

# Foundation for Planning

## Park Purpose

*Gateway National Recreation Area provides a national park experience in the country's largest metropolitan area. The park preserves a mosaic of coastal ecosystems and natural areas interwoven with historic coastal defense and maritime sites around New York's Outer Harbor. Beaches, marshes, waters, scenic views and open space offer resource-based recreational opportunities to a diverse public, recognizing the importance to preserve these special places for future generations.*

## Park Significance

Statement 1: Gateway contains an assemblage of coastal ecosystems formed by natural features, both physical and biological, that include barrier peninsulas, estuaries, oceans, and maritime uplands. The habitats that comprise these ecosystems, so rare in such highly developed areas, support a rich biota that includes migratory birds, marine finfish and shellfish, plant communities, and rare, threatened, and endangered species. These features provide opportunities to restore, study, enhance, and experience coastal habitats and ecosystem processes.

Statement 2: Forts Hancock, Tilden and Wadsworth comprise one of the largest sets of military installations and distinctive fortifications in the country, dating from pre- Civil War through the 20th century. These installations represent a long period of military presence and served as the defense of New York, America's largest city.

Statement 3: The maritime resources of Gateway include the oldest working lighthouse in the United States and the first federally sponsored lifesaving station in the country. These resources served to protect ocean commerce and enhance the safety of the busiest American seaport.

Statement 4: The vast and diverse park resources at the gateway to the most densely populated region of the United States provide an abundance of outstanding recreational and educational opportunities.

## Fundamental Resources

- Beach and dune systems at Bergen Beach, Breezy Point Tip, Great Kills, Jacob Riis Park, Plumb Beach and Sandy Hook
- Natural Areas at Breezy Point Tip, Crooke's Point, Floyd Bennett Field, Great Kills, Hoffman & Swinburne Islands, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and Sandy Hook
- Jamaica Bay waters including inlets, submerged lands, and Dead Horse Bay
- Sandy Hook Maritime Forest
- Sandy Hook Lighthouse
- Coastal defense resources including earthworks, associated structures, collections and archeological sites for:
  - Fort Hancock
    - Endicott/Taft Era Batteries
    - Parade Grounds
    - Nike Launch Area and Radar Site
  - Fort Tilden
    - Battery Harris East
    - Battery Harris West
    - Nike Launch Site
  - Fort Wadsworth
    - Battery Weed
    - Endicott/Taft Era Batteries
    - Fort Tompkins
    - Torpedo Building
- Feelings associated with open space in high density area
- Views of New York Outer Harbor
- Connections to national history
- Direct sensory experience with natural elements
- Public access to bay and ocean shorelines
- Darkness and night sky

## Fundamental Values

- Recreation experience including:
  - Nature observation
  - Water-based activities such as fishing and swimming
  - Walking, biking, and horseback riding on trails
  - Picnicking
  - Visiting historic sites



## Other Important Resources and Values

- Civil and military aviation history resources at Floyd Bennett Field and Miller Field
- Archeological resources



# We Listened and Learned From You



In the fall 2010, the Gateway planning team presented three preliminary alternative concepts. Over 9,000 copies of the second GMP newsletter were sent to the park's mailing list and distributed at visitor contact stations or by staff throughout the park. In order to reach as much of the metropolitan audiences as possible, the newsletter was posted on the park's website and translated and printed in Chinese, Russian and Spanish. The newsletter provided a summary of the three alternative concepts, as well as an update on the planning process, the foundation for planning, a summary of your ideas from the 2009 scoping meetings, and the planning challenges.

The planning team hosted eleven open houses in communities surrounding Gateway. The purpose of the open houses was to gather ideas on the preliminary alternative concepts for Gateway. Poster-size maps and text boards were used to present project background information, the foundation for planning, and the alternative concepts. GMP team members were present during the open house workshops to answer questions. The public comment period for the alternative concepts was from November 20, 2010 through March 15, 2011. Hundreds of comments were received in response to the following questions:

- Do you think each concept helps Gateway carry out its purpose?
- Will the park's natural and cultural resources that are important to you be adequately preserved under each concept?
- What types of educational and recreational activities do you think are appropriate under each concept?
- Do the concepts provide ways for people to reach Gateway and move around the different sites?
- How could partnerships support the ideas in each concept?
- Are there other ideas important to you that are missing from the concepts?

What follows is a brief overview of some of the ideas that were shared with us. A complete listing of all comments received is available on our website at: [www.nps.gov/gate](http://www.nps.gov/gate).

## *Gateway's Purpose*

Many of you indicated in your comments that all three of the alternative concepts would indeed help Gateway carry out its purpose. In general, your comments favored the concepts (or elements of the concepts) fairly equally; there was not a concept that was clearly preferred by a majority.

Ideas and topics that we heard repeatedly included the importance of building stewardship for Gateway's resources, increasing sustainability in park management, and raising public awareness of the park. Many of you suggested that park managers actively pursue the preservation, restoration, and adaptive re-use of historic structures, with many suggesting that partners could assist in this effort. Maintaining public access and ensuring a variety of recreation opportunities were also frequently mentioned. Some people voiced concerns with the current level of maintenance at the park.

## *Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources at Gateway*

Overall, your comments indicated that each of the concepts offered sound approaches to protecting Gateway's natural and cultural resources. Some comments encouraged the use of sustainable and innovative approaches to resource management and others suggested taking an adaptive management approach to climate change. Recognizing the great number of natural and cultural resources of the park, some suggested prioritizing the protection and rehabilitation of only the most important resources. There were specific ideas and suggestions for priority resources, such as the buildings at Fort Hancock and Fort Tilden, forts, and the marshes and islands of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. Some suggested that non-priority resources, those in very poor conditions, or inappropriate uses should be removed from the park, such as garbage truck facilities, some historic runways, and dilapidated buildings. Some of you recognized the challenges of resource protection, and identified issues such as water quality degradation, the deterioration of cultural resources over time, and litter.

Several of your comments recognized the important role that community and non-profit groups, schools, and other partners play in rehabilitating and using park buildings. It was pointed out that these



types of partnerships can help to bring life to otherwise unused (and in some cases dilapidated) park structures and many encouraged the continuation of these types of partnership as a way to protect park resources. Finally, there were comments that addressed the importance of building and nurturing the next generation of park stewards to ensure the protection of Gateway's resources into the future.

## *Educational and Recreational Activities at Gateway*

Your comments generally expressed satisfaction with the activities and programs currently available at Gateway and many new ideas were provided. Favorite recreational activities that were frequently mentioned included boating, fishing, kayaking, biking, swimming, hiking, bird watching, canoeing, crabbing, exploring, wind surfing, scuba diving, and historic ship viewing, and sightseeing. Some of you thought that equipment rentals and lessons could help visitors to better access and enjoy park resources. Many showed your support for the continuation of organized sports leagues and for the use of park buildings by community groups.

Your suggestions for educational programs included topics such as the ocean, environmental concerns, water quality, sand movement, preservation and sustainability, history, arts, interpretation, and climate change. It was suggested that programs and activities should target a wide range of ages, from youth to senior citizens, and should be offered throughout the day and year to accommodate different schedules. Some of you suggested that working with local educators and interest groups could help to expand the capacity of Gateway's educational programming. Others made specific suggestions of names and types of community and nonprofit groups, educational institutions, and governmental entities that could be partnered with to enhance educational and recreational opportunities at Gateway.

## *Getting To and Moving Around Gateway*

Overall, your comments indicated that the alternative concepts would provide convenient ways for people to get to Gateway and move around the sites. Many of you expressed support for alternative transportation approaches including more bike and walking paths, waterways, shuttles, buses, and ferries. Many also endorsed the idea of enhanced water connections between the park units and improved access throughout the park. Several comments emphasized that transportation improvements should focus on convenience, affordability, and accessibility for all. A few of you noted that good public transportation connections exist for bringing visitors to park



entrances, but not necessarily into and throughout the park unit. Working with city, county, and state transportation providers and other partners to improve connections was suggested.

Some questions were raised regarding the transportation element of the alternatives. Some questioned whether there would be sufficient demand to support ferries and shuttles, while others indicated concern for the costs associated with an improved transportation network.

## *Partnerships at Gateway*

Most of your comments indicated that partnerships can provide significant benefits, both to the park, as well as the partnering organization. The benefits of partnerships that were mentioned included financial support, enhancement of park resources, additional "people-power", and new ideas and innovation. Many suggested seeking partnerships with groups who can assist the park with rehabilitating historic buildings and then reusing them.

Many expressed support for the existing partners at the park, citing the positive role that they play through improvements to facilities, assistance with providing programming, introducing new park visitors and extending the park's network, cost savings, and stewardship building. Ideas for new partnerships include businesses, educational institutions, concessioners, local and state governments, science, conservation, and wildlife organizations, private foundations, friends groups, and global partners. Some suggested that partnering with the community is an important tool to building additional support and stewardship for the park.

**Access is the most important thing, along with preservation of habitat and key structures... people will use it if they can get to it!**

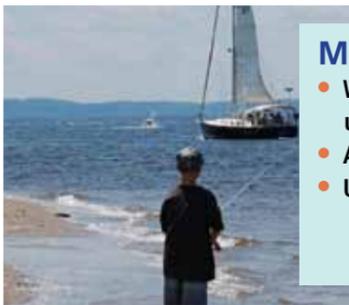
The GMP planning team carefully considered your ideas and comments in the development of the draft management alternatives. Some of these suggestions are reflected in the alternatives sections of this newsletter. Other ideas will be incorporated into the larger draft GMP/EIS as the planning process moves forward.

# Management Alternatives

There are many different ways to protect Gateway's natural areas, preserve its historic buildings and provide fun and educational activities. In a GMP, these different options to fulfill the park's purpose are called draft management alternatives. In this newsletter on pages 8-27, you'll find information about the alternatives that describe three visions for Gateway in the future. Each of the alternatives is anchored by a different concept that helps guide both parkwide and unit specific ideas. Your comments on the draft management alternatives will help guide the different visions that will be presented in the draft GMP/EIS. The NPS has not yet designated a preferred alternative. The preferred alternative could be one of the three alternatives in this newsletter or it could be made up of parts of these initial alternatives. Information about how to comment is provided on pages 4 and 28 in this newsletter.

## Management Zoning

One of the tools used in park planning is management zoning. Management zones identify how different areas of Gateway could be managed to achieve a variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences. These zones are applied differently to Gateway's land and waters with respect to the types and levels of uses and facilities. The planning team arranged these zones in different configurations consistent with the three alternative concepts to create the maps on the following pages.



### Marine

- Waters managed to protect and enhance the ocean and bay environments and provide opportunities for water-based visitor use and recreation.
- Activities are regulated to protect elements of the natural environment, prevent visitor conflicts and enhance public safety.
- Use levels would be expected to range from low to high and would be influenced by adjacent zones and time of year.



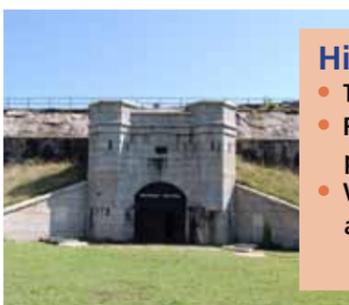
### Recreation

- Park areas that accommodate a variety of recreation activities for fun, learning and physical activity.
- These areas offer a broad range of outdoor, educational, and interpretive experiences.
- High use levels would be expected especially during the summer months. Encounters with other people would be common.
  - **Community Activity Subzone** - This subzone supports large group gatherings such as sports leagues, community activities and special events. These places require more intensively managed facilities and landscapes.
  - **Active Beach Subzone** - This subzone offers traditional summer beach activities including swimming and sunbathing.



### Natural

- Open, undeveloped areas managed to preserve natural resources while allowing for the enjoyment of the outdoors and nature.
- Visitors would enjoy the quiet, solitude, and sense of connection inspired by the natural world.
- Programs and facilities would facilitate nature study, interpretation and other passive activities.
- Moderate use would be expected at centralized activity areas and points of entry.
  - **Sensitive Resource Subzone** - These natural areas receive the highest level of protection, scientific investigation and monitoring and are sites for current and future restoration efforts. Public access is restricted to minimize impacts.



### Historic Core

- These areas include fundamental and historic sites, structures and cultural landscapes linked to Gateway's history.
- Resources in these areas are the focus of interpretation and preservation projects and are managed to ensure the long-term protection of their historic integrity.
- Visitor use would be managed to minimize impacts on the resources while providing opportunities to learn about their associated events and history through tours and interpretive media.



### Evolving Landscapes

- Structures, sites and landscapes in these areas are adaptively reused to accommodate contemporary uses.
- These places continue to reflect their historic character while being rehabilitated and utilized by visitors, partners and/or NPS.
- Use levels would be expected to range from low to high and would be dependent on chosen adaptive uses.
  - **Ruins Subzone** - This subzone contains historic structures and landscapes in very poor condition. These structures and landscapes are allowed to decay naturally. Some areas may be improved for interpretation. The majority of these areas would be fenced to limit public access or stabilized for safety.



### Developed

- These areas support visitor and administrative functions of the park and its partners.
- Infrastructure and facilities support maintenance, orientation, education, interpretation, lodging and transportation.
- Visitor access would vary throughout this zone with some areas receiving intensive visitor use and others having limited or no public access.

## Alternative A

### Continuation of Current Management Practices (No-Action)

This “no-action” alternative is required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and serves as the baseline for evaluating and comparing the other proposed alternatives. Although there are current management actions associated with it, this alternative is not considered to be an “action alternative.”

Gateway would continue to manage park resources and visitor use as it does today, with no major change in direction. Decisions would be based on existing conditions and available information, but would continue to lack a comprehensive planning framework that addresses the full range of contemporary and potential future issues. The park’s enabling legislation, the existing General Management Plan (NPS 1979), and other implementation plans would continue to guide management decision-making.

The park would continue to meet day-to-day operations, management, legal, and regulatory requirements based on existing plans and the availability of funds. Improvements to natural and cultural sites and visitor facilities would include only projects that are already approved and fully funded, or compatible with the current direction of park management. NPS would continue to collaborate with local, county, and state officials on an as needed basis to address common regulatory, policy, and management issues. Existing partnerships and cooperative relationships that support ongoing management would continue.

#### Visitor Use and Experience

Under this alternative, the visitor experience would remain segmented with each of the three units independently serving local residents and visitors at specific locations. Existing interpretive, educational, and management programs providing a range of services to visitors would continue. Visitors would continue to enjoy a variety of traditional beach-oriented recreational activities at current areas. NPS would continue to manage sports leagues and other activities such as gardening in their current locations.



The four visitor centers at Fort Wadsworth, Sandy Hook, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and Floyd Bennett Field would continue to provide orientation, information, interpretive programs, and exhibits and serve as both destination and points of departure for day visitors, tours, and school groups. Traditional ranger-led activities and curriculum-based educational programs would continue to be available. Current efforts to make more people aware of the presence of the national recreation area would continue. The park’s informational website, exhibits, brochures, and other publications would continue to be available.

#### Natural and Cultural Resource Management

Natural resource management programs would continue, many in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations. Existing programs would focus on protecting sensitive species, monitoring conditions, mitigating external threats, controlling non-native species, and restoring habitats impacted by man-made structures or activities.

Historic structures and landscapes would continue to be managed through maintenance and repair where feasible and when funding becomes available. Existing programs providing basic protection to the park’s cultural resources would continue consistent with applicable federal and state laws and NPS policies.

Some coastal defense fortifications continue to have vegetation removed on a limited basis while others will continue to further

deteriorate and be impacted by natural processes. The Sandy Hook Lighthouse continues to be maintained in good condition. Collections and archives continue to be maintained in their current locations. Many vacant buildings continue to deteriorate.

Gateway would continue to provide snack bars, restrooms, lifeguards, limited camping and ferry operations, where those services currently exist. Improvements and expansions to trail systems and camping areas would continue under existing management guidelines. Funded projects for additional planning for trails and expanded camping opportunities would continue.

Gateway visitors would continue to be auto-dependent and people without cars would continue to be reliant on limited direct bus and ferry service. The park’s administrative headquarters, operations and maintenance areas would continue in their present locations.



## Planning Considerations Common to All Action Alternatives

Regardless of which alternative is ultimately chosen and implemented, numerous objectives for management will be applicable to the park as a whole. Some of the elements considered common to all action alternatives are presented below:

### Multiple Day Experiences

Gateway is a large park with thousands of acres spread out among three units in two states with additional adjacent parklands managed by local and state agencies. All of these places provide a variety of things to see and do that can't be experienced in a single day. The alternatives will propose different types of camping and lodging, varied use levels and a range of supporting facilities that may be appropriate. In the future, Gateway will work with partners to develop and offer a variety of overnight accommodations such as camping, youth and elder hostels, eco-friendly lodges and small inns, where appropriate at each unit. These overnight lodging facilities will be similar to those found in other national parks throughout the country.

### Adapting Historic Buildings and Landscapes

Finding viable contemporary uses for hundreds of historic structures and landscapes is a priority preservation strategy for Gateway. Some of the park's most well-known places like Battery Weed, Officers Row, and the Floyd Bennett Field Hangars are elaborate stone and brick structures. Repairing, painting and other maintenance today is a serious challenge given the number of buildings, current condition, and competing funding and staff priorities. For all action alternatives, the park will pursue

public-private partnerships that assist with the reuse of these places for a wide variety of uses including visitor services such as lodging, administrative and partner needs and recreational business opportunities.

Some structures and landscapes are in very poor condition and the costs to repair, stabilize and preserve these resources are extreme. Under all the alternatives, many of these resources would remain as ruins and continue to decay naturally by the forces of nature. Gateway would prioritize documentation of these places and use innovative interpretive media to provide information and virtual access.

### Cooperative Stewardship of Jamaica Bay

There is a long and rich history of environmental interest within Jamaica Bay. Despite many years of efforts by a multitude of federal, state, city, and municipal agencies, and philanthropic organizations to improve conditions, water quality is still threatened in Jamaica Bay. The deterioration of the saltmarsh in Jamaica Bay is severe and the rate of replacement cannot keep up with the rate of loss. While a wealth of information exists about Jamaica Bay, new scientific insights are necessary to further clarify the important ecosystem processes of the Bay in order to achieve restoration goals. In addition, specific studies, along with monitoring follow-up, will be necessary to implement and evaluate success of restoration work. Under all alternatives, Gateway will work with partners to support a new cooperative stewardship approach that considers NYC, Gateway and New York state lands and waters holistically. At the center of this new approach is a research-based science institute that may be located at Gateway under some of the alternatives.

### Climate Change & Sea Level Rise

Climate change refers to changes occurring in the earth's atmospheric, hydrologic, and oceanic systems, which could alter the landscape, natural and cultural resources,

and facilities of Gateway. Gateway would implement sustainable strategies and establish programs to assess, interpret, and respond to the impacts of climate change and work to:

- reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- explore the use of solar and other types of energy generation for operations
- educate NPS staff, its partners, and the public on the topic
- improve energy efficiency and waste reduction
- undertake research and monitoring to expand understanding of climate change and how systems respond
- proactively plan for and adapt to the effects that may be realized from climate change, including the loss of shoreline, altered ecosystems, cultural resources, loss of recreation sites and park facilities, and disruptions in visitor use.

### Information, Orientation and Wayfinding

NPS, in conjunction with others would improve orientation and wayfinding to and throughout Gateway, including signs, maps and other information. Different types of facilities (e.g. kiosks, contact areas) would welcome and orient visitors to Gateway and surrounding partner parklands to improve the sense of arrival. The park would take advantage of technological innovations in interpretive media, social networking and communications in order to connect with broader audiences.

### Third Party Recreation Management

The maintenance and operation of sports fields and leagues remains a challenge at Gateway. Several sports share the multi-purpose fields while other fields are going unused. Similar types of activities are offered adjacent to the park by NYCDPR, non-profit leagues and also for-profit facilities. For all the action alternatives, Gateway will explore the use of a non-profit or for-profit partner to maintain the sports fields and manage leagues.

# Action Alternatives



Three draft management alternatives are presented on the following pages and provide a broad range of ideas from concept statements to area-specific changes. Together, this information and the associated management zoning maps will guide the different options for Gateway's future.

## Alternative B: Discovering Gateway

**Concept:** Through widespread outreach and improved community connections, Gateway becomes a popular destination for recreation, education and interpretive experiences in the Northern New Jersey/New York area. By offering a multitude of recreational opportunities, NPS and its partners attract a greater diversity of visitors to the park and increase awareness and enjoyment of Gateway's historic resources and the natural environment.

### Parkwide Highlights

- Provides the widest range of activities and most recreation opportunities of any of the alternatives.
- Forges new connections with city parklands and communities adjacent and nearby the park.
- Offers more instructional programming and skills development – from kayak lessons to bike rentals to designed nature play spaces for youth.
- Emphasis on more convenient and affordable park access through alternative transportation, greenway connections, and bicycle infrastructure.
- Promotes Gateway as a natural retreat for urban residents and facilitates connections between people and the natural environment.
- Maximizes joint management and operations for visitor services, orientation, programs, and facilities with New York City and other partners.

## Alternative C: Experiencing Preserved Places

**Concept:** Natural systems, historic sites and landscapes receive the highest levels of preservation and restoration in this alternative. Opportunities for independent exploration of Gateway's fundamental resources and values and participation in environmental education and preservation programs provide for an outstanding national park experience.

### Parkwide Highlights

- Promotes and highlights preservation projects, resource protection, research and monitoring activities with partners.
- Immerses visitors into environment and highlights preservation efforts as part of interpretation and education activities.
- Protects and enhances natural resources to the greatest degree possible to strengthen ecosystem integrity and resiliency.
- Provides most opportunities for independent exploration and "wild" experiences.
- Focuses new recreational programming on low impact activities that promote hands-on learning and outdoor skills.
- Serves as a learning lab for history and environmental education.
- Improves transit connections and low impact, human-powered access modes such as bikes, trails, and non-motorized boats to make the park more accessible.
- Concentrates facilities and highlights sustainable operations.

## Alternative D: Connecting Coastlines

**Concept:** The broad themes of coastal ecology, coastal defense and coastal recreation link the three park units and their varied resources together. In this alternative, NPS and its partners emphasize water-based recreation, education and interpretation and create a seamless coastal experience centered on beaches, marine habitats and coastal defense resources and stories.

### Parkwide Highlights

- Increases the visibility, enjoyment and protection of coastal resources throughout Gateway, especially opportunities to access and experience Gateway waters.
- Expands and promotes water-based recreation opportunities and city park connections including water trails, kayak rentals and trainings, and boat tours.
- Provides new orientation, programming and access from water and increases water-borne transportation.
- Focuses resource management on beach & dune ecosystems and coastal defense landscapes.
- Promotes coastal and wetlands research, education & stewardship.
- Fosters development of new support areas for coastal activities and recreation i.e. tours, outfitters, launch/landing sites, lodging.
- Offers a distinct interpretive focus and becomes a learning center for one or two of the park's interpretive themes (Staten Island – Coastal Defense, Sandy Hook – Maritime, Jamaica Bay – Natural History).