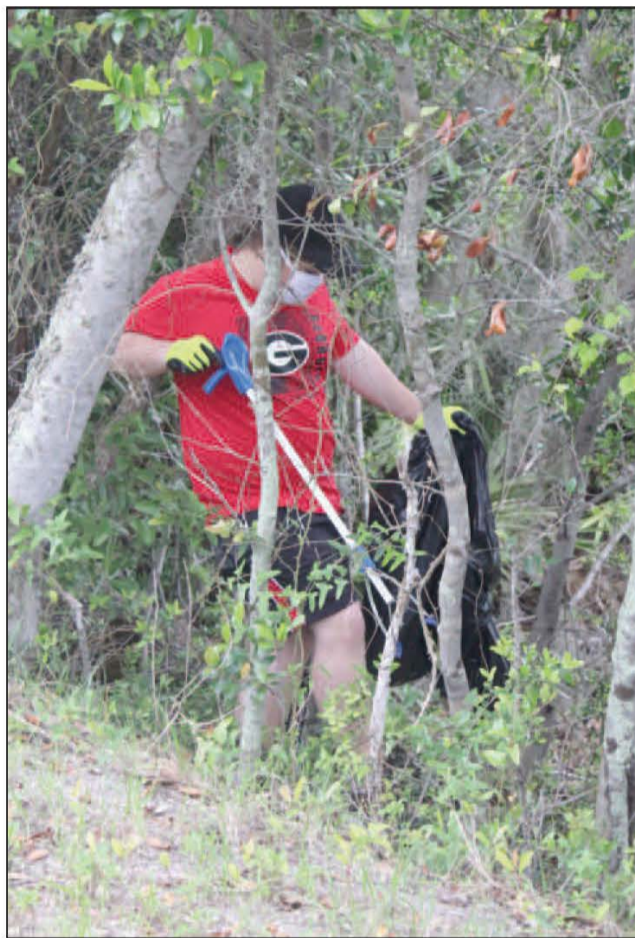
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**CLEANUP EFFORT**

*JULIA ROBERTS/NEWS-LEADER*

In Nassau County, volunteers scooped up 3.8 tons of litter from 13 sites during the St. Marys River Cleanup on Saturday.

**VISIT** *Continued from 1A*

At the meeting, McCarthy explained the Nao Victoria Foundation, as a nonprofit, "typically" does not pay dockage fees, but enough money is raised during its visit and a contribution is made to the marina.

McCarthy said the ship was scheduled to come to Fernandina Beach last year, but those plans were canceled due to COVID-19. There were local organizations willing to contribute to a fund to pay for the dockage fees for the ship last year, he said.

"I think we could probably reach out to the visitors bureau; (Amelia Island Convention and Visitors Bureau President) Gil Langley was kind enough to donate money the last time," McCarthy said. "I'm not sure where the rest of the money came from, but someone else offered to donate enough to cover the slip fees last time."

McCarthy said Fernandina

Beach City Manager Dale Martin told him the decision of whether to waive the dockage fees is up to Oasis Marinas, the company that manages the city-owned Fernandina Harbor Marina. He said if Oasis did not waive the dockage fees, he would work to solicit contributions to cover them.

Marina Manager Taylor Fitzsimmons said Oasis is also in talks with the Coast Guard about two cutters coming into the marina for a similar event, which would pay dockage. He said the dockage fees for the Santa Maria would be \$1,756.

Advisory board members said they think sponsors would cover the dockage fees, and voted to endorse efforts to bring the Nao Santa Maria to the marina, if dockage fees are paid, and to have McCarthy serve as a point person for the deal.

Dockage fees were also discussed when advisory board member Scott Stewart suggested

the fee to use the dinghy dock is too low.

Fitzsimmons said boats that use the marina's mooring field, at a charge of \$25 per night, can use the dinghy dock for free. Boats anchored outside the mooring field use the dinghy dock for \$4, with access to marina facilities for an additional \$4. Boaters who dock at the marina for "dock and dine," where they dock their boats for two hours while they go into town, pay \$10 for up to 30-foot boats and \$15 for bigger boats.

Stewart said he thinks the charge for the dinghy dock rate should be adjusted.

"We get a lot of dinghies and other boats to the dinghy dock all the time," Stewart said. "I think we need to increase the rate to only one rate there, a \$10 dock and dine fee, unless you are on a mooring ball. What happens is everybody goes on anchor out there, comes up and use the dinghy dock, and they don't pay. I

think that will push traffic back to the mooring balls to increase the occupancy rate. Just charge everybody a \$10 flat fee, unless they have a tag for a mooring ball."

Fitzsimmons said he agrees with Scott and will explore the possibility of raising the rate with Oasis.

Fitzsimmons said business is doubling monthly as the marina's busy season begins. He said there were 285 transient slip reservations in March, up from 143 in February. As of April 27, there were 384 transient slip reservations for the month.

On at least 10 occasions in April, the marina was full, and there were other nights where only one or two slips were unoccupied, Fitzsimmons said. He said that when the fuel dock opens, hopefully this weekend, the marina will lose 340 feet of dock space, as that space will be used for boats to buy fuel.

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**May 1, 2021**

10:00 am - 4:00 pm • Activities 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

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