

## **Santa Rosa Island Authority**

The Santa Rosa Island Authority was created by special act of the Florida Legislature in 1947. That special act also authorized the Board of County Commissioners of Escambia County to use that portion of Santa Rosa Island owned by Escambia County or in which Escambia County had a proprietary interest for such purposes as it deemed to be in the public interest, or to lease the Island to such person or persons and for such purposes as it deemed to be in the public interest. The Board of County Commissioners delegated to the Santa Rosa Island Authority all of its powers, duties and authority relating to the development, leasing and operation of the Island.

The Board of the Santa Rosa Island Authority presently consists of six members, five of whom are appointed by the Board of County Commissioners and the sixth of whom is elected by the resident voters on the Island.

The Authority has jurisdiction over 1,474 acres on the Island, sixty percent of these acres (886.3 acres) are set aside for public use or public service, and forty percent (587.7 acres) are leased for residential or commercial use.

The Authority's 2002-2003 budget is \$5.16 million. None of these funds comes from the general revenue of Escambia County.

The day-to-day operations of the Authority are under the direction of a General Manager appointed by the Board of the Authority. There is an administrative staff of thirty-seven permanent employees working in four departments: Administration and Leasing, Environmental and Developmental Services, Finance and Accounting, and Public and Recreation Facilities.

According to a report prepared by the University of West Florida's Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development dated October 2002, Pensacola Beach tourism contributes approximately \$277 million per year to the local economy and supports over 4,00 local jobs.

In 2001, the Board of County Commissioners requested that the local delegation of the State Legislature repeal the special act creating the Santa Rosa Island Authority. The local delegation voted to introduce legislation which would abolish the Authority as of October 2004, provided the Board of County Commissioners would establish a plan by January of 2003 reflecting how it intended to have the duties and functions currently performed by the Authority administered by the county. Due to the subsequent grand jury investigation, the local delegation decided not to introduce any legislation changing the status of the Authority.

There are advocates for leaving the Authority as it presently exists; others believe the Authority should continue to exist but with modifications to its structure; and still others contend the Authority should be abolished and the duties and functions it presently performs transferred to a department, which would report directly to the County Administrator.

What do you, the members of the public, believe should be done with the Santa Rosa Island Authority?