

SW FLORIDA FISHING

Was once everyones, now for the few.

BY CAPT. JOE LECLAIR

It's a sad day here in Boca Grande for fisherman like me who have enjoyed wading the shoreline looking for snook, reds, trout, pompano, sheepshead, cobia, tripletail, etc. The days of quietly walking along the shoreline in search of good fishing has become significantly restricted to residents only in many of the best areas. I suppose that things are always changing but this feels more like Darth Vader has just walked into the room and anyone who questions it will get the death grip. I'm also a Charlotte County father, and my wife and children have enjoyed going to the beach since the children were born. Now if my daughter and her friends get out of school on a warm afternoon, they can only hope there is a parking spot available at the state park, if they want to go to the beach. When you know these children, and the families that will be hurt the most by the sweeping changes

to the public access in Boca Grande it breaks your heart. If you look at why we love living in Charlotte County this is a big part of it. If this was a change that was in balance with the public need and support for all the people who have enjoyed the island over the last thirty years, then it would make sense. In fact, it is not. Instead, the lack of access to key points along the water, both in Placida and Boca



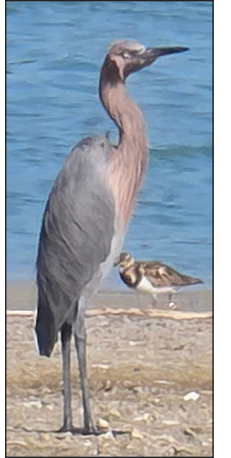
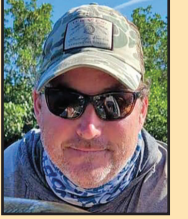
Grande has been diminishing since i enjoyed it in my youth. Outdoor activities in Florida are being replaced with video games and hours of social media. If you want to nurture the next generation of outdoor recreation and outdoor enthusiasts, this is NOT how you do it. Organizing youth volunteers to help rehabilitate parking areas, or holding free fly-casting clinics at the dog park for Boca Grande residents, oh wait that was 7th Street and that's gone now ...

And if we look to the leadership in Lee County for answers, chances are the de-

isions were made long before the questions were asked. I have a unique perspective on this matter because I hunt and fish all over Florida. Public access is a massive issue and in constant conflict with the number of people who are moving to Florida. This issue is exaggerated when you cram everyone on a small island like Gasparilla Island. Throw in the jerks who leave trash and abuse the rules (which happens everywhere) or the people who landscape over public parking spots, or effect of hurricanes, and you have a volatile situation. It's not unlike many other places here in SW Florida, but somehow, I thought we were different.

Photos courtesy of Capt. Joe

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