

## **CAPTIVA COMMUNITY PANEL**

*P.O. Box 72, Captiva, FL 33924-0073*

June 26, 2020

Commissioner John Manning, District 1  
Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, District 2  
Commissioner Ray Sandelli, District 3  
Commissioner Brian Hamman, District 4  
Commissioner Frank Mann, District 5  
Lee County  
P.O. Box 398  
Fort Myers, FL 33902-0398

Commissioners:

I am writing today on behalf of the Captiva Community Panel to discuss the ongoing health and safety problems related to fishing from the Blind Pass Bridge.

This has been a topic of discussion in the community and at panel meetings for years, as both fishing and bicycle/pedestrian use of this small and narrow bridge has increased. The concerns most often brought to the attention of the panel have been:

- Cyclists and pedestrians being forced into the roadway by fishing people who place their fishing rods and gear across the walkway.
- The dead fish, stale bait, hooks, fishing line, empty cans and bottles often left behind by some who fish from the bridge.
- The close proximity and lack of social distancing for both those fishing from the bridge, but also those members of the community who need or wish to walk across the bridge during a time when concerns over Covid-19 are still running high.
- Concerns over the occasional confrontation between people fishing from the bridge and bikers and walkers attempting to share a limited common area on the bridge.
- The bridge has become an attractive nuisance that creates the starting point for certain fishing people to move from the bridge to fish to nearby docks on adjacent private property without permission from nearby property owners causing great concern.
- Navigational hazards are created by lines hanging from the bridge into the channel under the bridge snaring passing boats.
- Impact on immature/undersize fish and other species caught and left to die on the bridge (or killed on impact when thrown back into the water from that height).

After numerous discussions and requests from Captiva property owners and residents, the Captiva Community Panel voted at its June 11, 2019, meeting to request that the county ban fishing from the Blind Pass Bridge. The hope was to find ways to improve fishing access from the two shorelines adjacent to the bridge, since the panel's aim was to move fishing out of the walkways and navigation channel, but not to eliminate fishing altogether.

As per Florida Statute 316.1305 ("Fishing from state road bridges"), the panel contacted Lee Department of Transportation Director Randy Cerchie to ascertain the process for requesting a determination to move fishing from the bridge. Blind Pass is a county bridge, but Mr. Cerchie

recommended that a policy decision from the county commission would be needed for DOT to move forward.

At a subsequent meeting on another issue, Mr. Cerchie suggested a possible option of creating a more “protected” walkway in the existing roadway by placing a low-profile curbing material and Flex Stake markers along the traffic lanes to separate vehicles and pedestrians. The community appreciated the suggestion but thought this was too hazardous for pedestrians, who would have to walk between a concrete barrier and moving vehicles with only a Flex Stake marker every 10 feet.

Lt. Mike Sawicki with the Lee County Sheriff’s Office has been part of the many community discussions about this issue, and his deputies regularly patrol the bridge area at certain critical hours to assess the situation and intervene when necessary, but obviously cannot provide full-time coverage of the bridge. He acknowledged that the LCSO can only enforce rules on the books and cannot be present at all times, and that creating additional hard to enforce rules would not solve the problems. He thought that the community and the county should simply decide if this bridge is amenable to both fishing and pedestrian use. It has been often noted that the bridge was not originally designed to accommodate both pedestrian use and fishing.

The panel also reached out to various departments in the City of Sanibel to apprise them of the panel’s concerns. Sanibel appreciated the head’s up and acknowledged that this was a Lee DOT and LCSO matter first and foremost.

Since this matter has been discussed at Captiva Community Panel meetings numerous times since initial concerns were brought to the county and initial suggestions made to close all or one side of the bridge to fishing, the Panel after considerable debate again voted on May 12, 2020 to request that the county either prohibit fishing from the Blind Pass Bridge – but if that is not possible for any number of reasons, then the panel would request a compromise which would permit fishing on the gulf side of the bridge, but would close the bay side of the bridge to fishing in order to permit pedestrians to cross the bridge safely. Any such compromise would have to be assessed for general safety concerns. The Panel also voted to prepare this report to be provided to all five county commissioners and appropriate county staff regarding this matter.

With this report, the Panel seeks your support in resolving the Blind Pass Bridge issues as soon as possible for the reasons set forth in this memo. The Panel also asks for your assistance as it pursues possible improvements in shoreline access on either side of the pass so that fishing from the shore can be offered as a safe option for fishing in the future.

Attached is a timeline of events surrounding this issue as well as photographs documenting some of the problems with the current situation. Two short videos of the bridge conditions are online at:

- [http://captivacommunitypanel.com/images/IMG\\_4031.MOV](http://captivacommunitypanel.com/images/IMG_4031.MOV)
- [http://captivacommunitypanel.com/images/IMG\\_3828%281%29.MOV](http://captivacommunitypanel.com/images/IMG_3828%281%29.MOV)

Thanks for your consideration of this request, and please contact me with any questions or to set up a meeting with Panel members to discuss further.

Sincerely,

***Ken Gooderham***

Ken Gooderham, administrator  
Captiva Community Panel

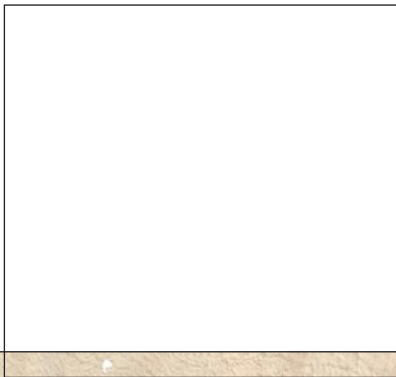
## **BLIND PASS BRIDGE**

### **TIMELINE**

- June 11, 2019 Captiva Community Panel votes to close the Blind Pass Bridge to fishing after complaints from adjacent property owners and other community members.
- July 31, 2019 Advised Assistant County Manager Doug Meuer that Panel voted to close Bridge to fishing.
- Aug. 2, 2019 Meuer spoke with Assistant County Managers Pete Winton and David Harner, as well as Lee DOT chief Randy Cerchie and representatives with the Lee County Sheriff's Office re: closing Bridge – will review options and configurations.
- Aug. 6, 2019 Memo to Commissioner Manning outlining reasons for request as part of a longer briefing memo on a range of Captiva issues.
- Aug. 7, 2019 The Panel also reached out to the City of Sanibel to apprise them of the problem. Sanibel said it was a Lee County DOT issue and not Sanibel's.
- Sept. 19, 2019 Requested of Pete Winton to continue discussion re Bridge
- Dec. 1, 2019 County DOT offered to put rubber stanchions between roadway and concrete barrier for pedestrians. Panel said no to rubber stanchions and voted to close one side of Bridge to fishing – and so advised Cerchie. Cerchie said that the higher ups in Lee County said no to closing one side of bridge
- Jan. 23, 2020 Met with Commissioner Manning and requested the closing of one side of Bridge. He said he would discuss with appropriate persons. No action taken.
- March 24, 2020 Sheriff Marceno was contacted regarding our concerns at the Bridge by Manning assistant and instructed that the deputies be sent out.
- March 31, 2020 Requested that Bridge be closed to fishing during COVID-19 crisis because of failure of social distancing and because parking lots were closed. Manning forwarded request to Staff. No county action was undertaken.
- May 12, 2020 Community Panel revisited issue at its monthly meeting. After debate, the panel voted to prepare this report for county commissioners and staff to request a complete prohibition of fishing from the bridge.







**Litter & debris:**

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 to clean up after themselves, leaving litter  
 and dangerous debris behind.



Deputies with the  
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 Bridge. While deput-  
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 the bridge safe and  
 passable, that typ-  
 ically lasts only as  
 long as law enforce-  
 ment is on site.