

Take Back Virginia Key!

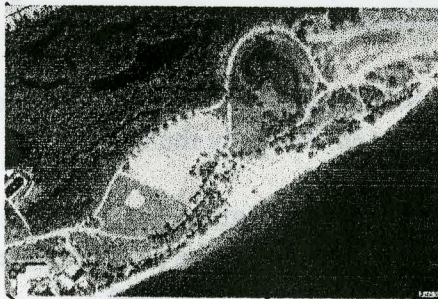
Virginia Key is a barrier island of beaches and nature preserves, lagoons and lakes, a place of spectacular beauty and opportunity for recreation, education and relaxation for all the people of this community. Best of all, it's all within our reach -- a rare wildlife outpost within view of the downtown skyline.

Unfortunately, Virginia Key's potential has been mismanaged, its wild areas neglected, its public beaches abandoned and closed by the City of Miami. And now the City is once again poised to exploit this natural resource and exclude the public by leasing out its public parks and beaches and its marine areas to developers for resorts, shopping centers, hotels and other private development.

Don't sit back while our public parks are taken away for the private profits of a select few! Take back Virginia Key from special interests!

The Public Parks Coalition, a group of individuals and civic-minded organizations, including the Urban Environment League, the Sierra Club, Friends of Virginia Key, are calling for the reopening of both public beach parks on Virginia Key, the creation of a Civil Rights Park and Memorial on the old county beach site, the restoration of all natural areas of Virginia Key and the redevelopment of neglected areas, such as the Marine Stadium area, in a manner that is consistent with the natural resources of the barrier island and serves the public's recreational, educational and marine-related needs.

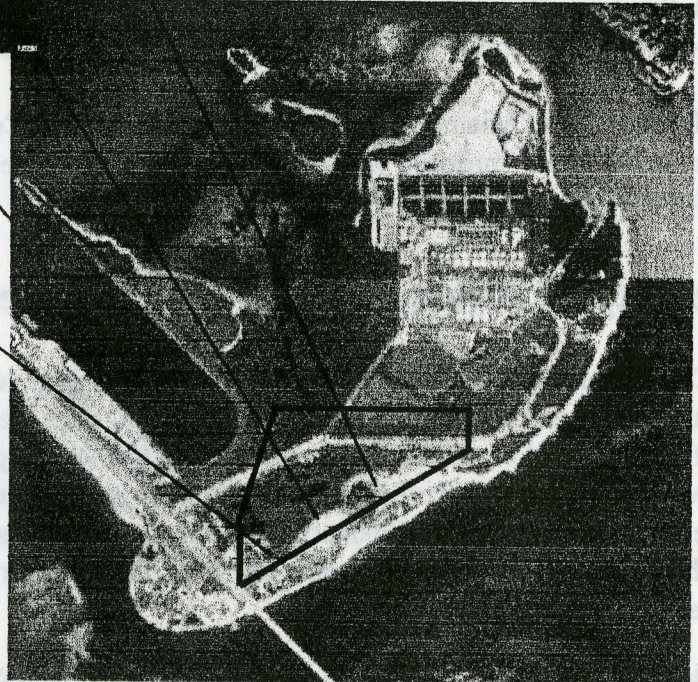
Old County Park



Here's what you can do: Come to the City of Miami Waterfront Advisory Board's public workshop **Wed., April 14, 1999 at 5 p.m.**, at the **City of Miami City Hall, 3500 Pan American Drive., Miami.** Let your voice be heard!

On March 10, the Virginia Key Ad Hoc Committee, individuals appointed by City of Miami Commissioners to recommend development opportunities on Virginia Key, who worked in concert with the City's Department of Real Estate and Economic Development, recommended the following development:

A private resort on beachfront park land on the Old County Park site. Half of the land could be developed with buildings for this resort. Buildings would be more than 3 1/2 stories high above the grade. The facility would be private. No real campground experiences would be allowed -- no tents or campers would be permitted. No public parking would be allowed at this private resort, effectively excluding the public's access to the beach. The restaurants and "tasteful" concessions" of the resort will be used primarily for the resort guests. No public concessions will be built.



Take Action

Write to your local newspapers about why you think these public parks and beaches should remain open to the public for its use and enjoyment:

The Miami Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132; fax (305) 376-8950 or email: HeraldEd@Herald.com

Miami Times, 900 NW 54 St., Miami, FL 33127; phone (305) 358-2663

Miami New Times, 2800 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 100, Miami, FL 33137 fax (305) 576-7678; email: editorial@miaminewtimes.com

Sun-Sentinel, 200 E Las Olas Blvd., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301; fax 954-356-4634; email: letters@sun-sentinel.com

History of Virginia Key and its public beach parks

The old County Park on Virginia Key was Miami-Dade County's first segregated beach and evolved into an important community asset, a place of church picnics and baptisms, dance parties and family gatherings. Today, the bittersweet memories of the past have inspired many to call for the creation of a Civil Rights Park and Memorial on Virginia Key Beach -- to honor and remember the civil rights struggles of the past and leave a lasting legacy for the future.

In 1982, Miami-Dade County agreed to give Virginia Key Beach (known as the Old County Park parcel) to the City of Miami. But the County asked the City to follow some simple rules:

"The property is restricted to public park purposes only to be kept open to the public, providing maintain and a level of service equal to or exceeding that which was provided by the County"

FACT: The City of Miami has kept the beach closed for 17 years. The bathrooms, the refreshment stands, the dance floor, the carousel, the miniature trains, the picnic tables, the pavilions, the forest and trails -- are all abandoned and deteriorated and unusable in their present condition.

FACT: The City of Miami has already asked Miami-Dade County and the State of Florida to ignore these rules so it can "proceed with the task necessary for the imminent development" of Virginia Key's Old County Park and the Marine Stadium area.

The City of Miami: A Sad Environmental Legacy

The City has always been unkind to Virginia Key, a unique regional resource: In the 1950s, it turned Virginia Key's central lake into a landfill and filled it with incinerator ash and sewage sludge. When Dade County recently asked permission to test the landfill for the presence of aquatic life-threatening ammonia, the City declined. It let the island become overrun with exotic trees, like the Australian Pine, that kill native vegetation. It closed Windsurfers beach after a fiscal scandal. It tried unsuccessfully in 1995 to lease hundreds of acres of public park land to a company for a private development, and now it is trying to lease public park land again.

For more info: Sierra Club, 476-9898; UEL 667-4398; Gene Tinnie: 751-9791