



Dear Friends of Gulf Islands,

In fall 2011, Gulf Islands National Seashore released its draft General Management Plan (GMP) in which we presented several possible alternative ways of managing Gulf Islands National Seashore. Many of you attended public meetings in October and November 2011, and provided comments to us on your support or concerns about various aspects of the plan. We are appreciative of all the comments we received, whether at a public meeting, in e-mail, or in conversations with seashore staff. After hearing from you, the planning team reviewed all your comments and updated or changed aspects of the plan. For example, many of you were concerned about management zones in the plan, and based on your feedback, we changed the zone descriptions so that they are more clear and straightforward. In this newsletter you will find summaries of general topics that were of concern to you and how we are addressing them in the final plan.

In addition, this newsletter provides information on next steps for the general management plan and future planning efforts at Gulf Islands National Seashore. And while some of you have met our new Deputy Superintendent Steve McCoy, we have included an introduction of him.

Your comments on this plan are always welcome and are important throughout this planning process. Additional information regarding the Gulf Islands National Seashore General Management Plan, including a copy of previous newsletters, is available on the national seashore's planning website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/guis>

You can email the park at GUIS_gmp@nps.gov, or mail us a letter at

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

Public Scoping and Public Comments.....

The National Park Service (NPS) held four public meetings in October and November 2011. Public meetings were initially held at the Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center and at the William M. Colmer (Davis Bayou) Visitor Center in October. Approximately 28 people attended our October meetings. Due to public interest in and concern over the draft general management plan, two additional public meetings were held at the same venues in November. Approximately 161 people attended our November meetings. At each of these meetings, NPS staff explained the GMP alternatives, followed by discussion to answer questions and provide an opportunity for the public to share their comments and ideas.

In addition to the public scoping meetings, the public was asked to formally comment on the general management plan between September 9 and November 11, 2011. This comment period was extended for an additional 30 days, until December 11. The National Park Service received a total of 181 comments through various methods—letters and public comment cards via U.S. mail, letters via e-mail, and letters via the web-based Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system.

Comments came from a wide range of stakeholders, including local residents, businesses, organizations, and agencies with economic, recreational, educational, and other interests in the park, as well as other private citizens who have visited in the past.

Below, the main topics and issues we heard about from you are discussed, along with brief summaries of changes we are making to the final general management plan.

What We Heard: Generally, you told us that visitor access, whether by boat, while camping, or walking along the beach, is very important to you. We heard that we need to balance the protection of resources with adequate visitor access across the national seashore. Overall, your concerns about access fell into several major topics: management zoning especially in seagrass beds, backcountry camping/facilities, and Davis Bayou access. In addition, some of you had questions about the public process that was part of this planning process.





Management Zones in the Draft Plan:

Many of you expressed concern about the management zones presented in the draft plan, specifically relating to seagrass bed areas and future recreational access at the seashore. You told us that your access should not be restricted because of a few irresponsible boaters. You also felt that we did not provide sufficient data to support the idea that human actions are a significant cause of seagrass bed damage.

Management zoning is not intended to, nor will it result in, broad restrictions on public access at the national seashore. To address your concerns, the name of the zone has been changed to seagrass bed zone, and the maps have been updated to show the current extent of seagrass habitat. We also considerably changed the description of the seagrass bed zone to highlight our intent to focus first on boater education and outreach, while using temporary closures in limited areas as a last resort. If small areas do have to be closed, they will be for short periods of time and limited to the damaged seagrass beds and immediately surrounding areas. The plan does not directly limit boater access, and there is neither a desire nor intent to close any areas to boaters. Propeller scars and human-caused resource damage in seagrass beds have been documented in the national seashore. It is our goal that through education and proper signage, boaters can be made aware of shallow seagrass bed areas and operate their boats in a manner that causes no further damage.



Backcountry Camping/Facilities:

The permitting or reservation system in primitive camping areas caused many of you to worry that your visitor access to the seashore would be restricted in the future. Many of you felt that we did not clearly explain the need and purpose of such a system.

If the national seashore implemented a backcountry camping permit system it would not have any fees associated with it. The goal of a reservation system in the backcountry areas of the national seashore is neither to restrict access nor to generate revenue. The reason for a registration system is to gather information about the numbers of people who use a certain area, so that education and other information can be provided to the visitors. Overall, the purpose of such a system would be to improve visitor experience and provide better resource protection. Overnight camping will be addressed in an upcoming wilderness and backcountry use management plan. The plan alternatives will be shared with the public during public meetings and comment periods. This effort is being undertaken in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act in 2014.

Davis Bayou Roads and Access:

We heard a variety of viewpoints about evaluating the potential closure of the VFW road in Davis Bayou.

While some of you felt that a closure would increase safety, many believe a closure would decrease safety to nearby residential areas, particularly due to slower emergency vehicle access. Overall, we heard that the public is very supportive of a pedestrian and bike path being built along the existing road. We will address the safety issue on Park Road through a separate environmental assessment, evaluating alternatives to provide safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists. During that process, the impacts to the VFW road will be evaluated, and public comment will be solicited.



Public Involvement Related to the Plan:

We heard from many of you that you felt we did not adequately inform you of the plan or of public meetings in a timely manner.

The general management planning process began in 2004 and was delayed several times due to hurricanes, hurricane response efforts, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill incident. Through the past eight years, the national seashore has held public meetings every few years and has also released several newsletters and other updates.

A detailed description of the public involvement efforts and public responses and turnout will be included in the final general management plan in “Chapter 5: Consultation and Coordination.” In addition, the national seashore planning team has improved its electronic media and outreach, creating a new email list during the last round of public comment on the draft plan, and updating the seashore’s Web pages with all current and pertinent planning documents and related information. The national seashore continues to welcome public involvement, and the public can join the seashore’s mailing list by sending an email to guis_information@nps.gov.

Introducing our new Deputy Superintendent.....

Steve McCoy joined Superintendent Dan Brown and the rest of the Gulf Islands National Seashore staff as deputy superintendent in June, 2012. He began his NPS career in 1981 at Stones River National Battlefield and has worked at 10 other park units from Alaska to the Everglades including Gulf Islands National Seashore.

Steve has worked in many aspects of park management including serving as superintendent at Fort Donelson National Battlefield and National Cemetery and completed a detail as superintendent of Cumberland Island National Seashore.

“The breadth of Steve’s experience, especially his successes in building internal and external partnerships as well as his ability to gain consensus on management issues for the parks he has served, make him an ideal choice to assist in the development of the future of Gulf Islands,” said Superintendent Brown.

An Oak Ridge, Tennessee, native, Steve earned his Bachelor of Science in agribusiness and biology from Middle Tennessee State University. Steve and his wife, Kelly, enjoy spending time with their two children, and in their spare time, enjoy traveling, camping, watersports, and spending time with their pets.

At Gulf Islands, Steve’s vision includes expanding the curriculum-based resource education program and efforts to engage youth with the park’s natural and cultural resources. This includes a goal to create a NPS Research Learning Center at the park, enhanced “distance learning” opportunities, and maximizing the use of technology. Other efforts to enhance connections with local communities include the expansion and revitalization of a friends group to support implementation of projects and increase civic engagement with park management. Steve will be instrumental in guiding and implementing an expanding cultural resource program to manage and preserve the historic structures and fortifications within the park. Visitor access to these resources and accompanying programs and services will promote emotional and intellectual connections with the continuum of history represented and preserved in the park. He is also very focused on integrating science and resources management with all park operations to create internal and external stewards of the vast natural resources within the waters and ecosystems of Gulf Islands National Seashore.



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Step	Time Frame	Planning Activity
1	Summer 2003—Winter 2004	Initiate project
2	Spring 2004—Fall 2004	Define planning context
3	Fall 2005—Winter 2006	GMP placed on hold during hurricane recovery efforts
4	Winter 2007	Publish alternative newsletter with range of alternatives for the draft general management plan
5	Fall 2011	Publish draft general management plan and hold public meetings
6	Winter 2011—Spring 2013	Revise draft general management plan
7	Summer 2013	Publish final general management plan
8	Fall 2013 and beyond	Implement the approved plan

Next Steps: General Management Plan Timetable