

National Park Service Expands Personal Watercraft Access at Gulf Islands National Seashore

Changes provide more flexibility for personal watercraft users while preserving existing protected areas.

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GULF BREEZE, Fla — The National Park Service today announced a final rule that expands recreational opportunities for personal watercraft users at Gulf Islands National Seashore by reducing flat-wake zones in Mississippi and Florida while maintaining important protections for visitor safety and submerged vegetation. The rule also codifies two existing personal watercraft closure areas to reflect current conditions at the Seashore.

In Mississippi, the flat-wake zone has been reduced from one-half mile to 300 yards from shore. In Florida, it has been reduced from 300 yards to 150 yards. Outside those zones, personal watercraft may operate at higher speeds where otherwise allowed.

"This update reflects our commitment to providing high-quality recreational opportunities while continuing to protect the unique natural and cultural resources at Gulf Islands National Seashore," said Rick Clark, superintendent of Gulf Islands National Seashore. "These changes allow visitors to enjoy the seashore safely while helping us protect the resources that make this place so special."

The changes are based on research showing that reducing the flat-wake zones will continue to protect sensitive underwater habitats, including seagrass, while allowing personal watercraft users to operate at higher speeds closer to shore. The rule also formally incorporates existing closures around West Petit Bois Island and the Fort Pickens ferry pier into park regulations to reflect current conditions.

The updated rule supports Executive Order 14314, *Making America Beautiful Again by Improving Our National Parks*, which directs federal land management agencies to expand recreational access while continuing to protect public lands and resources.

For more information about Gulf Islands National Seashore, visit www.nps.gov/guis.