

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (continued)**Some facts about beach driving opinions**

This letter is in response to the several letters to the editor appearing in The Island Breeze over the last several months concerning driving on the beach.

During the period from September 2002 through August 2003, I conducted a survey on behalf of the Outer

Banks Preservation Association about people's opinions about various aspects of beach access and driving on the beaches. I have been conducting surveys for more than 30 years for both commercial clients and for legal purposes. Anyone who wishes to check my credentials can go to www.sdr-consulting.com.

We randomly surveyed 466 residents, 546 non-resident property owners (NRPOs), and 438 visitors to Hatteras and Ocracoke islands during the period.

Some highlights from that survey will hopefully shed some light on the discussions.

- Accessing the beach with a licensed ORV is very important to visitors. A majority, 52 percent, uses a licensed ORV for beach access, and 37 percent do so

at least three times per week when they are visiting the Outer Banks.

- Accessing the beach with a licensed ORV is also very important to NRPOs. A large percentage, 78 percent, use their ORV for beach access, and 45 percent do so at least three times per week.

More importantly, when it comes to totally banning access to the beaches by licensed ORVs, only 20 percent of visitors are in support and 71 percent are against it. If ORV access was banned 18 percent of visitors would visit less often. A very substantial 24 percent would not come back at all. We estimate that the lower Outer Banks would experience at least a 28 percent decline in visitor spending if ORVs were banned or severely restricted from beach access.

Considering just full-time residents, when it comes to totally banning access to the beaches by licensed ORVs, only 11 percent of residents are in support and 88 percent are against it.

If ORV access was banned:

- 50 percent of resident respondents said their jobs would be negatively impacted. The majority of those said their jobs would be severely impacted.

- 30 percent of residents said their income would drop severely (by an average of 60 percent), and another 20 percent said their income would drop somewhat (by an average of 40 percent).

- 62 percent of residents said the local economy would experience a severe negative impact, and another 25 percent said there would be a somewhat negative ~~impact on the local economy~~. Only 3 percent believed an ORV ban would improve the economy.

We also asked all three groups — visitors, NRPOs, and residents — about banning or restricting ORV traffic in front of each of the villages. All three groups

were in general agreement.

- On average, around 40 percent agreed with a year-round ban on ORVs in front of the villages.

- Another 30 percent believed those areas should be open off-season.

- 10 percent believed they should be open all year.

- 20 percent gave some other answer.

When asked about charging ORV access fees or placing other restrictions on ORV access to the beaches, such as limiting the number of

vehicles or restricting access times, a majority of all three groups were against those ideas, especially among residents.

The bottom line is quite clear — the vast majority of residents, non-resident property owners, and visitors are against restricting or banning ORVs from the beaches. If that was done, the vast majority believe that it would have a very negative economic impact on the lower Outer Banks. Opinion

is split concerning access in front of the villages — but at least a partial ban on ORV access during the tourist season would clearly be supported by all three groups.

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