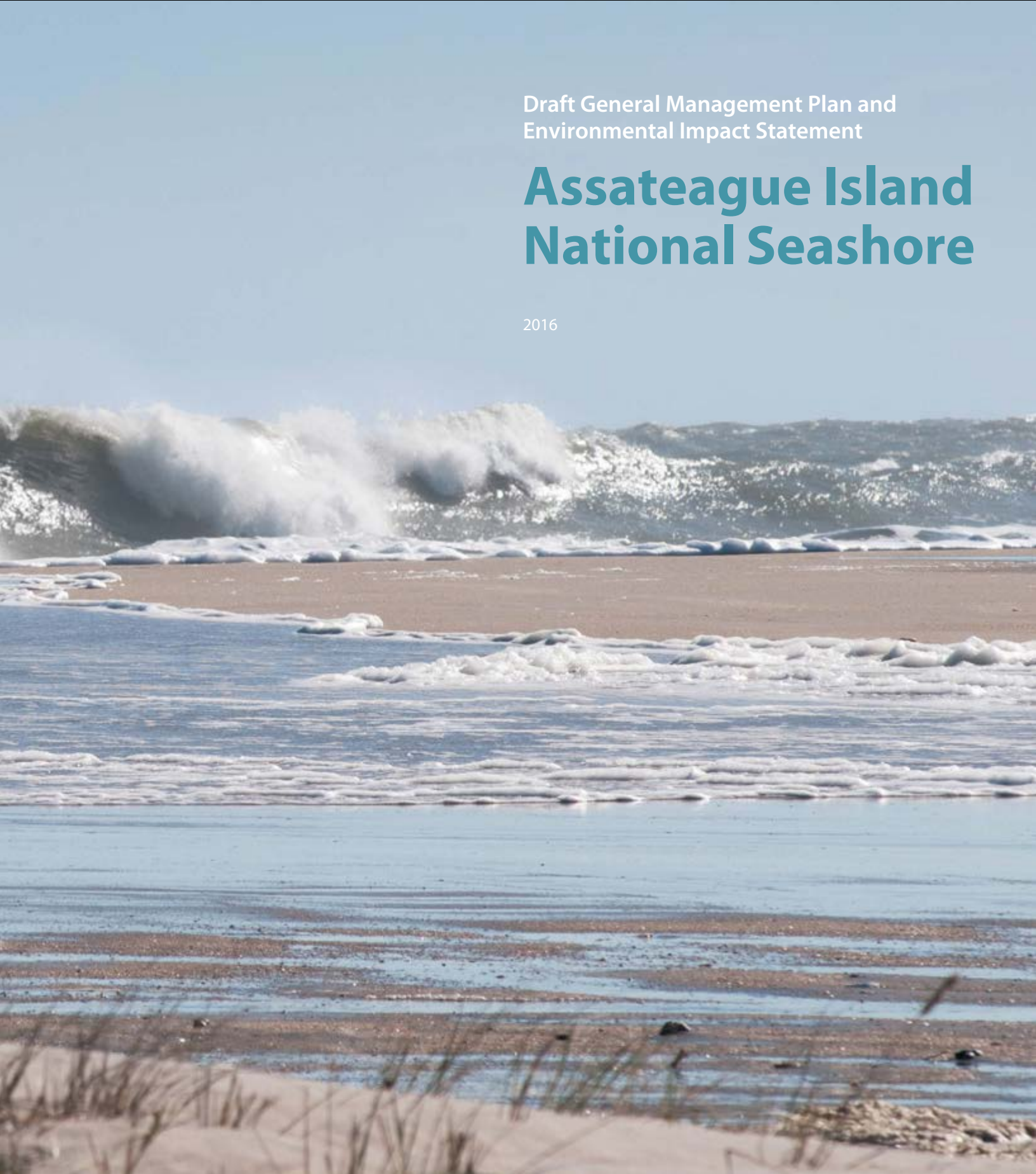




Draft General Management Plan and
Environmental Impact Statement

Assateague Island National Seashore

2016



Photos by Allen Sklar

Cover

Horse in Wetland (page xiii)

Beach and Dune (page 1-19)

Birds in the Water (page 1-21)

Fisherman (page 1-23)

Draft General Management Plan and
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Assateague Island National Seashore

2016



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DRAFT GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
Assateague Island National Seashore, Maryland and Virginia

Assateague Island National Seashore (the seashore), established in 1965, preserves the outstanding Mid-Atlantic coastal resources of Assateague Island and its adjacent waters and the natural processes upon which they depend. The seashore also provides high quality resource-compatible recreation experiences. To support these purposes, the National Park Service (NPS) is preparing a new general management plan/environmental impact statement (GMP/EIS) for the seashore, to replace the seashore's existing GMP completed in 1982.

This GMP/EIS describes the continuation of current management alternative and three action alternatives for future management of the seashore, the environment that would be affected by the alternatives, and the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives.

Alternative 1. The NPS would continue to manage resources and visitor uses as it does today. The seashore's enabling legislation and the existing *General Management Plan* (NPS 1982) would continue to guide seashore management. The NPS would manage seashore resources and visitor use as it does today, with no major change in direction.

Alternative 2. Most visitors would enjoy traditional beach recreation concentrated within a high density developed area accessible by private vehicle. This alternative would likely require significant manipulation of the natural environment to protect facilities and infrastructure in the island developed area. Outside the developed area, natural processes and the effects of climate change/sea level rise would be the primary forces influencing the condition and evolution of natural resources.

Alternative 3 (NPS Preferred Alternative). Over time, visitor use infrastructure would evolve to more sustainable designs and likely shift to more stable locations both on and off the island. Most recreational uses and activities would continue while new water-based points of access would provide access to additional low density visitor use in the seashore's backcountry. Natural processes and the effects of climate change/sea level rise would be the primary forces influencing the condition and evolution of natural resources. Alternative 3 represents a long-term shifting of seashore facilities and assets to adapt to climate change.

Alternative 4. Visitors would continue to use existing facilities and infrastructure until such time as they are lost and/or damaged by natural coastal processes and/or the effects of climate change/sea level rise. Lost or damaged facilities would either not be replaced or would be minimally replaced with sustainable substitutes. Visitor use would become almost entirely limited to day-use activities, although some primitive camping would remain available. Natural coastal processes and the effects of climate change/sea level rise would be the primary forces influencing the condition and evolution of natural resources. Alternative 4 represents a quicker adaptation of seashore facilities and assets to the effects of climate change, as the seashore shifts from a more traditional developed place to a more primitive place.

The GMP/EIS addresses the environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the alternatives. Impact topics include: water resources, vegetation, wildlife, federally listed threatened or endangered species, historic structures, cultural landscapes, seashore operations, access and circulation, visitor use and experience, and the socio-economic environment.

The NPS has distributed the GMP/EIS to other agencies and interested organizations and individuals for their review and comment. The public comment period for the GMP/EIS will last for 60 days after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the *Federal Register*.

How to Comment on This Plan

The NPS welcomes comments on the GMP/EIS. Interested parties can submit comments to the NPS during the 60-day review and comment period, using one of the following three methods:

Online: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/asis>

We prefer that readers submit comments online through the park planning website identified above so that they become incorporated into the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment System. An electronic public comment form is provided through this website.

Mail

Superintendent
Assateague Island National Seashore
7206 National Seashore Lane
Berlin, MD 21811

Hand Delivery

Comments can be dropped off at seashore headquarters (address above) or at public meetings, which will be announced in the media, following release of the GMP/EISA. Before including your address, telephone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, could be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Table of Contents

1. Purpose and Need

1.1	Protecting and Enhancing the Seashore Experience – A Long-Term Plan for Management	1-1
1.1.1	Purpose of the Plan.....	1-1
1.1.2	Need for the Plan.....	1-2
1.1.3	Plan Development	1-2
1.1.4	Next Steps and Plan Implementation	1-4
1.2	Seashore Overview	1-4
1.2.1	Seashore Origin and Legislative History.....	1-4
1.2.2	Seashore Boundary and Ownership	1-7
1.2.3	Regional Context.....	1-8
1.2.4	Natural Resources.....	1-9
1.2.5	Cultural Resources	1-10
1.2.6	Visitor Experience and Visitor Use.....	1-12
1.3	Relationship to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge	1-12
1.3.1	Refuge Establishment and Overview	1-12
1.3.2	Recreational Use at the Refuge	1-13
1.3.3	<i>Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for Chincoteague and Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuges.....</i>	<i>1-15</i>
1.4	Guidance for Seashore Planning, Development, and Management.....	1-18
1.4.1	Seashore Purpose	1-18
1.4.2	Seashore Significance	1-18
1.4.3	Seashore Resources and Values	1-20
1.4.4	Interpretive Themes	1-24
1.4.5	Legislative Mandates and Special Designations	1-25
1.4.6	Other Legislative and Policy Requirements	1-29
1.5	Planning Issues.....	1-31
1.5.1	Natural Coastal Processes and Effects of Climate Change.....	1-31
1.5.2	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience.....	1-32
1.5.3	Partnerships.....	1-34
1.5.4	Wilderness	1-35
1.5.5	Cultural Resources	1-36
1.6	Impact Topics	1-37
1.6.1	Impact Topics Retained for Further Analysis	1-37
1.6.2	Impact Topics Considered and Dismissed from Further Analysis	1-38

1.7	The Seashore's Wilderness	1-45
1.8	The Seashore's Boundary.....	1-46
1.9	Related Plans.....	1-48
1.9.1	National Park Service Plans.....	1-48
1.9.2	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Plans	1-52
1.9.3	State of Maryland Plans	1-52
1.9.4	Local Government Plans	1-53
1.9.5	Other Plans and Projects	1-57
2.	Alternatives	
2.1	Development of Alternatives	2-1
2.2	Climate Change Response for Assateague Island	2-3
2.2.1	Background	2-3
2.2.2	The Seashore's Climate Change Response – GMP/EIS Alternatives	2-4
2.2.3	Strategies for Seashore Facilities and Operations	2-5
2.2.4	Strategies for Responding to Changing Conditions	2-6
2.2.5	Engaging the Scientific Community and Visitors in Climate Change	2-7
2.3	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management.....	2-8
2.3.1	Overall Concept	2-8
2.3.2	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	2-8
2.3.3	Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure.....	2-10
2.3.4	Natural Resource Management.....	2-11
2.3.5	Cultural Resource Management	2-13
2.3.6	Seashore Operations	2-14
2.3.7	Partnerships.....	2-14
2.3.8	Land Acquisition.....	2-15
2.3.9	Seashore Boundary.....	2-15
2.3.10	Planned and Programmed Projects	2-15
2.3.11	Costs	2-15
2.4	Management Guidance and Actions Common to the Action Alternatives (Common to Alternatives 2, 3, and 4).....	2-19
2.4.1	Management Zoning and Desired Conditions	2-19
2.4.2	Community Resilience	2-21
2.4.3	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience.....	2-27
2.4.4	Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure.....	2-29
2.4.5	Natural Resource Management.....	2-30
2.4.6	Cultural Resource Management	2-33
2.4.7	Seashore Operations	2-33
2.4.8	Partnerships.....	2-33
2.4.9	Land Acquisition.....	2-34
2.4.10	Seashore Boundary.....	2-34
2.4.11	Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Future Conditions	2-34

2.4.12	Costs	2-34
2.5	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	2-36
2.5.1	Overall Concept	2-36
2.5.2	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	2-36
2.5.3	Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure.....	2-39
2.5.4	Natural Resource Management.....	2-39
2.5.5	Cultural Resource Management	2-40
2.5.6	Seashore Operations	2-41
2.5.7	Partnerships.....	2-42
2.5.8	Land Acquisition.....	2-42
2.5.9	Seashore Boundary.....	2-42
2.5.10	Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Future Conditions	2-43
2.5.11	Costs	2-43
2.6	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	2-47
2.6.1	Overall Concept	2-47
2.6.2	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	2-47
2.6.3	Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure.....	2-50
2.6.4	Natural Resource Management.....	2-52
2.6.5	Cultural Resource Management	2-53
2.6.6	Seashore Operations	2-54
2.6.7	Partnerships.....	2-56
2.6.8	Land Acquisition.....	2-57
2.6.9	Seashore Boundary.....	2-57
2.6.10	Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Future Conditions	2-58
2.6.11	Costs	2-58
2.7	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience	2-63
2.7.1	Overall Concept	2-63
2.7.2	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	2-63
2.7.3	Visitor Facilities and Infrastructure.....	2-66
2.7.4	Natural Resource Management.....	2-67
2.7.5	Cultural Resource Management	2-68
2.7.6	Seashore Operations	2-69
2.7.7	Partnerships.....	2-71
2.7.8	Land Acquisition.....	2-71
2.7.9	Seashore Boundary.....	2-71
2.7.10	Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Future Conditions	2-72
2.7.11	Costs	2-72
2.8	Indicators and Standards	2-76
2.9	Mitigation Measures included in the Alternatives.....	2-79
2.10	Cost Comparison	2-82
2.10.1	Estimated Costs for Implementing the Plan	2-82
2.10.2	Funding for Actions Identified in the Plan	2-82

2.11	Comparison of Alternatives	2-84
2.12	Comparison of Impacts of the Alternatives	2-91
2.13	Consistency with Section 101 and 102(1) of NEPA	2-104
2.14	Environmentally Preferable Alternative	2-108
2.15	Identification of the NPS Preferred Alternative	2-108
2.16	Future Planning and Implementation (NPS Preferred Alternative)	2-109
3.	Affected Environment	
3.1	Introduction	3-1
3.1.1	Seashore Context	3-1
3.1.2	Seashore Significance	3-1
3.2	Climate Change/Sea Level Rise	3-7
3.3	Natural Coastal Processes	3-8
3.4	Water Resources	3-13
3.4.1	Nearshore Ocean Waters	3-13
3.4.2	Coastal Bays	3-13
3.4.3	Wetlands.....	3-16
3.4.4	Ponds	3-18
3.4.5	Floodplains.....	3-19
3.4.6	Surface Aquifer and Fresh Groundwater System	3-19
3.5	Vegetation.....	3-20
3.5.1	Plant Species of Special Concern	3-22
3.6	Wildlife	3-23
3.6.1	Marine Wildlife	3-23
3.6.2	Coastal Bay and Terrestrial Invertebrates	3-25
3.6.3	Fish.....	3-29
3.6.4	Amphibians and Reptiles	3-31
3.6.5	Birds	3-32
3.6.6	Mammals	3-35
3.6.7	Wildlife Species of Special Concern	3-36
3.7	Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species	3-40
3.7.1	Piping Plover (<i>Charadrius melodus</i>)	3-40
3.7.2	Seabeach Amaranth (<i>Amaranthus pumilus</i>)	3-42
3.7.3	Sea Turtles	3-42

3.7.4	Whales	3-45
3.8	Historic Structures.....	3-47
3.8.1	Assateague Beach U.S. Coast Guard Station.....	3-47
3.8.2	Green Run Lodge	3-48
3.8.3	Other Structures from the Historic Period	3-51
3.9	Cultural Landscapes	3-51
3.9.1	Assateague Beach U.S. Coast Guard Station Cultural Landscape	3-51
3.9.2	Assateague Island Cultural Landscape.....	3-51
3.10	Wilderness	3-52
3.10.1	Potential and Recommended Wilderness	3-52
3.10.2	Current Conditions.....	3-53
3.10.3	Management of Visitor Use.....	3-54
3.10.4	Management of Administrative Activities	3-55
3.11	Seashore Operations.....	3-56
3.11.1	Operational Staffing and Funding.....	3-56
3.11.2	Operations Facilities and Infrastructure	3-57
3.11.3	Partnerships.....	3-60
3.12	Access and Circulation	3-63
3.12.1	Access and Circulation in Maryland.....	3-63
3.12.2	Access and Circulation in Virginia	3-72
3.13	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	3-75
3.13.1	Visitor Use.....	3-75
3.13.2	Visitor Activities and Related Facilities	3-76
3.13.3	Opportunities for Visitors with Disabilities.....	3-82
3.13.4	Commercial Services, Special Uses, and Tours	3-83
3.13.5	Visitor Orientation, Interpretation, and Education	3-83
3.14	Socio-economic Environment	3-86
3.14.1	Regional Context – Worcester and Accomack Counties.....	3-87
3.14.2	Gateways to the Seashore	3-89
3.14.3	Economic Benefits of Tourism	3-94
3.14.4	Economic Benefits of Assateague Island National Seashore	3-95
4.	Environmental Consequences	
4.1	General Methodology for Analyzing Impacts.....	4-1
4.1.1	Geographic Area Evaluated for Impacts	4-1

4.1.2	Analysis of Impacts	4-1
4.1.3	Assessing Impacts Using CEQ Criteria	4-2
4.2	Water Resources	4-4
4.2.1	Methodology	4-4
4.2.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-5
4.2.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-11
4.2.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-13
4.2.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-17
4.2.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience.....	4-25
4.3	Vegetation.....	4-30
4.3.1	Methodology	4-30
4.3.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-31
4.3.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-37
4.3.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-38
4.3.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-43
4.3.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience.....	4-50
4.4	Wildlife	4-55
4.4.1	Methodology	4-55
4.4.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-56
4.4.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-63
4.4.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-64
4.4.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-70
4.4.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience.....	4-77
4.5	Federally Listed Threatened or Endangered Species	4-82
4.5.1	Methodology	4-82
4.5.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-83
4.5.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-89
4.5.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-90
4.5.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-95
4.5.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience.....	4-102
4.6	Historic Structures.....	4-108
4.6.1	Methodology	4-108
4.6.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-109
4.6.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-111
4.6.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-111
4.6.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-113
4.6.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience.....	4-115
4.7	Cultural Landscapes	4-117
4.7.1	Methodology	4-117
4.7.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-118

4.7.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-120
4.7.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-120
4.7.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-122
4.7.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience	4-124
4.8	Seashore Operations	4-126
4.8.1	Methodology	4-126
4.8.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-127
4.8.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-131
4.8.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-132
4.8.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-135
4.8.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience	4-139
4.9	Access and Circulation	4-143
4.9.1	Methodology	4-143
4.9.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-144
4.9.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-148
4.9.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-149
4.9.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-151
4.9.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience	4-155
4.10	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	4-159
4.10.1	Methodology	4-159
4.10.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-160
4.10.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-164
4.10.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-164
4.10.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-169
4.10.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience	4-174
4.11	Socio-economic Environment	4-178
4.11.1	Methodology	4-178
4.11.2	Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management	4-179
4.11.3	Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives	4-183
4.11.4	Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation	4-184
4.11.5	Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation.....	4-187
4.11.6	Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience	4-192
4.12	Relationship between Local Short-term Uses of the Environment and Maintenance of Long-term Productivity	4-196
4.13	Irreversible or Irretrievable Commitments of Resources	4-196
4.12.1	Alternative 1	4-196
4.12.2	Alternative 2	4-196
4.12.3	Alternative 3	4-197
4.12.4	Alternative 4	4-197
4.14	Adverse Impacts that could not be Avoided	4-197

4.12.1	Alternative 1	4-197
4.12.2	Alternative 2	4-198
4.12.3	Alternative 3	4-198
4.12.4	Alternative 4	4-198

5. Consultation and Coordination

5.1	Public Involvement and Agency Coordination	5-1
5.2	Section 106 Consultation	5-6
5.3	Section 7 Consultation	5-7
5.4	Consultation with State Natural Resource Management Agencies	5-8
5.5	Coastal Zone Management Act/Federal Consistency	5-8
5.6	Tribal Coordination	5-9
5.7	Draft GMP/EIS Document Review	5-9
5.8	List of Preparers	5-10
5.9	List of Draft GMP/EIS Recipients	5-12

Appendices

Appendix A	Assateague Island National Seashore Enabling Legislation	A-1
Appendix B	Memorandum of Understanding between the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Interagency Cooperation at Assateague Island National Seashore and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge	B-1
Appendix C	Agency Correspondence	C-1
Appendix D	Summary of Public Involvement Activities	D-1

References

Glossary

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	Regional Location.....	1-3
Figure 1.2	Seashore Ownership and Management Responsibilities	1-5
Figure 2.1	Seashore Places	2-9
Figure 2.2	Alternative 2 – Management Zones	2-37
Figure 2.3	Alternative 3 – Management Zones	2-49
Figure 2.4	Alternative 4 – Management Zones	2-65
Figure 3.1	Assateague Island National Seashore (subarea key)	3-2
Figure 3.2a	North End.....	3-3
Figure 3.2b	Developed Area	3-4
Figure 3.2c	Backcountry	3-5
Figure 3.2d	Toms Cove	3-6
Figure 3.3	General Barrier Island Geomorphic Processes	3-10
Figure 3.4	Accelerated Erosion Caused by Jetties, Groins, and Other Efforts to Stabilize the Ocean City Inlet	3-11
Figure 3.5	Cultural Resources	3-49

Figure 3.6	Park Asset Analysis – Summary of Findings	3-60
Figure 3.7	Regional Access to the Seashore	3-65
Figure 3.8	Seashore Access and Circulation	3-66
Figure 3.9	Visitor Use and Visitor Experience	3-77
Figure 3.10	Gateway Communities.....	3-90

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Interpretive Themes	1-24
Table 1.2	Legislative Mandates	1-26
Table 1.3	Other Special Mandates	1-28
Table 1.4	Special Seashore Designations.....	1-30
Table 1.5	Impact Topics Retained for Further Analysis	1-37
Table 2.1	Overall Management Concepts for the Alternatives	2-1
Table 2.2	Alternative 1 – Planned and Programmed Projects.....	2-17
Table 2.3	Management Zone Summary – Common to Alternatives 2, 3, and 4	2-20
Table 2.4	Desired Conditions by Management Zone and Area – Common to Alternatives 2, 3, and 4	2-22
Table 2.5	Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 – Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Conditions.....	2-35
Table 2.6	Alternative 2 – Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Conditions	2-45
Table 2.7	Alternative 3 – Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Conditions	2-60
Table 2.8	Alternative 4 – Examples of Actions Needed to Achieve Desired Conditions	2-74
Table 2.9	Indicators and Standards	2-77
Table 2.10	Mitigation Measures included in the Alternatives	2-79
Table 2.11	Alternative Cost Comparison (2012 dollars)	2-83
Table 2.12	Comparison of Alternatives (Maryland District)	2-84
Table 2.13	Comparison of Alternatives (Virginia District)	2-89
Table 2.14	Comparison of Impacts of the Alternatives	2-91
Table 2.15	Summary of Future Implementation Planning Needs (NPS Preferred Alternative	2-109
Table 3.1	Assateague Island National Seashore – Climate Change Projections	3-9
Table 3.2	Dominant Vegetative Communities.....	3-21
Table 3.3	Plant Species of Special Concern (Maryland)	3-24
Table 3.4	Wildlife Species of Special Concern (Maryland)	3-37
Table 3.5	Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species	3-40
Table 3.6	Generalized Seashore Asset Analysis Categories.....	3-59
Table 3.7	Volunteers in Park Program Participation	3-60
Table 3.8	Entities that Help the NPS Accomplish Its Mission at Assateague Island National Seashore.....	3-61
Table 3.9	Parking Areas (for public use)	3-67
Table 3.10	Storm Damage to Toms Cove Recreational Beach Facilities (1991 through 2011)	3-74
Table 3.11	Total Visitation (1967-2012)	3-75
Table 3.12	Visitor Use Statistics (2000 -2012)	3-76
Table 3.13	Accessible Facilities.....	3-82
Table 3.14	Housing, Employment, and Income Overview (200 and 2010Total Visitation (1967-2011)	3-87
Table 3.15	Employment by Industry – 2010 Annual Average	3-88

Table 3.16	Gateway Community Population, Housing, and Employment Overview – 2000 and 2010	3-91
Table 3.17	Economic Impacts of Tourism (2010)	3-95
Table 3.18	Local-Level Impacts of NPS Visitor Spending	3-95
Table 4.1	Estimated Local-Level Impacts of NPS Visitor Spending on Local Economies – Alternative 1	4-181
Table 4.2	Estimated Local-Level Impacts of NPS Visitor Spending on Local Economies – Alternative 2	4-185
Table 4.3	Estimated Local-Level Impacts of NPS Visitor Spending on Local Economies – Alternative 3	4-188
Table 4.4	Estimated Local-Level Impacts of NPS Visitor Spending on Local Economies – Alternative 4	4-193
Table 5.1	Summary of Public Involvement and Agency Coordination	5-2