National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

PLANNING FOR FIRE ISLAND AND FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE'S FUTURE

CREDIT: DIANE ABELL

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE
GMP NEWSLETTER 4, MARCH 2015

A MESSAGE 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 its communities will require a different approach than has been traditionally taken over the 50 years since the National Seashore was established in 1964.

(continued inside)

CREDIT: SHAPINS BELT COLLINS

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

(continued from the cover)

In 1964 the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of Fire Island to the nation and established 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 2015 is a very different place than it was in 1964, as are New York, Long Island, and Fire Island. This General Management Plan (GMP) strives to ensure that the vision that 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. Today accelerated climate change and sea level rise are significant issues, and storm events such as Hurricane Sandy highlight the vulnerability of places like Fire Island. Hurricane Sandy dramatically changed the landscape of Fire Island in 2012, 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.

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.

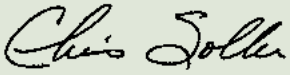
The proposed GMP recognizes the important role the developed communities play on Fire Island as advocates and stewards of this place. It further accepts that there is constant interaction between the human or built environment and the dynamic natural landscape. Fire Island is a place where adaptation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

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. 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.

Your participation in this planning effort through public comment continues that creative process by contributing to our long-term vision for the Seashore. Directions on how to access the full GMP and avenues to provide comments are described at the end of this newsletter.

I hope you will give us your input so that our management of Fire Island continues to protect and enhance this important place.

Sincerely,



K.Christopher Soller
Superintendent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEASHORE DESCRIPTION

Fire Island National Seashore (the Seashore) is a unit of the National Park System located along the south shore of Long Island in Suffolk County, New York. The Seashore encompasses 19,580 acres of upland, tidal, and submerged lands along a 26-mile stretch of the 32-mile barrier island, part of a much larger system of barrier islands and bluffs stretching from New York City to the very eastern end of Long Island at Montauk Point. Easily accessed on Fire Island are nearly 1,400 acres of federally designated wilderness, an extensive dune system, centuries-old maritime forests, solitary beaches and the Fire Island Lighthouse. Nearby on Long Island, also part of the Seashore, is the William Floyd Estate, the home of one of New York's signers of the Declaration of Independence.

CREDIT: DIANE ABELL

On Fire Island, interspersed among the federal lands within the Seashore, are 17 residential communities that predate the Seashore's authorization. Resort development on Fire Island began as early as 1855, with a number of the communities having been established prior to the Great Depression of the 1930s. No hard-surfaced roads connect the communities either to each other or to the mainland of Long Island. They are accessible mainly by passenger ferry or private boat.

During the summer season, the population of Fire Island swells to approximately 30,000 with a total of two to three million visitors each year. Recreational visitation to sites and facilities owned or managed by the Seashore in 2012 was 483,000. The Seashore's primary visitor facilities located on Fire Island are Fire Island Light, Sailors Haven, Watch Hill, and the Wilderness Visitor Center. Located at either end of Fire Island and accessible by vehicle are major state and county beaches with sizable visitation. On Long Island, the Seashore's headquarters are located in Patchogue and include administrative offices, a maintenance facility, and a ferry terminal. The William Floyd Estate is located about 15 miles east of Patchogue in the midst of a residential neighborhood in the village of Mastic Beach.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

A GMP is a comprehensive document that defines a national park's purpose and management direction and provides the overarching guidance necessary to coordinate all subsequent planning and management. The GMP for Fire Island takes the long view --15 to 20 years into the future-- and is meant to be a policy-level document that provides overarching guidance for Seashore managers. When approved, the Fire Island GMP will serve as the foundation for all subsequent planning and management decisions. All other plans will be based on the GMP.

The GMP has also been developed to meet the requirements of an environmental impact statement (EIS) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA).

PLANNING ISSUES

Fire Island National Seashore's last GMP was completed in 1977. Since then, the Seashore's resource management responsibilities have evolved, as have the philosophies underlying best management practices. A number of newly introduced mandates, events, and other actions are affecting the management of the Seashore's resources. Likewise, issues related to climate change and sea-level rise, land use and development, shoreline management, and the changing needs and desires for public access and recreational use (e.g., boating, vehicular access) are affecting the Seashore's resource management practices.

The following describes the major issues that the Seashore faces and the GMP seeks to address:

Acknowledging the Dynamic Character of the Barrier Island/ Addressing Climate Change & Sea-Level Rise

Fire Island is constantly being shaped and re-shaped by wind and waves. The complex interaction of sediment, waves, and currents results in a dynamic landscape, with formations like beaches, dunes, and spits shifting overtime. Both natural factors and human activities affect the dynamic nature of the barrier island. Natural drivers of coastal change include but are not limited to periodic storms and floods, climate change, and sea-level rise. Human activities, such as continued development and efforts to protect existing development, also influence the geomorphology of Fire Island.

Recognizing a Complex Mosaic of Jurisdictions

The Seashore is made up of approximately 19,580 acres of land and water. Of that only 32 percent is under federal ownership. The rest of the land and water within the Seashore's boundary is made up of privately owned and developed properties, Smith Point County Park (owned and managed by Suffolk County), and town and village marinas and beaches owned and managed by the towns of Brookhaven and Islip and the villages of Bellport, Ocean Beach, and Saltaire. On

the western end of Fire Island Robert Moses State Park abuts the Seashore. As previously stated, interspersed within the Seashore are 17 diverse residential communities that were established before the Seashore's authorization.

Regulatory oversight for land use and development, water, sanitation, wildlife, coastal zone management, driving, and public health and safety is distributed across multiple jurisdictions within the Seashore boundary, including two incorporated villages (Saltaire, Ocean Beach), two Long Island-based municipalities (Brookhaven, Islip), Suffolk County, and multiple NY State agencies. These agencies have missions, mandates, and policies that frequently conflict with those of the NPS.

Federal zoning standards developed by the NPS and approved by the Secretary of the Interior have been incorporated (for the most part) into town and village zoning codes to regulate land use and development within the residential communities. The practice of granting variances is widespread, even when NPS has noted its objection and indicated that the property would lose its suspension from the condemnation authority of the Secretary of the Interior. The towns and villages grant variances based on precedent, making it very difficult to deny subsequent applications. Further, NPS has neither the financial resources nor the political support to engage in condemnation of these properties. As a result the federal zoning in its current application has not been a particularly powerful tool for controlling development on Fire Island.

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

Watch Hill is a popular destination for campers, boaters, and beachgoers in season. Park rangers help connect visitors to this special place during guided hikes and presentations.

The mosaic of public and private entities, each with its own purposes, policies, guidelines, and management approaches has resulted in confusion and frequent conflicts for management of Fire Island. No existing mechanism effectively enables planning, communication, and cooperation across the various entities. A new management paradigm is needed to make the Island "whole" and to foster cooperative stewardship in its management.

Reinterpreting Island Resources

Since its establishment in 1964, the Seashore has been recognized almost exclusively for its natural resource values. The Seashore's 1977 GMP identified the "primary management concern" as "preservation and enhancement of the serenity and natural beauty of the Island, which includes the protection of the beaches, dunes, and other natural features fundamental to the concept of Fire Island National Seashore." Since 1977, additional research has been completed on the historic resources of Fire Island.

These reports reveal a rich cultural heritage, with some communities and institutions (e.g., U.S. Life Saving Service) having their roots on Fire Island in the mid-19th century. Prior to its inception as a resort area in the 1880s, Fire Island had been put to agricultural and industrial use for generations. While the significance of the natural resource values of Fire Island is not in dispute, it is important to recognize that Fire Island is a cultural landscape that has been and continues to be shaped both by human intervention and the forces of nature.

Placing New Emphasis on Marine/ Ocean-based Resources

In the past, management of the Seashore —as with other coastal national parks and seashores—has focused more on terrestrial rather than on aquatic resources. Yet Fire Island's boundaries extend 4,000 feet on average into the Great South Bay, and 1,000 feet into the Atlantic Ocean, encompassing a wealth of submerged and tidal resources, both natural and cultural. Over

70 percent of the Seashore is submerged. In recent years Seashore officials have become increasingly concerned about the protection of these marine resources. At the same time, the NPS has been affirming its commitment to marine resource protection service-wide, through development of new plans and initiatives.

Broadening the Park's Visitation
The Seashore offers a wide range of recreational activities and facilities to the visiting public. In 2012 the park's recreational visitation was approximately 483,000. However, the economic, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the Seashore's audience has remained limited, particularly compared with the demographics of the nearby metropolitan New York region. Opportunities to expand outreach and accessibility, strategies for broadening the Seashore's audiences, and measures to ensure that the Seashore's resources and stories are relevant to current and future generations of Americans must be considered.

Addressing Aging Infrastructure
The Seashore's physical infrastructure is complex and serves visitors and staff at several locations on Fire Island and Long Island. The Seashore maintains over 10 miles of boardwalk and operates over 90 buildings, including the historic William Floyd Estate and the Fire Island Light Station. Many of the Seashore's visitor facilities and supporting infrastructure are over 25 years old and are located on Fire Island, making them vulnerable to severe weather and storms, and difficult to operate and maintain. Because of the linear character of Fire Island and reliance on water-based transportation, the Seashore's visitor facilities are hard to reach for both the visiting public and the facilities management staff. Similar issues are associated with Seashore staff housing on Fire Island. On Long Island, the Seashore's headquarters and the Patchogue Maintenance Facility are located just under one-half mile apart.

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

The wind and waves shape the nature of life on a barrier island.

The William Floyd Estate
The William Floyd Estate (the Estate) encompasses the remaining 613 acres of the original "plantation" operated by William Floyd, who signed the Declaration of Independence as a representative of New York. In 1965 Floyd family descendants donated the Estate, composed of 27 buildings, structures, and major landscape features, as well as thousands of personal effects and historical artifacts, to the NPS. The NPS assumed responsibility for the main house (Old Mastic House) in 1975, but did not acquire full management responsibility for the entire property until 1991. The Estate is located on Long Island adjacent to the village of Mastic Beach and is different in purpose and character from the larger portion of the Seashore on Fire Island. The 1978 William Floyd Estate Development Concept Plan – Interpretive Prospectus provided the primary guidance for management of the Estate. Throughout its NPS administrative history, the Estate's preservation and programming have been subject to funding shortfalls and staffing limitations. Management options for the Estate aimed at improving the outlook for its long-term preservation and interpretation must be considered.

RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Over the last decade, the NPS has consulted with the scientific community, federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and other informed parties to gather data and explore strategies to prepare the National Park System for potential future impacts of a changing climate. Sea-level rise, extreme precipitation events, heat waves, and increases in severe winds or other phenomena related to climate change will alter how natural and cultural resources are managed, and the types of activities, facilities and infrastructure the NPS can support.

Climate change is expected to result in many impacts to the Atlantic coast of the United States. Both historical trends and future projections suggest that increases in temperature and precipitation levels, accelerated rates of sea-level rise and intensity of storm and weather events should be expected. These changes will have direct implications on the Seashore's resource management, recreational facilities, park operations, and visitor use and experience. Some of these impacts are already occurring or are expected in the time frame of this management plan. All of the alternatives described in this plan include elements that will support the resilience of Fire Island National Seashore relative to the anticipated impacts from climate change.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES AND THEIR IMPACTS

FIRE ISLAND SEASHORE

The Seashore includes two separate and distinct units – Fire Island and the William Floyd Estate (the Estate). The units are separated by the Great South Bay and are vastly different in terms of composition and overall character. To properly address the future needs of these units, two separate sets of management alternatives have been developed. While some common elements apply to both units, the management alternatives are organized somewhat differently and are presented in separate sections.

FIRE ISLAND WILDERNESS

The Otis Pike Fire Island High Dunes Wilderness Area (referred to as the Fire Island Wilderness) is also addressed in the draft GMP/EIS. Consistent with direction that the planning team received from the NPS Wilderness Stewardship Office in Washington, DC, a draft Wilderness Stewardship Plan appears in the appendix of the draft GMP. A final Wilderness Stewardship Plan will be approved and released concurrent with the final GMP/EIS.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE 1

CONTINUATION OF CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

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NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under Alternative 1, current management practices and the use of approved and interim plans would continue. This means that the NPS would continue to collaborate with local, county, and state officials to address common regulatory, policy, and management issues.

The Seashore would continue to work to preserve the natural environment and take actions to retain and enhance natural processes. A number of ongoing projects and programs would continue, including the Mosquito Management Plan, and inventory and monitoring of the park's natural resources. The Seashore would also adhere to the tenets of the Tentative Federally Support Plan (TFSP) as part of the Fire Island to Montauk Point Reformulation Plan (FIMP).

The Seashore's cultural resource management would continue to focus exclusively on resources on federal lands, particularly at the Fire Island Light Station and the Estate. The Seashore would rehabilitate or restore cultural resources based on priority and would continue to identify, manage, and protect submerged and other archeological resources.

The Seashore would continue to rely on the existing federal zoning standards for land protection and would continue to review applications for variances, exceptions, permits for commercial or industrial use, or special permits submitted to the zoning authority and provide a written response indicating whether the proposal conforms to the Secretary of the Interior's Zoning Standards or the purposes of the Seashore's enabling legislation.

Under this alternative, the visitor experience would remain somewhat segmented, with visitors to Seashore facilities largely staying within those facilities and visitors and local residents of communities largely staying within their individual communities. Current efforts to make more people aware of the presence of the national seashore would continue. The Seashore would continue to offer a broad slate of visitor programs at selected locations on a limited schedule as funding and staffing permit. The Seashore's informational website, exhibits, brochures, and other publications would continue to be available.

The existing Seashore facilities at Fire Island Light Station, Sailors Haven, Talisman, Watch Hill, the Wilderness Visitor Center, and the William Floyd Estate would remain largely unchanged and would be staffed at current levels. Facilities would be evaluated and upgraded as appropriate in the context of their regular maintenance cycle and consistent with NPS "Green Park" and facility management standards to address environmental sensitivity and sustainability concerns and universal accessibility. The Seashore's administrative headquarters and maintenance shop would continue in their present locations on the Patchogue River in the village of Patchogue and would be rehabilitated to address operational and environmental deficiencies.

There are few significant impacts associated with Management Alternative 1. This management alternative is likely to result in both beneficial and adverse impacts across all impact topic areas that vary in duration and are likely to be only slightly detectable relative to current conditions.

No two dune crossings are exactly alike on Fire Island but all of them provide access to the island's beautiful beaches.

CREDIT: DIANE ABELL

Beachgoers enjoy sunbathing, swimming, and surfing in season, and beachcombing can be enjoyed throughout the year.

ELEMENTS COMMON TO ACTION ALTERNATIVES 2 AND 3

COOPERATIVE STEWARDSHIP

The NPS would commit to Cooperative Stewardship and would work collaboratively with Fire Island communities and other relevant entities to improve land use planning and regulations and to protect the environmental quality and distinctive character of Fire Island. To accomplish this, the NPS would propose the creation of a regular forum for communication, coordination, and collaboration in managing Fire Island. Two distinct alternative approaches would be considered, one of which could be adopted.

Under any cooperative stewardship approach, the NPS would continue to manage Fire Island National Seashore in accordance with all applicable laws and policies including the National Park System Organic Act and NPS Management Policies.

COASTAL LAND USE/ SHORELINE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The NPS would assume a leadership role in working with Fire Island communities, the towns of Islip and Brookhaven, Suffolk County, and New York State to develop a coastal land use and shoreline management plan for Fire Island. The plan would be consistent with the Tentative Federally Supported Plan (TFSP) for FIMP and would articulate a comprehensive strategy for protecting coastal resources while accommodating land use development within the coastal zone on both federal and non-federal lands within the Seashore. The plan would address shoreline protection, land use controls, site planning, and design standards as well as post-storm response in the context of the dynamic barrier environment and emerging trends resulting from sea-level rise and climate change. The plan must be undertaken and adopted as a multilateral, collaborative effort.

MARINE RESOURCES

Under Management Alternatives 2 and 3, the NPS would engage in partnership opportunities at the Seashore with federal, state, and local agencies and non-governmental organizations to enhance marine resource research, monitoring, conservation, and education with particular emphasis on waters within the Seashore's boundary, acknowledging the larger context of these resources in the Great South Bay and Atlantic Ocean.

The NPS would work with others having jurisdictional authority to address both natural and cultural marine-based resources to develop a Marine Resources Management Plan for submerged lands and shared resources within the Seashore. The Marine Resource Management Plan would define NPS roles and priorities and would recommend collaborative management strategies to promote the long-term protection and sustainability of marine resources within the larger contexts of Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

The NPS would collaborate with other stakeholders across a broad spectrum of interests to restore the Seashore's native animal and plant communities (e.g., eel grass, clam beds). The ultimate aim of these efforts would be to protect and, where feasible, to restore the natural habitats, and behaviors of native plant and animal communities and ecosystems where they occur.

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

The NPS would collaborate with others to revise the Secretary's zoning standards and to address local land use regulations, to address inconsistencies, provide greater specificity and/or guidance, and to define with greater clarity the role of the NPS. Alternatives to traditional zoning would be encouraged. The NPS would work collaboratively with others to encourage, support, and cooperate with Fire Island communities and the towns of Islip and Brookhaven in the identification and preservation of the distinctive character of each Fire Island community and Fire Island as a whole. The NPS would pursue the realignment of the Federal Dune District, to be either co-terminus with the NYS Coastal Erosion Hazard Area (CEHA) or dropped entirely, whereby CEHA would become the officially designated and legislated line for federal zoning purposes.

WILDERNESS

The NPS is preparing a new Wilderness Stewardship Plan for the Fire Island Wilderness that is addressed and evaluated in the draft GMP/EIS. Early in the planning process, the national office of the NPS Wilderness Stewardship Program requested that wilderness planning be integrated with the Seashore's GMP to ensure that it was given full consideration as other proposals within the plan were developed and evaluated for environmental compliance. A draft Wilderness Stewardship Plan that, when approved and adopted, would supersede the 1983 Wilderness Management Plan, appears in Appendix D of the draft GMP/EIS.
The Fire Island Wilderness would continue to be managed in accord with the Wilderness Act to preserve its wilderness character so as to maintain the qualities of being untrammeled, natural, and undeveloped; to provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation; and to preserve other unique features as deemed important to the Fire Island Wilderness.

Due to the removal of the incompatible features related to the Smith Point West Nature Trail and the loss of Old Inlet facilities resulting from Hurricane Sandy in 2012, these areas (approximately one acre) will be designated as Wilderness upon publication of an upcoming notice in the Federal Register.

The NPS would no longer maintain formal dune crossings into the Fire Island Wilderness that connect to a trail that in places follows the historic path of the Burma Road. In their stead, the Seashore would place temporary markers on the beach face to indicate appropriate places for visitors to access the Fire Island Wilderness. The through trail would be minimally maintained to accommodate foot traffic. The Smith Point West Nature Trail (approximately 1,000 feet) would be maintained by the NPS.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE 2

ENHANCING NATURAL RESOURCE VALUES

NATURE-BASED PARK

Under this alternative, greater emphasis would be placed on the protection and restoration of natural resources and ecological systems on federal lands. A nature-based park experience would be emphasized, and the overall development footprint of the Seashore would be reduced. Visitor use and activity would be carefully distributed and accommodated in a manner that protects the Seashore's natural resources. A proactive, collaborative approach to stewardship among existing and new partners would be considered fundamental to the plan's success.

Under this alternative the visitor experience in the Seashore would center on close contact with and immersion in the natural landscape. Clearly organized access routes would minimize the disturbance of natural resources, with access to some areas being restricted and some different types of uses that are "lighter on the land" being encouraged. Physical connections between Seashore sites and the communities would continue to be limited or even diminished. Personal services and media (e.g., web-based downloads, cell phones, iPods, brochures) rather than physical exhibits, museums, and waysides would be emphasized in providing visitor information and programming.

Under this alternative, the Seashore would reduce the number of facilities where deemed appropriate. The Seashore's Sailors Haven marina would be removed, but the ferry dock would be retained and off shore moorings would continue. The current system of boardwalks and trails would be retained and maintained to ensure protection of the Seashore's natural resources, while still providing opportunities for visitors to experience a more natural barrier island environment. Under this alternative, the NPS would minimize development on the edges of the Fire Island Wilderness. The existing Wilderness Visitor Center would be replaced with a small visitor information kiosk and restroom facility. Minimal services including lifeguards and restrooms would be provided for visitor safety at Sailors Haven and Watch Hill. The campground at Watch Hill would be removed and a new campground would be developed at a more suitable location on Fire Island. The new campground would be located at Sailors Haven, Talisman, or Watch Hill and would be considered in the master planning process for each of these locations. While concessioners would continue to operate the Watch Hill Marina, the NPS would assume responsibility for campground operations on Fire Island.

The treatment of cultural resources would be similar to what is described under Management Alternative 1, with continued emphasis on the Fire Island Light Station and the William Floyd Estate. As funding becomes available, the NPS would continue to work to preserve cultural resources undertaking appropriate preservation treatments. The curatorial storage facility would be reorganized and refurnished for greater efficiency. The Seashore would expand its natural resource/ natural history collection for interpretive and research purposes.

Several significant beneficial or adverse impacts are associated with Management Alternative 2. The emphasis on the restoration of natural systems, and an aggressive approach to managing non-native, invasive species would be of significant, long-term benefit to vegetation. Minimizing development on the edges of the Fire Island Wilderness and the emphasis on ecological restoration would result in substantive changes and would contribute to protecting wilderness character. The removal of visitor facilities, changes in visitor programming and access, and the emphasis on interaction with the natural environment would substantially change the way visitors experience many of the Seashore's sites on Fire Island. This change could be viewed as positive by some and negative by others. The eventual removal of the marina at Sailors Haven would represent a substantial change and would be considered a significant adverse impact to transportation and access on Fire Island, particularly for the private boating community.

A commitment to cooperative stewardship and carrying out the proposed changes to visitor facilities and the visitor experience on Fire Island could affect visitation and would have both adverse and beneficial effects on the local and regional economy. Likewise, proposals involving demolition of facilities and restoration of natural resources and increases in Seashore staff could also have a beneficial effect on the local and regional economy. A commitment to cooperative stewardship would also have an impact on the organization of Seashore staff.

CREDIT: DIANE ABELL

The wide variety of habitats and its position along the Atlantic Flyway make Fire Island a great place for birds and birders alike. More than one-third of all North American bird species have been recorded here.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE 3

RECOGNIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN USE AND NATURE

NPS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

This alternative acknowledges that Fire Island is a natural landscape with a significant cultural overlay and recognizes the strong connection between natural and cultural resource protection and human use. Historically, human use and development have reflected and responded to the natural qualities and character of the barrier island environment on Fire Island in how it has been used, adapted to, and manipulated. Through a proactive and collaborative management approach, the NPS would seek an appropriate balance between continuing human use and protecting Fire Island's fragile environment.

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

The lush undulating backdune landscape serves as a temporary home to campers in season.

The Seashore experience and interpretation would recognize the relationship between human involvement with the dynamic natural landscape of the barrier island. Fire Island would be explored from the perspective of Long Island and New York Harbor history, from its early use for agricultural and maritime purposes to its emergence as a distinctive vacation destination and finally a national seashore. In considering Fire Island's human history, the relationship to the natural environment would be central, as that story of adaptation and manipulation has shaped the place that exists today and will influence how the NPS, Fire Island communities, and other Seashore stakeholders respond to the effects of climate change and sea-level rise.

The NPS would also engage in outreach and collaborative efforts that would enhance the public's understanding and appreciation of the Seashore within its regional historic, cultural, and natural context.

Existing infrastructure would be retained and, over time, would be improved and/or reoriented to be greener, more efficient, and resilient in the coastal environment. Any new development meant to create improved opportunities for visitor use and appreciation of resources would be limited to existing visitor use areas and would be undertaken only after appropriate climate change and sea-level rise assessments have been completed.

The Sailors Haven marina would be redesigned to minimize the erosion that has been undermining the Sunken Forest. The Wilderness Visitor Center would be rehabilitated to improve universal accessibility and update interpretive media. The NPS would also work collaboratively to re-establish a residential environmental education program that would be housed in existing facilities during the Seashore's shoulder seasons.

Under this alternative, natural resource management would be similar in approach to Management Alternative 1. However, similar to Management Alternative 2, the Seashore would work to restore the Sunken Forest and other maritime forests on Fire Island, improve water quality through the development and implementation of a wastewater management plan, and engage in more intensive management of non-native invasive species. Cultural resources would be considered island-wide through a comprehensive cultural landscape report that examines the history of Fire Island as a whole and its various stages of use and development. The Seashore would also offer technical assistance to Fire Island communities seeking to inventory, protect, and interpret their own cultural resources. Under this alternative, an addition is proposed to the existing curatorial storage facility that would provide sufficient space for storage, conservation, and research.

Under this management alternative, the Seashore experience would stress the connections between the natural and cultural environment and offer a more integrated visitor experience on Fire Island and at the William Floyd Estate. Through collaborating on programs and special events, the NPS would create more opportunities to link the Seashore

experiences between Fire Island communities and the Seashore. The NPS would work to increase the distribution and dispersion of visitors across Seashore facilities and encourage a broad range of experiences.

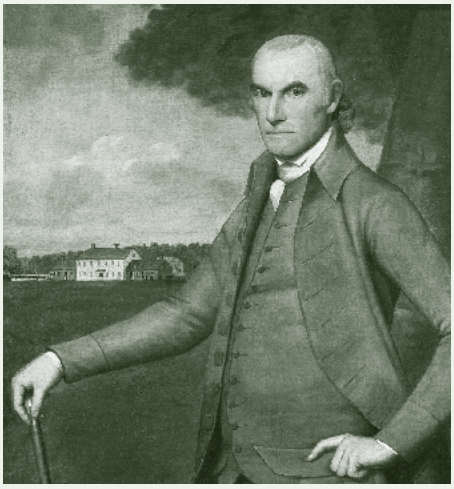
The NPS and its partners would offer a diversity of opportunities – educational, recreational, water-based, land-based, interpretive, and virtual – that would be designed to engage diverse audiences that are representative of the tri-state area demographic, and delivered by a range of personal and non-personal services and media. The visitor experience would draw on regional connections to encourage visitors to seek out related resources on Long Island (e.g., Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge, Long Island Maritime Museum, the Manor of Saint George, etc.) to enhance their understanding of Fire Island.

Several significant beneficial impacts are associated with this Management Alternative 3. The emphasis on the restoration of natural systems, and a more intensive approach to managing non-native, invasive species would be considered to be of significant long-term benefit to vegetation. The rehabilitation of the cultural landscape at the Fire Island Light Station, the completion of a Fire Island-wide cultural landscape report, the rehabilitation of a number of historic structures, and efforts to document and develop a management plan for archeological resources would be of long-term benefit to the Seashore's cultural resources. The expansion of the curatorial storage facility would have a beneficial impact on the use and protection of museum collections.

The emphasis on understanding and experiencing Fire Island holistically and within its broader context as described under this alternative would result in beneficial impacts, including broadening the visitor experience to address both the natural and cultural heritage of Fire Island and its regional context. Land use and development proposals including technical assistance to Fire Island communities to identify and preserve their distinctive community character; and revisions to land use regulations including alternatives to traditional zoning would be of long-term benefit to the overall character of Fire Island. A commitment to cooperative stewardship as well as enactment of proposed changes to visitor facilities and the visitor experience on Fire Island could increase visitation and would have a beneficial effect on the local and regional economy.

THE WILLIAM FLOYD ESTATE

The William Floyd Estate (the Estate) is a separate and distinct unit of Fire Island National Seashore with its own unique characteristics. To properly address the future needs of the Estate, workshops and alternative planning concepts were developed separately from the overall planning effort for Fire Island National Seashore. The following critical planning priorities were defined for the Estate:



SOURCE: INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

DEFINING THE MESSAGE

Work with other entities to develop a consistent message that defines the Estate's significance, themes, and objectives and also broadens understanding and appreciation of the Estate locally, nationally, and globally and within the context of the Seashore and the National Park System.

EDUCATION DESTINATION

Establish the Estate as a place for research and education. Become a living classroom that builds understanding for the cultural and historical significance of the property through engaging, hands-on activities and tangible examples of the historic uses of the site.

ACCESS

Ensure the Estate is easy to find and available to the public on a regular basis. Provide a facility that orients visitors and provides space for educational programs throughout the year.

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND SECURITY

Ensure that visitors have a safe and healthy experience that fosters their understanding and appreciation of the Estate. Create an appropriate monitoring and security system to ensure the site's long-term protection.

IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS

In collaboration with others, establish a broad range of diverse and lasting partnerships with other sites, institutions, and museums that encourage educational opportunities for a wide array of audiences and foster long-term stewardship of the property.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE A

THE ESTATE'S CURRENT MANAGEMENT

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The Estate's Current Management is considered to be the No-Action management alternative. Under the No-Action alternative, current management practices and the use of approved and interim plans would continue. The NPS would continue to collaborate with local, county, and state officials on an as-needed basis to address policy and management issues. The Estate would continue to meet day-to-day operations, management, legal, and regulatory requirements based on existing plans and the availability of funds.

The Old Mastic House would continue to be preserved and furnished to reflect the family's use and occupancy. One room would continue to serve as an introductory exhibit space, while another would serve as a small sales area. NPS would undertake work to correct structural issues at the Old Mastic House.

The NPS would prepare a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) and Treatment Plan for the Estate. Consistent with the recommendations of the CLR and Treatment Plan, the Lower Acreage would continue to be managed as a cultural resource and would be monitored to retain its natural resource values. The historic cemetery would continue to be preserved and maintained.

The NPS would develop an outreach initiative so that the Estate and its history would become better known locally, regionally, and nationally. To do this effectively, the Estate's hours and season of operation would be expanded as funding becomes available. Working in conjunction with the village of Mastic Beach and others, the NPS would improve wayfinding to the William Floyd Estate through a diversity of means. These would include signs, maps and other information located at key places in the area.

The existing collection of maintenance sheds in the northeastern section of the Estate would continue to serve as the storage and preservation area for maintenance and operational activities at the Estate and on the east end of Fire Island. There are few significant impacts associated with Management Alternative A. This management alternative is likely to result in both beneficial and adverse impacts across all impact topic areas that vary in duration and are likely to be only slightly detectable relative to current conditions.

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

Three centuries of change are preserved at the William Floyd Estate.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE B

HISTORICAL PARK AND MUSEUM

NPS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

This alternative would advance the vision of the William Floyd Estate as a historical park and museum where visitor activities and experiences would focus on understanding and appreciating the historical relevance of William Floyd and his descendants, the evolution of the site from agricultural plantation to recreational retreat, and the political, social, and economic forces that shaped this family and their use of the property. The value of the Estate as a large area of undeveloped land in a developed community would be more fully recognized.

Cultural, natural and recreational opportunities would be expanded as appropriate within the context of the Estate's purpose and significance. The interpretative emphasis would be broadened to embrace more of the property's historic regional context, with more collaborative exhibits and programming taking place with other institutions, both on and off-site.

As in Management Alternative A for the Estate, NPS would undertake work to correct structural issues at the Old Mastic House. However, under this alternative the orientation exhibit and sales area would be removed, and all the spaces in the home would be furnished to illustrate the continuum of family use. The existing structures and selected landscape features (e.g., garden, portions of the orchard) within the historic core would be rehabilitated and interpreted. Relevant missing structures and features would be interpreted to help visitors understand the Estate's history.

The NPS would prepare a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) and Treatment Plan for the Estate. Consistent with the recommendations of the CLR and Treatment Plan, in the Lower Acreage, the existing cultural landscape features (e.g., fields, marshlands, the Vista, ponds, and remnants of the corduroy road and lopped tree fence system) would be retained and rehabilitated. Landscape vignettes (e.g., introduction of cultivated fields in some locations) would be created to evoke different periods in the Estate's history in support of interpretive objectives.

For many, the visitor experience at the Estate would begin at a rehabilitated visitor facility near the existing parking area. The facility would build upon existing visitor infrastructure including restrooms and an orientation kiosk and would provide a versatile and safe indoor orientation and program space for a variety of audiences, but particularly school children. Indoor and outdoor program spaces would be available for presenting day and evening programs as well as orienting and staging school groups and providing a sheltered area for lunch.

The NPS would also collaborate with the village of Mastic Beach to explore the possibility of creating an off-site orientation exhibit about the Estate in the village itself. As in Management Alternative A, the NPS would work in conjunction with the village of Mastic Beach and others to improve wayfinding to the Estate through diverse means, including signs, maps and other information located at key places in the area.

Building upon the existing maintenance shop, the NPS would develop a consolidated maintenance facility at the Estate that houses the primary functions within a single structure. The consolidated facility would offer safe and sufficient space to support the maintenance and preservation operations for the Estate as well as the east end of the Seashore. Several significant impacts would be associated with Management Alternative B at the Estate. The rehabilitation of the cultural landscape and historic structures and the relocation of non-historic functions from historic buildings would have a notable, long-term beneficial impact on cultural resources at the William Floyd Estate.

Improvements to the parking and circulation system at the Estate would be of long-term benefit relative to transportation and access to the site. The rehabilitation of the cultural landscape and historic structures as well as improvements to visitor facilities and visitor programming could result in expanded visitor use and enhanced visitor experience. Greater visitation would have a beneficial effect on the regional economy.

CREDIT: SHAPINS BELT COLLINS

Eight generations of Floyds are buried in the family cemetery.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE AGENCY PREFERRED AND THE ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The **Agency Preferred Alternative** (43 CFR 46.420d) is the alternative which the NPS believes would best accomplish the purpose and need of the proposed action while fulfilling its statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical, and other factors.

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

The combination of Management Alternative 3 with Management Alternative B as described for the William Floyd Estate, has been identified as the NPS preferred alternative because it best meets the Seashore's management goals and conveys the greatest number of significant beneficial results relative to its potential impacts in comparison with other alternatives. Management Alternative 3 in combination with Management Alternative B would do the most to ensure the cooperative stewardship of Fire Island National Seashore's dynamic coastal environment and its cultural and natural systems while recognizing its larger ecological, social, economic, and cultural context and meets the specific needs and management goals of the William Floyd Estate.

In accordance with the DO-12 Handbook, the NPS identifies the **environmentally preferable alternative** in its NEPA documents for public review and comment [Sect. 4.5 E(9)]. The environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. The environmentally preferable alternative is identified upon consideration and weighing by the Responsible Official of long-term environmental impacts against short-term impacts in evaluating what is the best protection of these resources. In some situations, such as when different alternatives impact different resources to different degrees, there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative (43 CFR 46.30).

CREDIT: NPS/FIRE ISLAND NS

After evaluating the potential impacts of the management alternatives on cultural and natural resources, the NPS has determined that a combination of Management Alternative 3 and Management Alternative B as described for the William Floyd Estate is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative because it best protects, preserves, and enhances the Seashore's natural, cultural, and recreational resources. Management Alternative 3 proposes that Fire Island National Seashore be considered holistically – including its natural, cultural, and recreational values – and that it be understood within its regional context, resulting in a more effective approach to achieving these results.

Fire Island National Seashore General Management Plan
National Park Service
15 State Street, 10th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02109

HOW TO COMMENT ON THE DRAFT GMP/EIS

To download a full version of Fire Island's Draft GMP/EIS, please visit **www.parkplanning.nps.gov/fiis** and click on the "Open for Comment" tab on the left. A printed copy of the document can be made available upon request. Comments on the draft GMP/EIS are welcome and may be submitted during the 90-day review and comment period, using one of the methods noted below.

ONLINE

www.parkplanning.nps.gov/fiis
We encourage readers to submit comments online through the park planning website identified above which incorporates the comments into the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system. An electronic public comment form is provided through this website.

MAIL

Fire Island National Seashore GMP
15 State Street, Boston, MA 02109
Attn: Ellen Carlson

FAX

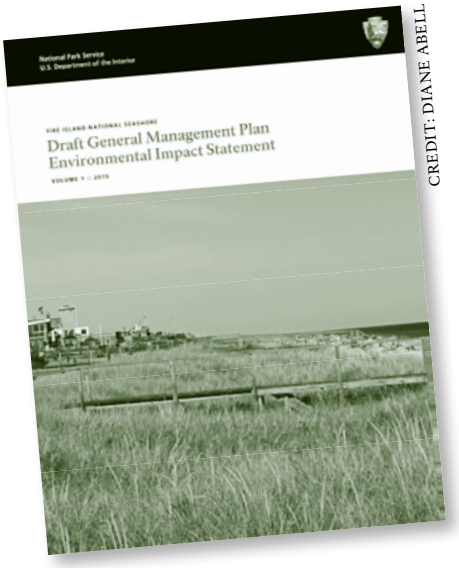
617.223.5164
Attn: Fire Island GMP (Ellen Carlson)

HAND DELIVERY

Comments may be dropped off at Seashore headquarters (120 Laurel Street, Patchogue, NY 11772) or at public meetings, which will be announced in the local media following the release of this plan.

Please note that the names and addresses of people who comment become part of the public record. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

All comments on the draft GMP/EIS will be reviewed and considered. Substantive comments will be identified and responded to in a Comment Analysis Report that will appear in the final GMP/EIS.



CREDIT: DIANE ABELL