



## Protect the National Park Service's historic and natural resources during Preservation Month

Throughout May, America celebrates Preservation Month as a time to reflect on the places that are important to us and to our communities, the ones we want to share with generations to come.

Parks have made a huge impact on my life whether local, state of Florida or our National Park System. Locally we have **Veteran's Park** on Okaloosa Island, **Henderson Beach** or **Fred Gannon** and **Blackwater State Park**. Nationally I have visited **Arcadia, Yellowstone, Fort McHenry, Fort Sumter** and **Smoky Mountain National Parks**, and with each visit I develop what former National Park Service (NPS) director George P. Hertzog called "a deeper understanding of the history of the United States and our way of life; of the natural processes which have given form to our land, and to the enrichment of the environment in which we live."

I keep a photo of the flag flying at **Fort McHenry** as my screensaver, and it's a daily reminder of how valuable these parks are in helping Americans commemorate our shared heritage.

Closer to home, **Gulf Islands National Seashore** preserves the natural beauty of our region along with manmade structures like **Fort Pickens**, an important piece of military history in which brave soldiers defended our shores for over a century.

I am encouraged by the recent work of NPS preservationists who apply their talents to restoring our historic structures ("[National Park Service experts preserve 'historic fabric' of Fort Pickens](#)," April 6), but much more work is needed to ensure we do not lose these monuments to the passage of time.

The volume of national park deferred maintenance, or projects that have been delayed by at least one year due to lack of funding, is stunning: in FY2017, the tab is \$11.6 billion across the National Park System, with \$262.2 million in the 11 parks here in Florida, and \$62.5 million of work needed in Gulf Islands National Seashore alone.

In February, I sponsored a resolution asking my colleagues on the Okaloosa County Commission to express our support for the National Park Service, and encourage Congress to create a reliable, predictable stream of resources to address these deferred maintenance needs. We passed the resolution unanimously, joining more than 80 other gateway communities to national parks across the country that have passed similar resolutions or proclamations, including four Florida cities: Pensacola, St. Augustine, Cape Canaveral, and Titusville.

[These gateway communities benefit economically](#) from the presence of a nearby NPS unit as well. For instance, visitors to Gulf Islands spent \$168 million in neighboring communities in 2016, supporting 2,350 local jobs. Statewide, visitors to Florida's national parks generated \$904 million in economic output. As local leaders, we have a responsibility to advocate for continued investment in sound opportunities that create jobs for residents, such as our national parks.

Please thank your Commissioner for their support and more importantly reach out to the local state legislators in Tallahassee and Washington DC to ask for their continued funding of our national treasures.

Each generation has a responsibility to be good stewards of our land for those who come after us.  
As Jon Muir so elegantly stated, "Everybody needs beauty...places to play in and pray in where nature may heal  
and cheer and give strength to the body and soul alike."

*Carolyn Ketchel is the District 2 Commissioner for Okaloosa County*

***Carolyn N. Ketchel***  
***County Commissioner***  
***Okaloosa County, Board of County Commissioners***  
***1250 N Eglin Pkwy., Suite 100***  
***Shalimar, FL 32579***  
***850-651-7105***  
**[cketchel@myokaloosa.com](mailto:cketchel@myokaloosa.com)**