

Nikiski residents protest restricted access to Nikishka Beach Road



Photo By M. Scott Moon

About three dozen people protest Saturday afternoon in front of a guard shack and barriers blocking access to a stretch of Cook Inlet beach in Nikiski. They question the legality of the closure and security measures put in place by Offshore Systems Kenai.

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By Mike Nesper | Peninsula Clarion

Since before statehood, Karen McGahan has frequented Nikishka Beach every summer. She's watched five generations of her family search for agates, fly kites and roast marshmallows on the beach.

But this year no agates have been collected, no kites flown, no campfires lit. Now what waits for McGahan and her family at the end of Nikishka Beach Road isn't an entrance to the beach, but rather a sign that reads "private property no public beach access."

Saturday, armed with four-wheelers and homemade signs, several members of the McGahan family and other Nikiski residents came out to protest Offshore Systems Kenai, which has blocked beach access for the last six months.

"We're getting our freedom taken away step by step and it isn't fair," said Nadine Gabbett, who has been coming to Nikishka Beach since 1965.

"We use this beach for education, recreation and relaxation," said lifelong Nikiski resident Leah Jackson.

Protestors carrying signs that read "We're not terrorists just rock collectors" and "We're not against security just the level of it" marched from Nikiski High School to OSK. Shouting "free the beach," protestors stood at OSK's gate and guard shack now in place of what once was beach access. Though six North Roaders did cross into unauthorized territory, according to OSK operations manager Mike Peek, both sides remained civil. Protestors were quick to move for supply trucks going to and coming from the dock and with the exception of two video cameras filming the event, security guards acted as if no one was there.

Protestors also gathered at the corner of Nikishka Beach Road and the Kenai Spur Highway and shouted their message to passersby.

Peek said he wants to see the people allowed to use the beach again but doesn't have a choice in the matter.

"I have to follow federal regulations or I'll be shut down," he said.

A lawsuit has been filed concerning beach access, but no decision has been made at this time.

"If it can be taken away overnight, they can give us our access overnight," said Katrina Nelson, frustrated with the amount of time the situation has taken to be resolved. "We just want our beach back."

On the upside, a new public access to the beach could be ready as soon as next week, said Peek. Located across from the former Lighthouse restaurant, the new beach access is scheduled to be paved on Monday and will have free parking.

READER COMMENTS

Posted by: [perrigo](#) at Jun. 29, 2008 at 11:52:12 am

Mike Peek did have a choice as to how he implemented security for his area. He took the easiest solution and closed the entire access. He is on the Borough road board and should know that is a public and state maintained road. The new road they want to open is not acceptable or practical for the people of Nikiski. You can't blame people for not showing up to fight for what is their's when your representative in Juneau will not stand behind them, won't return phone calls, will not fight with them. Bill & Lessie Perrigo

Posted by: [timberjack](#) at Jun. 29, 2008 at 6:29:40 pm

Thanks to all the demonstrators. The world needs more people willing to stand up. The above mentioned new access should not even have been mentioned in this article. For all of you who don't know that access which is 6-8 miles to the south only provides access to that immediate area. The East Forelands Point which is about a mile north of the "new access" is impossible to get around because that is the bottleneck of the Cook Inlet. The current in that area has cut the beach into a sharp incline that is dangerous to traverse. The Arness/Nikiski Beach Road access is our only access point to 20-30 miles of the best beach around. A large majority of the beach in north kenai will still be inaccessible. The original homesteaders knew the beach and created access points where needed. When i grew up here all the beach was accessible by one point of access or another. Arness/Nikiski Beach RD has always been the beach of choice on a sunny afternoon, with the best sand for kids, agates to hunt, is protected from the wind and for many other reasons is the beach we want access to. If the dock is keeping us from accessing this beach than the dock needs to be investigated by the EPA with

core samples they will find what we already know. Old longshoremen tell tales of hundreds of gallons of bunker fuel that was never removed from these old ships turned into docks because it jellied and couldn't be pumped with their pumps. They also tell of a typo that sent 450 instead of 45 five gallon buckets of lead based paint to that dock for painting one of the platforms. After storing the paint for years until it went bad, when more dirt was hauled in to expand the dock they buried the bad paint on that dock. After the dock was expanded the workers stored pallets of toxic chemical out near the edge and a north storm wrecked havoc on the pallets and destroyed many of them. The ones that were not swept away were ruined and had to be disposed of. The workers were ordered to hurry and bury them on the dock. Lastly the local high school is a stones throw away from this terrorist "target". This dock is a menace and a danger to this community and should be ordered to be removed by the government if they really care about "safety of the community".

Posted by: [redrunner](#) at Jun. 29, 2008 at 6:53:27 pm

Perchance it is time for a little old fashioned "railroad" party? If the elected officials won't answer and support those who elected them, maybe they need the proverbial "ride out of town on a rail"! The picture is a lot larger than the Nikishka beach access, it is not security, it is bureaucratic infringement on the People's rights. Mike did what he had to do and had put it off as long as he could. It is a matter of the Federal Government's unelected minions usurping the people's and State of Alaska's rights. Security, from what? Logic and common sense (not always the same thing) have lost their meaning with the security issue. The likely hood of any attack or illegal entry at Nikiski, Kenai, Seward or Anchorage docks is just a few steps above zero. It is possible but what would be the result? Would it not be more likely for a rented plane, or a fishing boat to cause a problem with the inlet? Even then, what would be the result? The loss of 1000 bbbls/ day of oil from one platform? Get real! WE THE PEOPLE, is how the Constitution starts, no where does it say that "we the people give up our rights so we can live in a round rubber room and be safe all of the time!" Through the elected bums out and then take on the troopers. Will they arrest 500 people for doing what is their right under State law to do? This is why there is a second amendment to the Constitution, so hopefully, Tyrants can't take power over the people. I do not advocate violence, only common sense and law!
Good Luck North Roaders, I may not live there anymore but I still feel like it. Dave Carpenter

Posted by: [kenairverbandit](#) at Jun. 29, 2008 at 8:06:44 pm

red runner.....we the people would work if all the people that could would get up off their you know whats and stop waiting for things to get better.....it really is the Easy Life for most people these days.....you are correct thought with the fact that our rights are slowly being taken away.....first this then that then the beach and on and on.....society would be healthier all the way around if the microchip and transistor didnt exist.....i am sure that some other form of evil would try taking its place but america wouldnt be so friggin lazy and stupid.....there, now how does everyone feel about the future.....

Posted by: [texsis](#) at Jun. 30, 2008 at 4:45:02 pm

Alaska is falling prey to the government and "security measures" just like the states that are home to 9/11, and neighbors of Mexico. Civil liberty is fastly fading, and we all will succomb to "what is good for us" it seems. Unless Americans stand up for what we know to be true and our inborn, taken for granted freedoms, we will lose ALL. Can't some of you idiots see the big picture? Best do it while you can. The Nikiski residents