

## Appendix D

# Summary of Public Involvement Activities

## Table of Contents

GMP Scoping Summary Report 2009 .....	D-1
GMP Planning Update and Summary Report – Preliminary Management Alternatives Public Review, January 2012 .....	D-14

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## Assateague Island National Seashore General Management Plan Scoping Summary Report 2009

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### Introduction

The National Park Service has begun the scoping process for the Assateague Island National Seashore General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement as required pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Scoping is a process that begins early in the development of a General Management Plan (GMP) for all units of the National Park System, and continues throughout the planning process. Scoping is conducted both internally by National Park Service planning teams and externally with the public including partners, local governments, other interested parties, and the general public. A Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register at the beginning of the scoping process to invite comment and participation. This report describes the public involvement activities that NPS has completed thus far for the Assateague Island National Seashore GMP, and summarizes the comments and ideas that have been raised by the public.

### Scoping with the General Public

NPS hosted a series of three open house workshops and eight outdoor information stations to solicit public input regarding the issues that should be addressed in the GMP, as well as ideas, opportunities, and concerns for the future of the park. In advance of the meetings, NPS staff issued a press release to several media sources, emailed meeting announcements to the seashore email list, and distributed the first GMP newsletter.

The first newsletter issued in summer 2009 described the Assateague Island National Seashore's GMP process. The newsletter invited the public to provide ideas and comments for the planning process, and posed a series of questions that asked people their opinions on what is most special to them about the park; their concerns for the park's future; thoughts on recreational and educational opportunities that should be available to visitors; how to better protect the natural environment and ecological values of the park; and how to make it easier to get onto and around the seashore. Prior to the public scoping meetings, the newsletter was sent out to the seashore mailing list and posted on the park's website.

During the open house workshops and outdoor information sessions, the public was introduced to the GMP process via information posters, the GMP newsletter, seashore maps, and through discussion with members of the planning team. The public was invited to fill out comment cards, provide comments directly on seashore maps, or write comments on large blank sheets of paper. Additionally, the public was invited to provide comments, ideas, and opportunities for the future of the seashore via email ([ASIS\\_GMP@NPS.gov](mailto:ASIS_GMP@NPS.gov)) and mail.

Open house workshops were held:

- The Wor-Wick Community College – September 21, 2009
- Paul Sarbanes Coastal Ecology Center – September 22, 2009
- Chincoteague Center Community Center – September 23, 2009

Outdoor GMP information sessions were held:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• July 11, 2009 in Maryland:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Old Ferry Landing</li> <li>– North Beach Parking Lot</li> </ul> </li> <li>• July 11, 2009 in Virginia:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Toms Cove Visitors Center</li> <li>– Toms Cove Parking Lot</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• August 15, 2009 in Maryland:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– OSV Entrance Road</li> <li>– North Beach Parking Lot</li> </ul> </li> <li>• August 15, 2009 in Virginia:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Toms Cove Visitors Center</li> <li>– Toms Cove Parking Lot</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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### Comments Received on the NPS PEPC Web Site

The NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website provides the public with an electronic link for obtaining information about or commenting on the GMP process. Eighteen comments were received in 2009.

### Summary

This report provides a summary of the public comments organized by topic, which were received so far as part of initial public scoping. Between the ideas generated through the comment cards, emails, letters, and other sources, the GMP team received hundreds of comments. These comments came in various forms, including comment cards (139), emails (44), letters (4), PEPC comments (18), comments written on seashore maps (32), and comments recorded at outdoor events (44).

### Question 1 – What is most special to you about Assateague Island National Seashore?

#### Protection of the Seashore's Resources

- Assateague Island contains the most extensive beach habitat in Maryland and is the state's premier breeding site for beach-nesting birds. Assateague Island has been recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA) of global significance due to its nesting population of the Federally Threatened Piping Plover. Other beach-nesting birds of conservation priority at Assateague include Least Tern (Maryland State Threatened), Black Skimmer (Maryland State Endangered), American Oystercatcher, and Common Tern. Assateague Island serves as an important breeding location for several other vulnerable bird species including Common Nighthawk, Chuck-will's-widow, Seaside Sparrow, and Saltmarsh Sparrow. The island is consistently a significant migration corridor for Peregrine Falcon (Maryland At-risk Species) and a stopover location for a number of shorebird (e.g. Sanderling, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, etc.) and seabird species (e.g. Forster's Tern, Common Tern, Black Skimmer, etc.). ASIS boasts a high diversity of the saltmarsh breeding bird assemblage with 7 of 16 possible saltmarsh species breeding regularly.

#### Visitor Use and Visitor Experience

- access to natural resources (ponies, wildlife) and recreational uses (fishing, birding, camping)
- access to natural resources in an undeveloped natural setting
- access to natural resources in an undeveloped natural setting, and recreational uses including OSV use, fishing, and swimming
- public beach, with one small access fee, no extra parking fee, and no invasion of noise or commercial activity
- recreational uses, related to hiking/biking but park routes are blocked due to parked cars
- recreational uses, related to hunting, fishing, OSV, and water sports
- that the park belongs to the people, not the government
- Tom's Cove deck/trail, the Assateague Lighthouse, The Nature Circle
- clean
- history of the park
- ocean, beach, and the lighthouse
- open space
- park programs
- recreational uses, including clothing option area
- recreational uses, park programs and interpretation
- undeveloped natural setting, with some services
- views
- natural, dynamic nature of the park
- ocean, beach, with easy access
- enjoy many aspects
- family memories
- importance of preserving the park for future generations
- access to natural resources and park programs
- natural environment, preservation, wildlife/habitat
- ocean, beach

- natural environment
- wildlife (including birds and ponies) and habitat
- undeveloped natural setting
- ocean, beach, natural environment, and wildlife/habitat

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – Traffic, Circulation, and Access**

- additional handicapped parking is needed to improve access
- continue abundant parking at south end and increase area for parking
- driving on the beach provides access. We would be unable to walk over the dunes to access the beach otherwise.
- easy access
- parking lot for RVs only
- parking lots and access

### **Question 2 – What are your concerns for the Seashore’s future?**

#### **Protection of the Seashore’s Resources**

- threats which face both the nesting and migrating birds of ASIS include beach erosion, disturbance, predators, and sea level rise
- concern with the eradication of the sika deer, along with the traditions, heritage, opportunity, and income that go along with them
- external impacts to park, including development and off shore wind power
- preserving the park for future generations
- protection of natural resources
- reduction of horse herd

#### **Barrier Island Dynamics and Sea Level Rise**

- changes to the park due to natural processes and OSV use
- changes to the park due to natural processes, including sea level rise, erosion, weather damage, and dune loss
- the natural action of the barrier island will provide protection, not man-made dikes/dunes

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience**

- enjoy many aspects of the park
- enjoy the store
- ensure a clothing optional beach
- horse and trash and pollution
- I don't want it to rain
- overuse and overcrowding

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – OSV**

- concerned that if the users and the park management don't work together there will be more closures and restrictions than there is now
- too crowded – extend the road and provide more beach access
- lifeguards for OSV zone
- restricting access of beach, wilderness designation
- loss of access to the beach/bays
- loss of access to the beach and bays – OSV access

**Visitor Use and Experience – Traffic and Circulation**

- additional parking, including the south beach
- parking (south end) and economy of Chincoteague
- traffic – shuttle service and limit the number of vehicles on the beach

**Partnerships**

- accommodation of all interests regarding a diversity of uses while respecting the natural environment
- support for partnerships with the development and agricultural community

**Facilities and Operations**

- funding for park programs
- funding shortfalls
- rules on campfires and alcohol
- safety and security
- safety and security, preservation of the park for future generations
- threat of development of additional park facilities and/or encroachment
- trash and pollution

**Miscellaneous**

- natural population growth will pressure the park
- too much government protection
- uncertain future
- visitor attitudes
- will the defense departments need for an inland waterway conflict with your plan
- changes to the park due to humans including hunting accidents and gang violence

**Question 3 – What recreational and educational opportunities do you think should be available to visitors at the Seashore?**

**Visitor Use and Experience**

- doing well currently
- enjoy current food and beverage options
- enjoy current level of park programs, recreation, and/or education opportunities
- enjoy the park's natural resources, OSV area, and the park's management and staff
- enjoy the visitor center and park programs
- enjoy the written description of activities of wildlife visible from trails
- fishing, crabbing, hunting, beach combing, etc.
- nature based educational opportunities and recreational programs including fishing, OSV, camping, and water based activities
- ponies
- the new visitor center will provide additional opportunities

**Visitor Use and Experience – Education and Interpretation**

- additional programs geared towards children and expand programs to local schools
- additional special events, such as bon fire nights, meteor shower, or “beach seminars”
- consider offering history of the island courses, senior programs, photography classes, or ecology courses for user groups
- continued and increased education opportunities for visitors to learn about the significance of ASIS to beach-nesting birds, salt marsh-nesting bird and other wildlife – visitors should be made aware of current management and monitoring practices and how the public's use of Assateague impacts the island's ecosystem and distinctive birdlife

- crabbing and fishing lessons/education
- educate visitors on the effects of OSV use on beach-nesting birds and migrant shorebirds on the beach
- educational classes about keeping the beach clean
- educational opportunities should be better publicized
- educational opportunities should be offered year round and/or during the week
- greater detail of the history of the island and a pamphlet with GPS coordinates of the old hunting lodges, and houses
- increase interpretive program material on websites
- nature based educational opportunities
- recommend the creation of an educator position that would deliver programs and information to the public specifically related to beach-nesting birds at ASIS, including ecology, threats, monitoring and management

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – OSV**

- additional OSV access overall (with camping), and in Virginia
- general recreational opportunities that currently exist at the park, including non-mechanized, non-destructive e.g. No ORV's, personal high-speed watercraft
- OSV classes to teach beach maintenance, appropriate uses, and equipment
- when there are closures for birds, active fishermen should have a detour and use the back road to go around the closure

#### **Visitor Use and Experience – Recreation**

- additional "put ins" for kayaking in the back bay
- additional water/land trails and preserved land
- all forms of hiking, birding and water activity like surfing, swimming, fishing, kayaking/canoeing, kite-surfing and sailing should be top priorities
- allow personal water craft access to a designated area that is separate from other recreational users of the park
- allow vehicles on beach overnight
- as is – no camping
- boat rentals and concerts
- continue current recreational opportunities, with restrictions on hunting
- do not take away any current recreation opportunities currently existing
- enjoy clothing optional areas that is designated and well signed
- establish clam and oyster beds along Assateague bay shoreline for recreational clamming
- expand recreational opportunities to year round
- general recreational opportunities that currently exist at the park
- more recreational based tour opportunities – ranger led walks; history, kayak, bike, boat, and bus tours
- quiet zones from radios, etc. – enjoy evening programs on the beach or in screened amphitheater
- request continued equal access for kite-boarding in the park – is a low impact activity that contributes revenue to the local economy
- request that an area/remote area of Assateague could be designated as clothing optional
- safely manageable recreational opportunities, swimming, fishing, etc. or those that have health benefits
- too many recreational users, especially OSV
- volleyball nets
- water based recreational programs, including sustainability

#### **Visitor Use and Experience – Traffic and Circulation**

- additional parking at south end
- reduce vehicle access in the park – for example, please close the wildlife loop to cars

### **Partnerships**

- utilize volunteers to help promote recreation and education workshops

### **Facilities and Operations**

- additional air pumps and dump stations
- additional food/drink opportunities
- beach front visitor center
- consider utilizing the plastic material on the parking lot next to the environmental center to maintain that road – would allow for wash-overs and still maintain the road integrity
- no additional park facilities
- provide full showers
- suggest larger visitor center with film viewing area

### **Miscellaneous**

- unsure of additional opportunities

## **Question 4 – How can we better protect the natural environment and ecological values of the Seashore?**

### **Protection of the Seashore's Resources**

- acquire additional neighboring lands
- adaptive management approaches, use NWR for resource projects
- additional vegetation
- attempt to prevent beach loss/erosion
- consider modifying plover management approach to allow visitors in the OSV area to drive around the closure areas
- control of invasive species
- control pollution
- different approach to the management of areas for nesting birds
- doing well currently
- erosion management
- establish mussel beds along the O.C. inlet rocks, the bivalves would help clean up the waters
- limit areas for crabbing/protect the mud flats for wildlife
- maintain the park's undeveloped natural environment and clean waters
- plant Sea Beach Amaranth out of OSV zone
- protect dunes and/or build dunes
- protection of surrounding waters
- reduce the pony heard
- south end snow fence, jetty, and dredging of sand to beach
- suggest that NPS should take a proactive approach to increase the numbers of Piping Plovers rather than restricting access to protect them
- supports the inclusion of the following bird management and monitoring practices in the updated general management plan:
  - determine and implement the best management practices for maintaining high-quality Piping Plover nesting habitat on ASIS, especially on the storm berm at the island's north end
  - quantitatively assess the effects of storm berm notches on Piping Plover reproductive success, and continue/change management accordingly
  - continue use of predator exclosures for Piping Plover nests
  - continue removal of mammalian and avian nest predators as necessary to prevent and mitigate Piping Plover nest failure due to depredation



- continue rigorous monitoring of beach-nesting birds, including Piping Plover, Least Tern, and American Oystercatcher
- quantitatively assess the effects of pony grazing on salt marsh habitat and salt marsh-nesting birds, including Saltmarsh Sparrow and Seaside Sparrow
- maintain appropriate beach closures, including OSV zone, as necessary for nesting Piping Plovers. Use clearly marked signage and frequent public notification
- explore the feasibility of creating suitable breeding conditions for Piping Plover through vegetation removal and artificial disturbance if the natural disturbance regime fails to maintain the plover population
- determine the likely impacts of sea level rise on the island's beach and salt marsh habitats and their birdlife
- develop and implement sea-level rise adaptation strategies for beach and salt marsh habitats

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience**

- better education not to feed animals. Have back road open so vehicles will not be tempted to ride on dunes when high water
- extended hours for the visitors center
- protection through public education

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – OSV**

- continue to allow access for OSV
- extend the OSV road, but shrink the area so that it is open to the public
- if access to the park is so restricted, what purpose does it serve? becomes an educational resource
- limits on OSV, especially south end towards Tom's Cove Hook – consider alternate ways to get there including shuttle or walking
- limits on OSV
- maintain the vehicle count at 145
- no limits on the number of people who can access the island
- OSV safety course
- rethinking vehicle/ORV access

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – Traffic and Circulation**

- encourage carpooling
- limiting the number of people and cars who can access the park
- reduce vehicular traffic, encourage biking and/or shuttle buses
- traffic control

#### **Partnerships**

- consider developing a cooperative agreement with UMES, Perdue Chicken, Mt. Air Company to collect Piping Plover eggs and hatch them inside, then release
- education and outreach, lobby for additional funding
- outreach to local officials
- work with local groups like AMSA to ensure protection and conservation of this national resource

#### **Facilities and Operations**

- additional park facilities and park maintenance
- additional staffing
- additional trash/recycling bins and closer to the beach
- address northern end boat landing congestion
- cleaning facilities for campers
- enforcement of current park rules

- keep trash cleaned up
- limits on additional development in park
- make ranger patrols visible during high visitation hours
- no expansion of roads and/or parking lots
- open back road for OSV use to allow for access during bird nesting times
- prevent horse riding at south end
- prohibit fishing
- quit building bath houses and parking lots, board walks and blacktop roads
- relinquished much via the ORV zones and suppression of other activities in other parts of the park to compensate - places an unfair burden on ordinary park-and-walk visitors
- separate traffic of pony watchers, and others
- tickets for those who litter

#### **Miscellaneous**

- be proactive to save beaches
- bothered by wave riders
- by using common sense laws and encouraging people to be responsible
- judicious management and avoidance of over-zealous protective action
- keep the park as it is today
- keep the park open
- no smoking on beaches
- unsure

#### **Question 5 – How can we make it easier to get onto and around the Seashore?**

##### **Protection of the Seashore's Resources**

- Assateague will be better preserved if the cars stopped before the sand packing
- believe there is a limit on how much capacity the park can handle – has begun to get overly crowded, and I can only imagine what that does to the water quality, not to mention the low-key atmosphere that was the park environment
- consider doing like other beaches and enclose areas for wildlife instead of closing entire beach to 4x4/walkers
- consider implementing the Florida Gulf Coast sea turtle program here
- do not eradicate the sika deer from the island, they bring enjoyment, visitor traffic, and cause less damage to the island than the ponies
- do not want the beach ruined by making dunes. Let the island be what it is
- fence the road to keep horses out and increase the speed limit
- keep it as "green" as possible, i.e. maintain natural habitats
- keep people off of dunes, use trails only
- reduce the pony herd size

##### **Visitor Use and Experience – Education and Interpretation**

- additional public education programs, not excessive "do not touch, do not trespass" signs

##### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – OSV**

- add annual permit to the OSV price
- additional OSV access by allowing for more vehicles on the beach (increasing the number of cars to 200) and/or by expanding the OSV zone
- improve the ORV access ramp
- inspect OSV to ensure proper waste disposal

- more parking, open the back road, shuttles, increase OSV carrying capacity, create/restore more OSV access ramps, establish routes around resource/safety closures, replace 2nd bullpen
- no change to the current OSV program. Utilize the OSV community to assist the park
- OSV driving course or instruction
- OSV passes should be available at the ranger station or ordered by phone or mail. Those who do not have proper equipment should lose their permit, forfeit on citation.
- OSV road must be constructed and maintained with a seashell base
- paths and a layer of parking area at the end of the road at the beginning of the OSV
- reopen the back road
- reopen the back road to allow access when weather or protection warrants a closure – consider allowing use of the dune crossings, OSV from Maryland to Virginia, and/or increase the vehicle limit
- reopen the back road, which would lighten the traffic on the beach – fine OSV users for littering and speeding
- too many restrictions of OSV use may reduce the fun
- support maintenance of current OSV zone openings and closures in accordance with locations of beach-nesting birds (i.e. Piping Plover) – do not support the opening of new areas to OSV use – encourage continued monitoring and research regarding the ecological impacts of OSV use on ASIS

#### **Visitor Use and Experience – Recreation**

- additional bike/hike trails - ramp for bikeway to north beach parking lot
- additional bike/hike trails
- designated sports areas
- disallow surf fishing with long lines for sharks, which is logically in conflict with children and other people being in the water
- expand bike trails and limit vehicular traffic by providing shuttles
- give surf fishermen an area so their lines are not amongst swimmers
- restore Swans Cove Trail
- link Black Duck Trail to beach
- provide safer bike trail from Chincoteague circle

#### **Visitor Use and Experience – Traffic and Circulation**

- a private ferry concessionary service, with reasonable hours and a regular schedule
- access seems to be easy, never had a problem, except in summer season but I understand that and adjust accordingly
- additional parking
- consider a series of small, 3- to 5-space parking areas along the main road to allow people to look out between the openings and get out to look at horses
- entrance way:
  - more booths at the park entrance
  - additional entrance
  - redesign the entrance way
  - open the annual pass lane sooner
  - auto pay for entrance fees
  - separate entrance for pass holders
- expand the historical exhibit parking between the main and south parking area and allow walkover onto the beach to relieve some of the pressure of the south beach area
- implement senior golden pass access thru self-swipe gate – build a third gate entry for daily/weekly visitor
- provide shuttle services, including town to beach and/or to off-road areas such as the mid-point of MD shore
- public transport to beaches near Wash Flats for a limited number of people per day, if birds aren't using the area that year

- signage:
  - signs to pull over to the shoulder if horse watching
  - additional signage – horse trailer areas
  - additional signage/wayfinding inside the park and to direct visitors to the park – signage on Rt 13, near Wallops, in Chincoteague, especially at drawbridge
  - additional signage within the park and on OSV route – will make it easier to report problems
- storm events could overburden a bus system
- support the addition of public transit to and from ASIS – an NPS shuttle service could prove more cost-effective than maintaining extensive repeatedly eroding parking areas on Assateague – locate parking areas on the mainland to reduce the amount of developed area on an Assateague Island which already has limited land

#### **Partnerships**

- utilize friends groups and other volunteers
- work with local, county, and state government to improve transportation

#### **Facilities and Operations**

- five-minute parking at campground office parking lot #1
- allow additional vehicles in the park
- allow for limited/permitted back country camping beyond the south parking
- better enforcement of leash laws
- better enforcement of no stopping for wildlife viewing
- better maintenance of the entry way
- do not make access any easier than it is today, would make it more crowded and/or ruin what is special about the park
- don't count campers in the bullpen towards to total number allowed on the beach
- eliminate entrance fees
- hook ups on RV sites
- increase the length of the boardwalk
- limit OSV permits to Maryland citizens only – reduce OSV fees, and the pony population to where they will no longer be a traffic hazard – eliminate roads, parking lots, boardwalks and bathhouses to reduce visitors and eliminate traffic
- longer staffing hours at the entrance way to ensure payment
- maintain road system and visitor center
- more benches near the showers in the changing rooms
- more dog friendly
- more parking and roadside pull off areas for viewing wildlife
- move bikeways to parallel Bayberry return from south end – Old Ferry Road, Bayside – move either E-station counter or North Beach parking lot – north exit
- provide hot water, flush toilets, and electricity in the park and the campsite
- public information:
  - develop a brochure that includes information about what is allowed and hours
  - on-line weekly newsletter and update with photos and annotation
  - provide maps at the entrance station
  - provide public information via call in number regarding beach closure and weather conditions
- rent golf cart type vehicles on the island
- shade areas around BBQ

## Public Comment – Emails, Letters, PEPC, Outdoor Information Session Comments, Map Comments, and Additional Comments from Comment Cards

### Protection of the Seashore's Resources

- continue to ban all development from the seashore
- need more regulation of commercial fishing and dumping off our coastal waters – maybe a 25-mile limit for national park lands and natural preserves
- will the barrier island exist in 20 years? global warming

### Visitor Use and Visitor Experience

- enjoy recreational activities at the park, including kites, fishing derbies, crabbing, fishing, skim boarding
- enjoy seeing wildlife and the natural environment
- enjoy the view, without encroachment of buildings
- enjoy time at the park
- no commercial interest – would wreck the island – leave it as is for the future visitors and our children
- preserve and increase access for surf fishing
- reconstruct a bike path that would connect the refuge with the Maryland side of Assateague Island and add several hike-in/canoe-in/bike-in campgrounds
- recreational opportunities = sika deer hunting, camping, exploration
- increase in the number of visitors to the park will destroy the pristine environment
- North Beach is getting more crowded with fishermen who ignore safety issues and fish in areas with swimmers
- is beautiful here – just needs a water area
- with eradication of sika deer would eliminate tradition (many generations)

### Visitor Use and Experience – Transportation and Circulation

- add additional entrance lanes to reduce congestion and separate day users and campers
- appreciate easy access to the seashore
- beach access (in Swan's Cove area) is very popular, but we still need more cycle racks in summer
- electronic sign on 611 to alert visitors to beach closures, etc.
- encourage use of bike trail where available (perhaps better signage??)
- extend bike paths to beach (in Virginia)
- limit off road traffic along OSV route (in Toms Cove area)
- make gate easier to navigate/faster to get through – consider separating those that need to pay from those who have already paid
- more pony pull-offs
- no alternative transportation – ie - no cars – would destroy the economy of Chincoteague Island
- OSV ramp scheduled for ongoing upkeep and repair – ideally, a base of clam/oyster shells can be brought in to rebuild the ramp and a drainage pipe could also be incorporated into the plan for drainage
- parking lots can be beyond capacity at times

### Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – Clothing Optional

- a clothing optional area will increase tourism to the park and neighboring areas
- do not designate an area of Assateague for clothing optional
- inappropriate behavior is not tolerated at clothing optional beaches
- nudists are good citizens of the beaches we visit, and assist with beach clean-ups and bring
- polls indicate that a majority would support a nude area if proper signs informed the public where it is located
- providing a clothing optional area would only require the posting of several signs (to prevent inadvertent sightings), and would result in additional park visitors
- request that a clothing optional zone of the Maryland portion of Assateague be reinstated

- request that an area/remote area of Assateague could be designated as clothing optional
- the experience at Sandy Hook demonstrates that clothed and clothing optional beach uses can co-exist successfully
- we pay taxes and would like our tax dollars support our interest in a clothing optional beach

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – Education and Outreach**

- concerned that adequate consideration is given to the interpretation of the human aspects of the seashore; in particular the interpretation of the old Life-Saving Service station that was vital for the rescue of shipwrecked sailors along this very dangerous stretch of coast
- enjoy park programs, including ghost crab night and fishing derbies
- include OSV info in Junior Ranger curriculum
- park programs to feed into the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL)
- professional four-wheel drive tour of beach island areas
- provide NPS brochure at entrance station
- tell visitors the role, and importance, of the men of the US Life Saving Service
- used to be evening talks on the beach in a screened enclosed amphitheater

#### **Visitor Use and Visitor Experience – OSV**

- consider charging a higher price for OSV permits and provide education/orientation regarding rules and OSV best practices
- continue ORV all season (in Toms Cove area) - rope off area with tape where nesting occurs
- day fee for OSV zone
- enjoy using the off-road portion of Assateague – believe that more damage happens to the island from visitors walking on the dunes than from allowing vehicles on the beach – should be additional educational programs and enforcement to stop this
- expand the OSV, unify the two sections of Assateague Island National Seashore
- increase OSV access
- no day fees in the OSV zone
- open the back road to allow for better access in the ORV zone
- OSV vehicle kit for sale at the ranger station - tow rope, boards, tire gauge, shovel, small first aid kit, fire extinguisher, flashlight
- stop cars from going on the beach – is inappropriate and totally wrong for Assateague
- suggest increasing the number of OSV users on the beach to 230, based on the formula of 100 ft. apart for 13 miles
- think that the OSV users are given additional privileges than other campers (they don't register, no limits for stays, make it difficult for others to access the beach driving area)

#### **Facilities and Operations**

- a group of volunteers would assist staff in maintaining, cleaning, and caring for the seashore
- additional showers
- concerned with the mess left behind ponies
- consider charging ocean side and weekend campers a higher rate
- day-use beach on the north end of the island, with a 1-mile access road from the end of 611 and parking - this area is currently used as state park camping
- disappointed that the new parking lot was installed without permeable pavers
- ensure there are adequate restrooms, including along in the OSV area
- keep NPS campgrounds managed by the NPS
- litter accumulates on the beach
- need an area for food/soft drinks
- never provide hot showers – will create health issues

- request more "no generator" areas, because they are very disruptive and so noisy
- state park camping should be moved to provide for additional beach front parking, with the collection booth moved to the end so that traffic does not block entrance to the national park
- upgrade restrooms

**Miscellaneous**

- add website to the senior pass
- annex Worcester County
- cheaper scooter rides
- enjoy current access and hope the park remains dog friendly
- ensure that the protection of the rights of the OSV permit holder be considered throughout the entire GMP process
- monitor those who do not protect the interests of the park
- park is great as it is
- too many dogs not on leashes
- unsure

## Assateague Island National Seashore General Management Plan Preliminary Management Alternatives Public Review January 2012

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### **Planning Update – National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service Planning Projects**

Assateague Island is a 37-mile long barrier island located off the Atlantic coast of Maryland and Virginia. The island and its surrounding waters consist of three public areas; Assateague Island National Seashore (approximately 8,300 acres of lands and 32,200 acres of waters managed by the National Park Service (NPS)), Assateague State Park (600 acres managed by Maryland's Department of Natural Resources) and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (8,900 acres in Virginia managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)).

The NPS and FWS are both undertaking long-range planning efforts for those portions of the island over which they have management authority. Although the NPS and FWS have separate planning standards and directives reflecting the different missions of the two agencies, the general planning steps are similar in many respects. Both require that management plans identify the actions needed to accomplish the purposes for which the seashore or refuge was established by considering a full range of alternatives. Public involvement is required throughout the planning process and decisions are made in careful consideration of comments received from all interested parties. The plans must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable requirements and as such are generally prepared in an environmental impact statement (EIS) format.

The NPS planning effort will produce a new General Management Plan (GMP) for Assateague Island National Seashore. The GMP will establish a vision for the seashore and provide guidance for its management over the next 15 to 25 years. In July 2011, the NPS GMP planning team released a GMP alternatives newsletter outlining several preliminary alternative management concepts for the future of the seashore and held a series of open house workshops.

The long-range planning effort by the FWS is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. The FWS CCP planning team released a CCP alternatives newsletter for the Refuge in August 2011 and also held a series of public workshops.

The planning teams for both agencies have gathered and analyzed the public comments. The NPS GMP planning team found that many of the comments received from the public addressed issues and concerns outside the scope of NPS authority. Most of those comments targeted elements of the proposed CCP alternatives for Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge and will be forwarded to the FWS. Examples of issues and concerns that are beyond the scope of the NPS GMP include:

- shuttle service to the beach in Virginia
- potential economic impacts due to proposed changes in access in Virginia
- the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge pony herd
- beach replenishment and dune fortification in the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

The following report outlines the NPS GMP management alternatives public review process and briefly summarizes the public comments on the Assateague Island National Seashore GMP.

### **GMP Management Alternatives Public Review**

The NPS presented four preliminary management alternative concepts for public review in the summer of 2011. The NPS mailed a GMP alternatives newsletter to over 500 addresses, emailed electronic newsletters to approximately 36 addresses, posted the newsletter on-line, and hand distributed an additional 950 newsletters at the NPS visitor centers and at public meetings. The newsletter provided a summary of the four management alternatives and associated zoning, as well as an update on the planning process, the foundation for planning, a summary of scoping comments, and the planning considerations. The newsletter also invited the public to attend



public open house workshops to learn about the management alternatives, meet with the planning team, and to provide comments. A press release was sent to local newspapers advertising the meetings and updates were made to the seashore's website and the NPS Planning Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website.

The NPS hosted public open house workshops at three locations in communities surrounding the seashore:

- August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – Wor-Wic Community College, Salisbury, Maryland (26 attended)
- August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – Marine Science Consortium, Wallops Island, Virginia (38 attended)
- August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011 – Ocean Pines Library, Ocean Pines, Maryland (48 attended)

The purpose of the workshops was to gather ideas from individuals on the preliminary management alternatives for the seashore. Poster-size maps and text boards were used to present project background information, the management alternative concepts and their associated management zoning, and a concept comparison chart. GMP team members were present during the open house workshops to answer questions.

The public comment period for the management alternative concepts was from July 20, 2011 through October 1, 2011. The public provided comments via comment cards (10), the PEPC website (155), emails (159), and letters (19).

### **Summary of Public Comments on the GMP Management Alternatives**

- **Comments on Specific Alternatives**

Overall, the public indicated the greatest support for Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation. Flexibility in managing future challenges and changes to the island, such as natural coastal processes, sea level rise, and climate change, was frequently mentioned as a positive attribute of the alternative. Many also noted that it offered the best balance between the protection of natural resources and the enjoyment of the resources and recreational opportunities of the island. The importance of maintaining over sand vehicle (OSV) use on the island was frequently cited, with many suggesting that Alternative 3 offers the best approach.

Several favored Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management because it would maintain the seashore as it is currently. There were a number of comments that expressed great satisfaction with the seashore as it is today, and some suggested that the island should be left as is. Several others indicated that Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation would provide the best beach recreation opportunities for visitors. Finally, several preferred Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience because it would provide a true island experience and unique interpretive and educational opportunities.

- **Comments on Visitor Use and Experience**

There were a number of public comments regarding the visitor experience at the seashore, addressing educational programming, recreation opportunities, and interpretive themes. Numerous comments expressed satisfaction with the quality of recreational resources and visitor use opportunities. Ideas for new educational programs at the seashore included winter hiking trips and historical interpretation by staff or partners. A few comments expressed support for a clothing optional beach. Other suggestions included the need to enhance visitor contact areas, orientation, safety messaging, seashore information, and posting of rules.

OSV use at the seashore was a topic of many comments. The comments indicated strong support for continued OSV use and opposition to changes to or reductions in the OSV area. Many comments expressed satisfaction with the current OSV program. Some supported allowing alternate locations for OSV use, if and when that becomes necessary due to natural coastal processes. Other suggestions for the OSV program included re-opening the back road, changes to the fee structure, speed limitations, and the need for 'work-arounds' for Piping Plover closures. A few comments suggested the elimination or reduction of OSV use.

- **Comments on Seashore Facilities and Operations**

Public comments about seashore facilities and operations primarily addressed access, alternative transportation, and parking infrastructure. There was support both for and against expanding visitor use services and facilities in the developed zone. Most indicated support for continued bridge access and repairs to facilities and infrastructure in the event that they are destroyed in a catastrophic storm. Many indicated their support for an adaptive management approach to facility development that promotes sustainability in the context of island dynamics and climate change/sea level rise. Some suggested that any change in access to the island would deter visitation, while others indicated their support for alternative transportation approaches including ferry, shuttle services, and a network of water-based public boat launch sites.

There was interest in additional camping opportunities at the seashore but some expressed concern that a mainland camping experience would be inferior to the current on-island camping opportunities. Others made specific suggestions regarding camping fees, length and type of stay, and generator use in the campground, and ideas for improving the entrance station.

- **Comments on Natural Resource Management**

Natural resource management comments ranged from suggestions for broad management approaches including adaptive management planning, to more specific suggestions related to issues such as invasive plants, habitat restoration, and rare species protection. Many indicated support for a proactive approach to addressing the threats from climate change/sea level rise, such as increasing resiliency and working in concert with natural processes. Others did not support the idea of allowing natural processes to shape the island and expressed concern that a breach or new inlet could impact the ability of visitors to access all parts of the island.

A comment indicated support for various protection and enhancement mechanisms for Chincoteague Bay water quality, including establishing sanctuaries, prohibiting unauthorized commercial fishing, banning of submerged lands leasing for commercial aquaculture, and compliance with applicable wastewater disposal regulations. Some supported dredging to enhance the tidal flow to and from Chincoteague Bay. Many comments indicated support for the continuation of commercial fishing and aquaculture in seashore waters, including the horseshoe crab fishery, and opposed any changes to the current system. Concern for the economic impact to local watermen was frequently cited. Several indicated opposition to any changes that would impact privately-owned structures ('oyster watch houses') in the Virginia waters of the seashore.

There were several comments that expressed support for a marine research reserve at the seashore. Others were concerned about the potential impacts that a marine research reserve could have on the livelihood of watermen and to the use of waterways for public and commercial use.

Several suggested that hunting was an important recreational opportunity and should be allowed to continue at the seashore.

- **Comments on Proposed Wilderness**

Comments on the proposed wilderness area ranged from support for the existing area to the removal of wilderness in the seashore. Some comments expressed concern about the potential that expansion of the wilderness area could affect ORV use.

- **Comments on Cultural Resource Management**

Several comments indicated concern for the removal of hunting camps due to their value in understanding the history of the island and as historic structures. The preservation, as well as active use of the Coast Guard Station was encouraged.

- **Comments on Partnerships**

Several comments addressed the importance of partnerships between state and federal entities in the plan and its implementation. It was suggested that the plan should highlight the existing (and capacity for additional)

partnerships and how they can be used to work cooperatively on land conservation initiatives and solutions to address the effects of coastal processes and climate change/sea level rise. Several indicated support for the continued partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers related to erosion control and protection of the seashore.

- **Comments on Land Acquisition**

There was support for mainland protection strategies, including expanded land conservation efforts in the Newport Bay, Chincoteague Bay, and Sinepuxent Bay watersheds targeting areas with healthy, functioning perennial streams and tidal creeks.

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