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WALTON COUNTY

Appeals are coming in for Walton County public, private beach rights

by: Kimber Collins
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SANTA ROSA BEACH, Fla. (WMBB) — A legal settlement agreement, making more than 1,000 beachfront properties private in Walton County, is not sitting well with some residents.

“One of the things we’re really focused on is trying to raise awareness both locally and regionally, where all of our tourists come from, to raise awareness about the problems that we’re having down here on the beach because it’s not fun to go to the beach anymore,” said John Dillard, Concerned Citizen with the Support Open Florida Sand & Beaches Facebook group. “There’s security guards, police, red cones, orange cones, all kinds of signs just kind of creating stress when it used to be a stress-free environment.”

The group is hosting protests at area beach accesses in hopes to change the 2023 settlement decision.

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In 2024, the customary use case is seeing action in the First District Court of Appeals(DCA).

“The appeals court sided with the private property owners and stated that Walton County did not have customary use established on their lots,” said Rachel Warrell, Real Estate Agent following customary use.

Now hundreds of private property owners are filing their own appeals.

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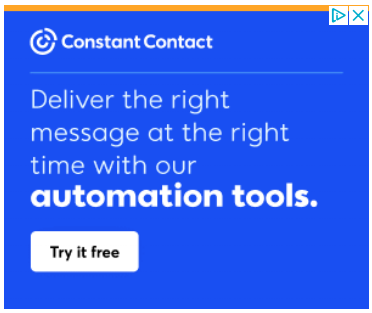

“This is not over,” said Warrell. “There’s a lot of people that want to know what their rights are. The general public wants to know what their rights are to access Florida’s beaches and the private parcel owners that have Gulf-front parcels, they want to know what their private property rights are. They’re asking for the First DCA to rule as to whether or not customary use exists and whether or not it’s in violation of the US Constitution.”

If the new appeal process sides with the property owners again, this could change beach rules about transitory zones in Walton County, and public beach access across the state.

“Time is of the essence right now because with the latest district court of appeals ruling and them siding with the private property owners, this calls into question the public’s rights to enjoy all of Florida’s public beaches,” said Warrell. “So this is going to bring in a question on Judge Green’s order on the transitory zones and it’s also bringing into question whether or not Daytona Beach v Tony Roma, the 1974 Florida Supreme Court ruling.”

“If it can happen to Walton County, there’s another 40 counties that can happen too,” said Dillard.

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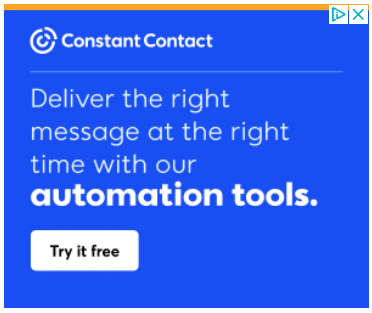

We’ve requested the appeal records from the Court of Appeals and the Walton County Clerk of Courts. We will update you once we have them.

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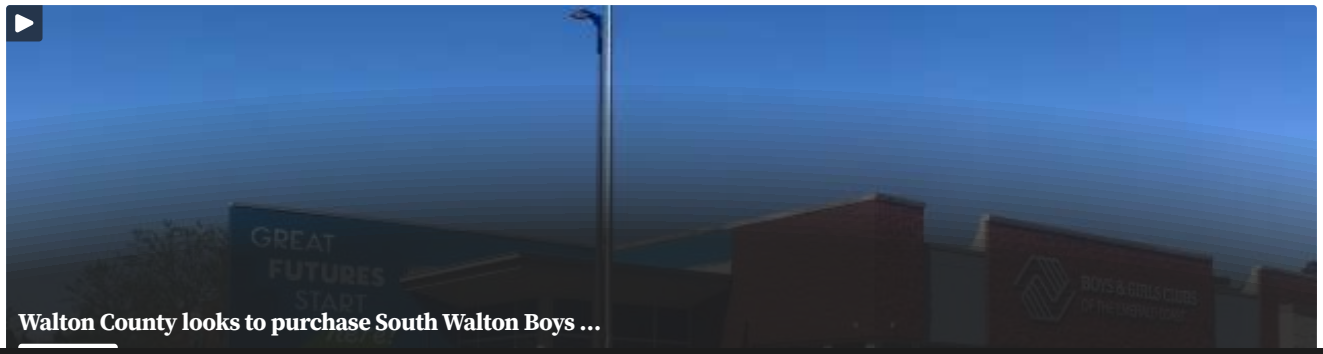

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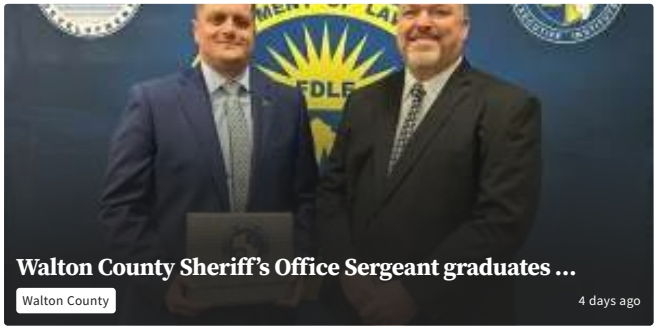

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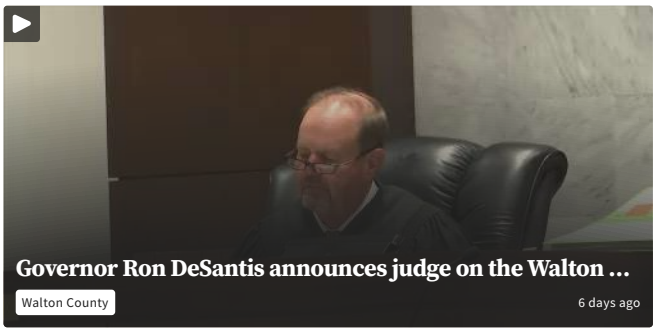

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