

Living on Dog Island: A Guide for Residents, Owners, and Guests

IMPORTANT NOTE: *This guide is updated regularly, and if you’re holding a printed copy, it’s quite possible that it’s outdated. Compare the date in the footer with the most current version of the guide, complete with clickable hyperlinks, that is always available online at www.dogisland.net.*

Current draft revised as of the date in the page footer. Please note that some items refer only to the portion of the island within the Dog Island Conservation District, which covers approximately the area east of and including Cannonball Acres.

Introduction

“Welcome to Paradise!” That’s the tourist-brochure line, anyway, and it surely applies to Dog Island. But what makes this island wonderful can also make it a challenge to live out here successfully. We hope this guide will make it easier for you to do so.

Although this feels like a wild and free place, paradoxically, the key to long-term happiness is being aware of *limits*:

- Limited access
- Limited supplies and services
- Limited natural environment

Keeping this concept in mind helps manage your expectations—and frees you to really enjoy this outstanding and unique place.

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Quick Information Page

Emergency Information

- KNOW YOUR ADDRESS. Find your island house address and be sure to post the house number in a prominent location so that emergency personnel can easily find you. Be aware that the “ambulance” for Dog Island is a Life Flight helicopter and transportation times are significantly higher than for mainland locations.
- CALL 911 FIRST FOR ALL FIRE AND MEDICAL EMERGENCIES
- For medical non-emergencies, contact Dr. Ivan Backerman 850-697-4702 (cell 850-508-6898)
- Power Outages – Call Duke Energy at 1-800-228-8485
- For other island emergencies, contact Island Manager Greg Buckley (850-943-0604)
- To facilitate returning to your property after an evacuation, visit the [Franklin County Emergency Management website](#) to apply for a “Re-Entry Tag.”

Important Island Organizations – Please see [Learn More](#) for information and contacts

- Dog Island Conservation District
- Dog Island Yacht Club
- Dog Island VFD
- Nature Conservancy

Owning Land and Building Houses

Buying Land or Existing Structures

“Real Estate”

Know what you’re buying into. The phrase “Barrier Island Real Estate” is something of an oxymoron, because the pile of sand we know as Dog Island is constantly changing, and shoreline modifications like seawalls and groins are at best temporary solutions that tend to just shift the problem elsewhere. Shorelines expand and contract, dunes are wiped out, and lots can virtually disappear in a single hurricane. A [2019 Florida DEP report](#) indicated that the shoreline from Cannonball Acres to the east end is “critically eroded.” Many island residents have had to move their homes landward (when possible) to keep them from falling into the Gulf.

For more on Dog Island’s history and shoreline changes, see:

- [Coastal Care: Dog Island, Florida](#)
- [Geologic History and Modern Morphodynamics of Dog Island, Franklin County, Florida](#)

Rentals and Camping: Home rentals within the DICD on Dog Island are prohibited per deed covenants. Camping is also prohibited. Rentals and short term beach accommodations are available on the adjacent St. George Island, for example. Google "St. George Island Rentals" for a plethora of rental options.

Legal Guidance

Deed covenants for Dog Island property within the DICD prohibit any commercial use of property on Dog Island—which would include home rentals. The following references can guide you whether you’re considering a vacant lot to build on or an existing structure:

- [Franklin County Planning & Building](#)
 - See their [Residential Instruction Sheet](#) for a checklist.
- [State of Florida Coastal Construction Control Line Program](#)

How to Find Property For Sale

If you’ve decided to go ahead and pursue purchase of island property, you’ll find listings in the usual real estate outlets.

Construction

Bear in mind that building on Dog Island is a challenge. Obviously, the lack of a bridge makes it difficult to get materials and equipment over and construction debris off. You may also find that housing workers on-island is more efficient than bringing them off and on every day—in which case you’ll need to find some housing for them. Once on the island, you’ll need a way to transport crew and materials from the dock to the worksite.

We've opted not to list specific individuals and firms in this document. To find information about specific contractors, we recommend you reach out to real-estate agents, Dog Island acquaintances, and social media groups.

Information about using the Landing Craft can be found under **Transportation**.

Utilities

Water

Unless you bring your own water supply, you'll need a well—and unlike mainland wells, Dog Island water comes from what's called a “surficial aquifer” – a lens-shaped bubble of fresh water resting on top of the salty Gulf and held in place by the island itself. It's a very shallow and fragile water source and most islanders use some kind of filtration, particularly for drinking. We've also come to realize how quickly it can get polluted by fuel spills and poorly maintained septic tanks. (You might also look into building and maintaining a cistern – see [this publication from UF IFAS](#).)

Electricity

Duke Energy supplies the island with power and repairs the lines when there are power outages, which can be frequent. Their [Customer Service page](#) is a good starting point. IMPORTANT: Corrosion and lightning strikes make electrical fires a serious concern on the island. [Duke's Surge Protection Program](#) is good insurance.

Telecommunications (Phone/Internet/TV service)

Cell reception (up to 5G) is generally good on the island, but you can also make arrangements for a regular land line. There is no cable TV or cable Internet on the island. Some islanders have had success with satellite-based Internet and TV services.

Trash and Recycling

It is no small matter to remove refuse generated by islanders, as you might imagine. Some help out by taking their own trash off with them. This includes recyclable items, since Franklin County is no longer accepting separate recyclables from the island. If you need to use the compactor located near the harbor, please follow all instructions posted. For large items (appliances, construction debris, etc.) contact the Island Manager to make arrangements. We recommend that you take hazardous materials (batteries, oil, etc.) back to the mainland for proper disposal.

Septic Tanks

As mentioned above, it's critical to have a well-maintained septic tank so you don't pollute your and your neighbor's water supply. Islanders will often get together to bring out a service truck to maintain several tanks at once in order to reduce individual costs.

Transportation

Getting To/From DI

Dog Island Ferry

Over the years there have been several types of ferry service from Carrabelle, and old-timers still reminisce about the old Spica car ferry and Capt. Raymond's regular ferry service. Today's ferry service is run by the able Captain Mike Urquhart, who can be reached at 850-879-4579 or on the web at <https://dogislandferry.org/>.

- **What can be ferried:** The boat carries passengers and their luggage/supplies only (no building materials or heavy freight). Passengers are requested to limit baggage to one carry-on bag and one plastic tub because of space and weight limitations. Contact Capt. Mike if you are uncertain whether your baggage exceeds these limits.
- **Scheduled runs:** Their are established runs that vary somewhat with the seasons, but you should ALWAYS call Capt. Mike at 850-879-4579 to confirm your travel plans. Even scheduled runs can fill up quickly on busy weekends. A run from the mainland to the island usually takes under 30 minutes each way.
- **Cost:** For DI property owners, a ride during scheduled runs is \$15 per person each way, while charter runs are available at other times. Tips that recognize Mike's excellent service will always be appreciated!
- **Mainland parking:** Public parking is available near the ferry dock on Marine Street in Carrabelle, but pay close attention to signs regarding overnight parking. Parking in the small Ferry lot itself requires a sticker affixed to the windshield or the car will be towed. Property owners can obtain a sticker by contacting a board member at the Dog Island Conservation District (see the Learn More section below).

Landing Craft

The LC or "Elsie" is Dog Island's "bridge" for vehicles, construction materials, and other large items. Trips are scheduled to take into account fuel usage and wear and tear on the boat, so it's imperative that you work with Greg Buckley, Island Manager (850-943-0604) well in advance of anticipated need. Greg can provide information about capacity, scheduling, and costs. Operational costs and maintenance for the ferry (upwards of \$25,000 per year) are underwritten by the Dog Island Conservation District.

Personal Boat

There are boat ramps in Lanark and Carrabelle. Please be mindful of channel markers and no-wake zones in Carrabelle and Tyson's Harbor. There is no free public dock at Dog Island. You can load and unload at the ferry dock, but no tie-up is permitted.

- Many residents anchor in the harbor to the west of the dock but of course you'll need to figure out how to get to and from shore.
- Residents who travel to the island via personal boat on a regular basis often join the Dog Island Yacht Club and rent slips. For more information on the DIYC, please contact Scott Gronholm at 770-337-9169.

Marine emergency services are available from:

- SeaTow Big Bend: 850-984-3456 or 800-4-SEATOW
- Tow Boat US (Russell Cahoon): 850-697-8909

Personal Aircraft

The grass-covered runway, [designated FA43](#) and locally referred to as DI International, is maintained by the DICD. Costs and other information for pilots can be obtained by contacting Ivan or Susie Backerman at 850-697-4702 (cell 850-508-6898).

Getting around DI

Roads on Dog Island

There are no paved roads on the island and while some areas are relatively firm, many of the roads are not. Driving in the soft “sugar sands” of the Gulf Coast is a challenge. Drive cautiously and courteously. Roads can be difficult, vehicles poorly maintained, and operators underage. Be alert for washouts, low and marshy sections, and large puddles after a downpour.

- When meeting another vehicle head-on on a narrow roadway, look for a wide spot to pull over and yield to the oncoming driver.
- Make sure that contractors understand that their equipment will be operating in soft sand.
- Island speed limit: 25mph. (You’ll be surprised at how fast that feels on our roads.)
- Stay on maintained roads. Beach and dune driving is prohibited in order to reduce erosion and our impact on the island.

Vehicles for Dog Island

- **Best types:** In addition to the challenging roads, the island environment is brutal for modern automobiles with their extensive reliance on electronics. Most islanders keep a second-hand SUV or pickup with four-wheel-drive at the harbor for transport from dock to house. In recent years, more islanders have been drawn to off-road golf carts and side-by-sides because of their ruggedness and fuel economy. These lighter vehicles are also much less hard on our roads.
- **Getting it out here:** All vehicles kept on the island incur a road use fee, and the landing craft fees are waived to and from the island (once each) for these vehicles. See the Landing Craft section to learn more about scheduling trips.
- **Fuel and maintenance:** You’ll be bringing your own gasoline, and a mechanic will have to come to you to conduct repairs, which can be expensive. Ferry captain Mike Urquhart is one potential contact.
- **Removal:** Storm surges can flood and ruin some vehicles, while others simply become too rusty or unreliable over time. In either case you’ll need to make arrangements for removing the vehicle via LC. This may take some time if there is a backlog of disposals due to a major storm.

Longterm Living

Law Enforcement

Contact the Franklin County Sheriff's Office to report crimes or suspicious activity. The Florida Marine Patrol and the U.S. Coast Guard provide enforcement on the water.

Our Carrabelle Neighbors

The small fishing town of Carrabelle has a rich history and several restaurants worth exploring. Learn more about Lanark and Camp Gordon Johnson or stop into Harry's Bar for a drink while waiting for the ferry.

Groceries

The Gulfside IGA Plus in Carrabelle is the closest to the island. Contact the ferry operator if you're interested in learning more about grocery delivery.

Mail Service

While life on DI is remote, you can still send and receive mail and packages. Just not as quickly or conveniently as on the mainland. First, stop by the [Carrabelle Post Office](#) (see website for location and hours) to introduce yourself and fill out the short form necessary to receive mail on the island. Within a few days, you'll be assigned a small mailbox, located near the ferry dock, and a key. Once you have this box number, you can have packages delivered using the following address format:

First Name, Last Name

Street address (for example - 764 Gulf Shore Drive)

Secondary address (required for package delivery): "HC 63" plus your box number (e.g., HC 63 5050)

Carrabelle, FL 32322

If a package is too big to fit in your assigned PO box, you might find a key in your small box. If so, simply look for the larger box at the bottom of the post boxes and use the key to unlock it and get your packages. If the package is too big to be delivered, there will be a notice in your box and you can pick up the package at the Carrabelle Post Office when it is open.

If you are receiving a package via Fed Ex or UPS, you need to find a person or business on the mainland willing to receive and hold your package for you. For example, the local Dollar General in Carrabelle does have an Amazon Hub Drop-off and Pick-up Station ([see info](#)).

Maintenance and Repairs

You'll likely need to fix things like appliances, vehicles, well pumps, roofs, electrical connections, and others more often because of the corrosive salt air. This guide does not endorse specific individuals, but you can get recommendations from your neighbors via DICD meetings, social events, and social media.

Community Events / Information

These are ways you can get involved and become a real Dog Islander, not just a property owner. Subscribe to the DICD newsletter or join online groups to learn about holiday meetups, covered dish suppers and parties, and group coastal cleanup efforts.

The Fourth of July holiday is an especially good time to get to know your neighbors. There's a pancake breakfast fundraiser at the firehouse, a fish fry/ covered dish/ libation contest at the yacht club, and a big fireworks show (donations accepted) at the Conley House not far from the fire station. All ages are welcome to these events, details of which are usually posted in the Property Owners Facebook group mentioned below.

Social Media: Search Facebook for “Dog Island Wisdom” (public group) and “Dog Island Property Owners,” which can be useful sources of information and contacts. Like all social media, they can also be sources of disinformation, gossip, and needless contention—so use them with a critical eye.

Natural Dog Island

Hurricanes

- Residents of the Southeast are familiar with the usual hurricane preparedness recommendations, but remember that you may not be able to return to your house for an extended period. Consider how the home will be secured, where your vehicle will be parked, what happens to perishables in freezers, etc.
- Evacuation is a serious matter at Dog Island, since conditions in the sound can become impassable long before roads are closed. Be alert and don't try to ride it out.
- To facilitate returning to your property after an evacuation, visit the [Franklin County Emergency Management website](#) to apply for a "Re-Entry Tag."
- Cleanup can be massive and ongoing for months or even years after a major storm. See this [Tallahassee Democrat article on Hurricane Michael cleanup, with photos and video](#).

Protecting the Island and Wildlife

For those whose homes are not directly on the beach, please respect your neighbors' property by using the **designated easements** to access the beach. You'll also avoid disturbing dunes and nesting habitat this way.

Because of our vulnerability to wildfire and limited fire-fighting resources, **open fires (including campfires) are prohibited on Dog Island.**

Fishing can be fantastic from shore or in the surrounding waters! Florida fishing regulations (including licenses) apply. Please use conservative fishing practices and take care to discard fishing line responsibly using the receptacle at the Tyson's Harbor dock.

Dogs, like people, love the beach. **However, loose dogs are prohibited on the island.** No matter how well-trained and gentle your dog may be, *it only takes a second to destroy critical nests or drive bird parents away from vulnerable hatchlings—possibly right on your property.* Please leash your dog and pick up after them.

Speaking of birds, **bird-watching** can be excellent on the island because of its remoteness and because it serves as a stopover for migrating birds. Butterflies also use the island as a resting point. Shorebirds nest directly on the sand and their colonies are highly vulnerable to disturbance. Eagles, ospreys, and owls build enormous nests in the pine forests, and small raptors like merlins and peregrine falcons can be spotted on power lines and pine snags. Please watch from a safe distance, and practice care when driving in The Narrows. Stay out of posted nesting areas during the April-August nesting season.

Dog Island is a popular nesting spot for threatened and endangered **sea turtles**, and you can help keep it that way. Observe limits on beach-facing lights at night so that hatchlings can find the surf—especially during the May-October nesting season. Bring objects that can impede nesting mother turtles as they crawl up the shore: remove chairs, canopies, and other large objects from the beach at night--

and be sure to fill in that deep hole where the kids buried most of Uncle Jack. If you see nesting evidence (including “crawl” tracks), contact Terry Cannon at 850 323-0508 so the nest can be monitored. Information on Franklin County’s laws pertaining to beach lights at night, with daily fines, can be found at http://franklincountyflorida.com/documents/turtle_lighting_ordinance.pdf.

It’s Florida, so we have our share of **potentially dangerous critters**. Snakes (including venomous ones) and alligators are part of the scene, as are sharks and rays. Being alert and keeping your distance are the best ways to coexist with these very necessary creatures.

Be kind to plants! Our sand-pine forests contain evidence of the turpentine trade from decades ago: look for “catted” trees as you walk the trails. Even a small island pine may be decades old and part of a system that holds your dune in place and feeds wildlife. Dune plants, including sea oats, are valuable allies in holding all this sand down, so please treat them with respect and ask before cutting if you aren’t sure. Be exceptionally cautious with fertilizers and pesticides (remember your aquifer!) and please don’t bring invasive plants.

Learn More

Organizations to Visit/Join

DICD

The Dog Island Conservation District covers all of the island except the portion west of Cannonball Acres. Its board of directors oversees the ferry docks and island roads, among other important concerns. The district's website contains archives of the quarterly newsletter, audit reports, enabling legislation, and other information about the DICD. Visit <http://dogislandconservationdistrict.org>.

DIYC

The Dog Island Yacht Club maintains private docks in Tyson's Harbor and a small clubhouse. Social events are typically open to all. Contact Scott Gronholm at 770-337-9169 for more information.

DI VFD

The Dog Island Volunteer Fire Department trains volunteers, maintains fire apparatus, and responds to island emergencies (dial 911). For non-emergencies, contact Ann Shanks (tallshanks@hotmail.com).

The Nature Conservancy

This preservation organization is the island's largest landowner and maintains the Jeff Lewis Wilderness Preserve, signs for which are posted around the island. [Learn more](#).

Others of Interest

- [Franklin County](#)
- [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)
- [Florida Department of Environmental Protection](#)
- [US Fish & Wildlife Service](#)
 - [Migratory Bird Program](#)
- [Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve](#)
- [Ocean Conservancy](#)
- [Sea Turtle Conservancy](#)
- [Audubon Society](#)

About This Guide

This Dog Island Guide is an unofficial compendium of information compiled and maintained by Dog Islanders for the benefit of new owners and those considering property on this unique Florida island. *The most current version of the guide, complete with clickable hyperlinks, is always available online at www.dogisland.net.*

Significant contributions from the following:

- Ray Appen
- Joe Clark (contact jsclarkfl@gmail.com with additions, corrections)
- Ann Shanks
- Stacy Spencer
- Bill Stone