

Fort Monroe National Monument

Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Purpose of the North Beach Area 4 Visitor Use Rapid Assessment

The presidential proclamation (Proclamation 8750, dated November 1, 2011, 54 U.S.C. 320301 note; 76 Fed. Reg. 68625) establishing Fort Monroe National Monument (“the monument”) looked forward to interpretation and recreational uses throughout the monument, including a 50-acre area in the northernmost part of North Beach, currently under the control of the US Army (“the Army”). The National Park Service (NPS) is considering accepting a transfer of ownership of this area from the Army and opening it to public access and recreation. This area, referred to as Area 4 (see map), is closed to the public as the Army completes risk assessments and remediation.

As a stakeholder in the remediation process, the National Park Service must provide the Army with potential uses of Area 4, should this land transfer and open to the public for access and recreation. Before a transfer can occur, environmental remediation and cleanup are required.

In late 2021 and early 2022, the National Park Service conducted a visitor use rapid assessment to inform discussions with the Army regarding necessary levels of cleanup before transferring ownership and opening Area 4 for public use.

PROCESS

The National Park Service established an interdisciplinary team of subject matter experts on visitor use and resource planning, coastal landscapes, environmental protection and remediation, and the monument’s unique history and resources to conduct the rapid assessment. Team members included staff from Fort Monroe National Monument, NPS regional office programs, the NPS Denver Service Center Planning Division, and the NPS Environmental Compliance and Cleanup Division.

The most critical element of the rapid assessment was engaging with the public to gather input regarding potential public uses and desired visitor experiences specific to Area 4. In March 2022, the project team hosted a 30-day public comment period that included a press release, a newsletter, an NPS Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) webpage,

and social media posts to provide information about the study area, the purpose of the rapid assessment, and how to provide ideas and comments. On March 3 and 4, 2022, the NPS hosted two site walks for key stakeholders to tour Area 4 and discuss possible future uses. In cooperation with the Fort Monroe Authority, on March 14 and 15, 2022, NPS also hosted two virtual public meetings that included a summary of the two site walks’ discussions. Learn more here: (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/northbeach>).

The NPS interdisciplinary team analyzed public input and incorporated knowledge about ongoing discussions with the Fort Monroe Authority and the Army about North Beach and Area 4 to develop preliminary desired conditions for resources and visitor experiences in Area 4 under future NPS management.

OUTCOMES

A total of 28 correspondences were submitted to the PEPC website. In addition, 29 people representing key stakeholder groups and one sovereign nation, the Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe, participated in the site walks. Public input almost unanimously supported transferring ownership of Area 4 from the Army to the National Park Service once environmental cleanup is completed. Additionally, there was resounding feedback that Area 4 should provide low-intensity, natural resource focused visitor experiences offering peaceful, reflective use of the landscape and providing a different kind of experience than is currently offered elsewhere in North Beach. The visitor activities suggested for Area 4 include hiking, walking, non-motorized uses such as bicycling, stargazing, birdwatching, viewing nature, opportunities for reflection, listening to the ocean and other natural sounds, and enjoying a peaceful, relatively isolated landscape. Access to the water for kayaking or other non-motorized water activities could be provided on the Mill Creek side. Furthermore, interest was expressed in providing opportunities in Area 4 to share histories and cultural traditions associated with Kecoughtan native peoples, including the seven federally recognized sovereign nations, as well as English settlers, enslaved Africans, and descendant communities.

As a result of this rapid visitor use assessment, public input received in March 2022, and the National Park Service's understanding of current and future site conditions, the National Park Service has concluded that future NPS planning and management of Area 4 would endeavor to keep the area as natural as possible, with low-impact activities and limited facilities, consistent with public input.

Future use would also consider the changing climate and potential impacts of rising sea levels and increasingly intensive storms, given the site's sea-level location. Outcomes from the rapid assessment form a vision for Area 4 that the National Park Service finds consistent with the reasonable types of use the area can accommodate, balancing recreational activities, resource protection, and interpretation of the monument's significance.

These outcomes will be shared with the Army to inform remediation activities needed before transferring Area 4 from the Army to NPS ownership.

For more information about Fort Monroe National Monument, visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/fomr.

