

Preface

PLANNING FOR FIRE ISLAND AND FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE'S FUTURE: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS FROM SUPERINTENDENT CHRIS SOLLER

This document is the culmination of the National Park Service's extensive effort to draft a new General Management Plan for Fire Island National Seashore. At the heart of this planning effort has been the recognition that Fire Island is a special place and an important asset to the people of Long Island, New York State, and the nation as a whole. Fire Island encompasses important natural resources; significant recreation resources; cultural resources of national, state and local significance; and unique residential communities. Also at the core of this planning effort has been the acknowledgement that the long-term management and stewardship of Fire Island's many and varied resources and communities will require a different approach than has been traditionally taken over the 50 years since the National Seashore was established in 1964.

In 1964 the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of Fire Island to the nation and established the Fire Island National Seashore as a unit of the National Park System to protect and preserve some of these important resources. The United States in 2014 is a very different place than it was in 1964, as are New York, Long Island, and Fire Island. The establishment of Fire Island National Seashore was to some extent in response to a plan to build a road down the middle of Fire Island, but it also came out of a nation-wide movement to preserve important natural resources and create national parks and other types of preserves (wildlife refuges, national recreation areas) close to urban populations.

The tools and resources available in 1964 were thought to be all that were needed to set aside and preserve places like Fire Island. However, the experience of establishing national park areas in remote undeveloped areas in the west did not translate easily or effectively to highly urbanized areas in the east. The national environmental movement of the 1960s and 70s made state and local governments active players in the protection of resources. Over time, development pressures and the urbanization of places like Long Island have had impacts on places like Fire Island.

Today accelerated climate change and sea level rise are significant issues, and storm events such as Hurricane Sandy in 2012 highlight the vulnerability of places like Fire Island. The storm dramatically changed the geomorphology of Fire Island, reminding us of the fragile



nature of the narrow barrier beach. The devastation caused by the storm also causes us to rethink past decisions regarding where and how some of the country's most vulnerable areas have been developed. We also have to acknowledge that under current legislative and fiscal conditions, Fire Island National Seashore does not have sufficient authority or financial resources to adequately prepare for or respond to such a catastrophic event.

Today it seems clear that the tools and resources provided to the National Park Service to achieve Congress' vision for Fire Island National Seashore and Fire Island overall are also inadequate. The role outlined in 1964 for the National Park Service on Fire Island is very different than the role the National Park Service

plays in 2014, even though the 1964 role expectations are still in place. This General Management Plan (GMP) strives to ensure that the vision the Congress had in 1964 is achieved and provides guidance for continued success for the next 20 to 30 years largely in the context of our current authorities.

The GMP recognizes that many players are responsible for the stewardship of Fire Island's varied resources: Federal, state and local government entities; private organizations and both for-profit and not-for-profit entities; private homeowners and community organizations; and the general public. These entities often have conflicting roles and missions, and finding the common ground among them is critically important to a cohesive management approach for Fire Island.

The proposed GMP recognizes the important role the developed communities play on Fire Island as advocates and stewards of this place. It further accepts that there is constant interaction between the human or built environment and the dynamic natural landscape. Fire Island is a place where adaptation to and manipulation of the environment has shaped its distinctive character.



Four questions before the National Park Service and Fire Island's various stakeholders and interest groups are:

1. Is the vision of a Fire Island National Seashore -- to set aside a relatively undeveloped natural area close to an urban area like New York, where development is limited so that the natural resources and the natural processes of the barrier island can function as close to naturally as possible -- still a viable and worthwhile endeavor?
2. If this is a viable and worthwhile endeavor, who are the players that need to be involved in carrying out this endeavor, and what is the mechanism by which they come together and make both short- and long-term decisions, to ensure the continued success of the endeavor?
3. How do we bring the stakeholders together in a meaningful way at a time of crisis, such as a major storm event, to talk about the long-term and where we want Fire Island to be in 20 to 30 years?
4. How do we ensure that the decisions we make today and in the near future do not reinforce past practices that have left us vulnerable, but rather help us ensure a sustainable and more resilient Fire Island that is able to adapt and respond to future events and the unknown effects of climate change and sea-level rise?

Long-term success in achieving the vision that the Congress outlined for Fire Island will require collaborative stewardship. The GMP outlines several approaches for achieving that goal. In 2012 Hurricane Sandy underlined the need for a new approach for working collaboratively on Fire Island. The challenge for all of us who have a vested interest in Fire Island National Seashore is not to simply respond to crisis, but to lay the groundwork for a future that will be sustainable and achievable. This GMP provides the guidance and foundation for building that future.