



Gulf Islands National Seashore Newsletter

Dear Friends,

The National Park Service (NPS) is beginning to plan for the future of Gulf Islands National Seashore. The current management plan was finalized in 1978 and no longer adequately addresses the issues facing the national seashore. A planning team has been formed to develop a new general management plan (GMP), which will guide the management of the national seashore for the next 15 to 20 years. In developing this plan, NPS staff will work closely with federal, state, and local agencies; interested parties; and the general public. We encourage and need your participation in the planning process.

The national park system represents a collection of many of the nation's most outstanding and significant resources. Gulf Islands National Seashore preserves outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational resources along the Gulf Coasts of Florida and Mississippi. These resources include several coastal defense forts spanning more than two centuries of military activity, archeological resources, and pristine examples of intact coastal barrier islands, salt marshes, bayous, submerged sea grass beds, complex terrestrial communities, emerald green water, and white sand beaches. The national seashore now also includes approximately half of the 2,200-acre Cat Island in Mississippi.

The purpose of a general management plan is to ensure that national seashore managers have a clearly defined direction for protecting resources and providing public access. Together, the National Park Service and interested groups and individuals will explore ways to answer the following questions:

- What actions should we take to ensure that Gulf Islands National Seashore and its resources are protected and maintained in good condition?
- What actions should we take to ensure that visitors and other members of the public learn and understand the purpose, significance, and mission of Gulf Islands National Seashore?
- What level and type of visitor use is appropriate for the national seashore?
- How can we work effectively with partners (other interested groups and individuals) to protect the resources and increase support for the national seashore?

Please share your ideas about these and other questions with the planning team by coming to one of our open houses and/or submitting written comments. Thank you for taking this time to help us plan for the future.

Sincerely,

Jerry A. Eubanks
Superintendent, Gulf Islands National Seashore



General Management Planning

Planning is a decision-making process, and general management planning is the broadest level of decision making. General management plans, which are required for all units of the national park system, are intended to set the management direction for the park unit for the next 15 to 20 years. The development of a general management plan for Gulf Islands National Seashore is being coordinated by the national seashore staff and NPS planning professionals, with participation by partners, neighbors, and the public.

Planning in the national park system is organized around three primary questions:

Why was this park unit established (what is the overall mission of the park unit)?

What is the vision for the future of this place (what kind of place do we want it to be)?

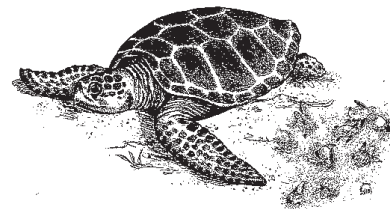
How do we achieve our future vision (what actions are needed to achieve the desired future conditions)?

WHY Was this National Seashore Established?

The answers to the WHY question form the foundation for the general management plan. All concepts and actions in the plan must be consistent with this foundation, which is based on legislation and NPS policy. For Gulf Islands National Seashore, the planning foundation begins with statements of national seashore mission, purpose, and significance. Draft versions of the mission and the purpose and significance statements are presented in this newsletter. Your comments will help us refine them. The planning team will refer to this foundation to direct and test each step of the management plan as it progresses, and national seashore managers will use the foundation statements and the management plan to help make operational decisions long after the plan itself is completed.

WHAT Is the Vision for the Future of the National Seashore?

Developing a vision for the future of the national seashore (answering the WHAT question) is the primary role of a general management plan. The planning team spends the most time on this step, and it is here that ideas and comments from you are the most important. A general management plan will apply 15-20 years into the future. The national seashore will be considered in its full ecological and cultural context as part of the surrounding region. Several possible courses of action for the national seashore's future (called alternatives) will be developed and analyzed before a preferred management direction is selected. Evaluating a set of alternatives enables the planning team and the public to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of one course of action over another, and to reach a sound approach to decision making required by the National Environmental Policy Act.



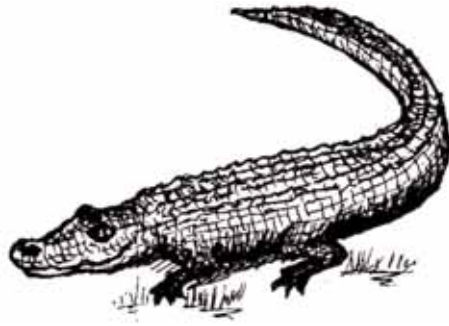
HOW Do We Accomplish our Vision for the Future?

In some cases it may be necessary to include specific actions in the general management plan for Gulf Islands National Seashore; however, most specific answers to the **HOW** question will be included in future implementation plans. For example, the desired conditions to be achieved for the national seashore's natural and cultural resources will be described in the general management plan, but specific actions to manage these resources will be identified in later resource management plans. The overall goals and conditions to be met by the interpretive and educational programs will be established in the general management plan, as will the primary interpretive themes, but the necessary media will be detailed in an interpretive plan. Any current implementation plans for the national seashore will be evaluated and revised as necessary to be consistent with the new general management plan.

Planning Time Frame

Gulf Islands National Seashore's general management plan process is expected to take several years to complete. A summary of the process and anticipated time frame are presented below. You will have opportunities to share ideas and comments throughout the process.

Step	Timeframe	Description	How you can be involved
1	Summer 2003 - Winter 2004	Initiate Project The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope, customizes the planning process, and begins to establish contacts with participants.	
We Are Here	Spring 2004 - Fall 2004	Define Planning Context and Foundation The team examines WHY the national seashore was established and affirms its mission, purpose, and significance. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public input.	Read this newsletter. Send us your ideas and comments. Come to public open houses.
3	Winter 2004 - Fall 2005	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives Using staff and public input, the team explores WHAT the national seashore's future could look like and proposes a range of alternatives.	Read newsletter. Send us your ideas and comments.
4	Winter 2005 - Winter 2006	Prepare a Draft Document <i>A Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement</i> is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and impacts of implementing each. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	Read draft document. Send us your ideas and comments. Come to meetings.
5	Winter 2006 - Fall 2007	Publish Final Document Based on review by the National Park Service, other agencies and organizations, and the public, the team revises the <i>General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement</i> and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.	Read the final document, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters.
6	Winter 2007 and Beyond	Implement the Approved Plan After the <i>Record of Decision</i> is issued, begin implementing the <i>General Management Plan</i> as funding permits.	Work with national seashore staff to implement plan.



Mission, Purpose, and Significance for Gulf Islands National Seashore

Mission

Gulf Islands National Seashore preserves certain outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational resources along the northern Gulf Coast of Florida and Mississippi. These include several coastal defense forts spanning more than two centuries of military activity, archeological values, pristine examples of intact Mississippi coastal barrier islands, salt marshes, bayous and submerged sea grass beds, complex terrestrial communities, emerald green water, and white sand beaches.

Purpose

The purpose of Gulf Islands National Seashore is to preserve and interpret its Gulf Coast barrier island and bayou ecosystem and its system of coastal defense fortifications, while providing for the public use and enjoyment of these resources.

Significance

The national seashore contains one of the most complete collections of publicly accessible structures relating to the evolution of seacoast defense in the United States, representing a continuum of development from early Spanish exploration and colonization through World War II.

The national seashore contains publicly accessible natural and scenic island, beach, dune, and water resource areas in close proximity to major population centers.

Protected and undeveloped natural resource areas provide habitat for several endangered species in diverse ecosystems, stop-over habitat for migratory birds, critical nursery habitat for marine flora and fauna, and serve as an enclave for complex terrestrial and aquatic plant and animal communities that characterize the northern Gulf Coast and fully illustrate the natural processes that shape these unique areas.

The land and marine archeological resources throughout the national seashore represent a continuum of human occupation in a coastal environment and are important in enhancing the knowledge of the past, including interactions between the earliest settlers and original inhabitants of this area of the Gulf Coast.

The national seashore provides a benchmark to compare conditions in developed areas of the Gulf Coast to natural areas.

The national seashore possesses a rare combination of recreational opportunities on publicly accessible undeveloped barrier islands, two of which are designated as wilderness.

Issues

Obstacles to Achieving Desired Conditions

An issue is defined as an opportunity, conflict, or problem regarding the use or management of public lands. Some preliminary issues/concerns relating to Gulf Islands National Seashore were identified during early information gathering for the general management plan. Those who informally contributed to this preliminary list include national seashore staff; representatives from other city, county, state, and federal government agencies; and representatives from various public and private organizations. The issues and concerns generally involve determining appropriate visitor use and types and levels of facilities, services, and activities that are compatible with maintaining desired resource conditions. The general management plan will present different alternatives or strategies for addressing the issues within the context of the national seashore's purpose, significance, mission, and applicable laws and policies. The following is a preliminary list of issues developed by the planning team:

Cultural Resources

The national seashore's cultural resources, which include submerged and terrestrial resources, archeological sites, forts, and structures, have not been comprehensively surveyed or evaluated, and they have often been overshadowed by the national seashore's considerable natural resources. However, these resources reflect the span of human history in the Gulf Coast from prehistoric times to the early 20th century.

The eroding effect of natural processes and human activities creates a constant challenge to NPS management for protecting, preserving, and interpreting these windows to the past. As visitation increases, cultural resources could be compromised, and without strategies to balance location and density of visitor activities, it will be difficult for the staff to protect, rehabilitate, and preserve cultural resource conditions.

Questions to be addressed:

- What resource conditions are desired for archeological, cultural landscape, historic, and ethnographic resources?
- In what ways and to what extent should Gulf Islands National Seashore emphasize cultural resource protection and preservation within the overall context of the seashore's natural landscapes?
- What would be appropriate levels of interpretation and visitor access to cultural resource sites?

Natural Resources

The national seashore encompasses barrier islands and estuaries that provide habitat for a variety of species including some threatened and endangered species. This complex ecological web is influenced by water quality degradation, alternating water flow, the introduction and spread of exotic, invasive and nuisance species, and increasing recreational uses such as boating. Without strategies to address these influences, it will be difficult for the national seashore staff to protect this ecosystem.

Questions to be addressed:

- What are the desired resource conditions for the various natural resources within the national seashore, and how should they be preserved, managed, and interpreted?
- What strategies should the seashore use to eliminate and/or minimize impacts associated with visitor use?
- What should the National Park Service do to restore and/or mitigate impacts on areas of the seashore that have been impacted by ongoing activities, such as the loss of sea grass, disturbance of dunes, and movement and nourishment of beaches?
- What programs should be established to allow terrestrial and aquatic wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, to thrive in the national seashore while providing for visitor use?
- What opportunities/partnerships should the national seashore staff pursue with other agencies and adjacent landowners to address regional natural resource issues such as wildlife protection, barrier island erosion, and exotic, invasive and nuisance species management?

Visitor Experience

Visitors to the national seashore enjoy a variety of activities. These include: hiking; picnicking; running/jogging; scenic driving; wildlife viewing; birding; photography; motorized boating (recreational and tour boating); nonmotorized boating (kayaking, canoeing, and sailing); bicycling; beach and island camping; swimming and sunbathing; surfing; fishing (boat, shoreline, and freshwater/salt water); and walking.

The number of visitors to the national seashore is expected to increase as a result of the continuing population growth and expansion of tourism. Proximity to the growing populations of coastal Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi is increasing pressure on the national seashore to accommodate local recreational demands. Boating activities have increased significantly in the national seashore in the past 20 years. With these issues, along with new and evolving recreational activities, noise levels and the demand for services and facilities will likely increase, as well as the likelihood of visitor conflicts, accidents, and resource damage.

Questions to be addressed:

- What strategies should the national seashore staff initiate to accommodate anticipated visitation increases and diverse visitor needs and expectations while maintaining high-quality visitor experiences and preserving resources?
- What are the amounts, types, and diversity of opportunities that can be offered while still promoting resource preservation and stewardship?
- What strategies can the National Park Service develop in partnership with others to protect and interpret the seashore's fragile resources while providing for an appropriate type and level of recreational activities?

Interpretation/Education

There is a need to upgrade and improve the national seashore's interpretive efforts to educate visitors on the ecological significance and values of the seashore and its natural and cultural resources within the context of the ecosystem that encompasses the Gulf Coasts of Florida and Mississippi. New interpretive opportunities have also been provided with the addition of Cat Island.

Questions to be addressed:

- What opportunities exist in the national seashore to provide for natural and historical interpretation and environmental education for visitors?
- In what ways could the national seashore's interpretive and educational programs be enhanced by partnerships with the other government agencies, local school systems, environmental groups, or other interested area organizations?
- What are the appropriate levels of interpretation and public access for the national seashore's natural and cultural resources?

Cat Island

The national seashore has acquired approximately half of the 2,200-acre island. There are numerous issues to resolve relating to limits and impacts of visitation, development of facilities, protection of cultural and natural resources, and interpretation.

Questions to be addressed:

- What strategies need to be developed to provide for visitor use while protecting the island's cultural and natural resources?
- What would be appropriate levels of interpretation and visitor access to the island?
- What facilities need to be developed?

Special Request to Local, County, Regional, and State Governments

The National Park Service is working to meet the local and regional needs for the next 20 years. To anticipate and plan for Gulf Island National Seashore we are asking all levels of government to help the planning team by identifying major projects and opportunities that your agency plans to consider or pursue over the next 10 to 20 years. The planning team is interested in understanding projects and policies that could influence the public use and the preservation of the Gulf Islands National Seashore. We would appreciate your consideration of this request. Please contact [Deputy Superintendent Nina Kelson](#) with any details or provide a copy of your plans.

Please contact us in a manner that's convenient to you:

Mailing Address:
Gulf Islands National Seashore
1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563

Telephone: 850-934-2604

E-mail: Nina_Kelson@nps.gov



What Happens Next?

Comments on issues and other items in this newsletter, as well as new issues, concerns, and ideas, will be accepted through the summer. In the meantime, the planning team is collecting and analyzing information about national seashore resources, learning more about opportunities and obstacles to fulfilling the national seashore's goals, and identifying the diversity of resources and visitor experiences available in various areas of the national seashore.

After we gather data and receive your comments, we will begin to identify alternative future visions for Gulf Islands National Seashore. These broad descriptions of desired resource conditions and visitor experiences will form the basis for the development of more specific alternative management strategies.

How You Can Participate

Public participation is crucial to a good general management plan. Throughout the planning process you will have several opportunities to express your thoughts and concerns about the future of the national seashore, to comment on the preliminary management alternatives, and to review newsletters and a draft document. In this phase of the process, we are asking you what you value the most about the national seashore and what issues (problems, concerns) you think national seashore managers will face. We also are asking for your visions — how do you think Gulf Islands National Seashore should look 20 years from now? **You may offer your thoughts and suggestions in several ways:**

Fill out and mail the enclosed prepaid comment card.

Send a letter to:

Superintendent
Gulf Islands National Seashore
1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563

Send an e-mail to guis_superintendent@nps.gov



Attend our open house meetings. The first public scoping meetings are listed below:

<p>Tuesday, June 8, 2004 3:00 to 7:30 p.m.</p> <p>Florida District Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center 1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway Gulf Breeze, FL 850-934-2600</p>	<p>Thursday, June 10, 2004 3:00 to 7:30 p.m.</p> <p>Mississippi District William M. Colmer Visitor Center 3500 Park Road Ocean Springs, MS 228-875-9057 ext. 114</p>
--	---