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A sign on the outskirts of the FISH Preserve pictured near Cortez Road east of 115th Street West April 6 will be replaced later this year. Islander Photo: Kane Kaiman

It'll be open 24/7 to those willing to hike it.

At an April 4 meeting in Cortez, the Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage board discussed how, in the future, the public will interact with a 100-acre nature preserve the nonprofit has been restoring since 2005.

FISH is seeking funding for the final phase of the restoration, with approximately \$300,000 needed.

Before the meeting, the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program policy board — which has helped FISH secure restoration funds in the past — asked the organization to share its plans for access to the sanctuary after the land is restored to its natural state, including information about public parking and hours of operation.

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the end of 119th Street West.

Board members discussed creating a “full Cortez experience” – a looping path along which visitors could hike through the preserve and to the Cortez Cultural Center, FISH Boatworks and the Florida Maritime Museum.

Steve Baker suggested maps be made to demonstrate the organization’s commitment to the idea.

Von Hahmann reported the nonprofit, dedicated to preserving Cortez’s commercial fishing heritage, is seeking a grant to cover the costs of an informational kiosk, trail signage and benches that would be placed within the preserve.

The board also reviewed a finalized preserve billboard design on which they had collaborated with the SBEP.

The 4-by-8-foot sign – which will feature the organizations that partnered with FISH on the restoration effort, as well as ospreys, a mullet and a line of mangroves – likely will be installed within the next six months east of 115th Street West along the south side of Cortez Road, von Hahmann said.

### A changing village

During a discussion about adjusting FISH property rental fees, Baker said the organization likely would need to raise rates to keep pace with increases in property taxes.

The dialogue led to a conversation about the housing market, which has incentivized descendants of Cortez working-class families to sell their properties to buyers of short-term rentals.

“It’s going to be a significant thing. It’ll change the whole culture of the village,” Baker said.

“I agree. It’s all Airbnb. It isn’t homes; we don’t have people who work and live here anymore,” von Hahmann said.

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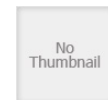
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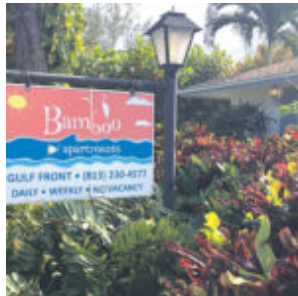
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Von Hahmann told The Islander April 5 that municipal self-governance could allow Cortez – currently an unincorporated community subject to Manatee County ordinances – to prohibit daily rentals within its boundaries and thereby encourage owner-occupancy.

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