

Frequently Asked Questions

Southeast Region Coastal Species of Concern Predator Management Plan/ Programmatic Environmental Assessment

What is the purpose and scope of this plan?

The purpose of the plan is to determine which tools and methods could be used in Southeast Region (SER) coastal park units to ensure protection of coastal species of concern from depredation. The methodology of the approach is to provide a “tool box” of tools and methods that allow parks to protect these species.

How was the scope determined?

The scope of the plan was determined by the SER based on input from park units regarding depredation of coastal species of concern, which includes both federally listed threatened and endangered species and state listed species. Many park units in the region have coastal and dune habitats that support species of concern, which are especially vulnerable during their breeding/nesting season.

What is a programmatic NEPA document?

When a federal agency prepares a plan like this one, it triggers the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The NPS must consider the environmental impacts of its proposed action and alternatives to that proposed action, before making a decision on what action to take. NEPA also requires the NPS to disclose these proposed actions to the public when making decisions that have the potential to cause environmental impacts. In this case, the NPS has determined that a programmatic environmental assessment should be prepared to complete the NEPA review for this plan. Programmatic NEPA reviews address the general environmental issues relating to broad decisions. They can effectively frame the scope of subsequent site-specific NEPA reviews. Programmatic NEPA reviews are governed by the same regulations and guidance that apply to site-specific NEPA reviews.

Why is the NPS proposing a programmatic approach versus a park-specific approach?

An advantage of a programmatic NEPA review in this case is that it will result in a decision regarding which tools and methods will be used in SER park units, and will contain impact analyses for those tools and methods, which can then be incorporated into park-specific environmental assessments (EAs). Park units will be able to complete focused, concise park-specific EAs that tier off of analysis in the programmatic EA and the decision made at the conclusion of the programmatic EA process. By having a programmatic document available to tier from, park units will be able to efficiently create a very focused and concise park-specific document. Park-specific EAs would address where and when each park would use the tools and methods included in the selected action from the programmatic EA; they should not need to revisit what tools can or should be used to control predators in park-specific EAs. They would also include park-specific compliance with other laws and requirements (e.g., Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Tribal Consultation, etc.).

Is the programmatic plan intended to include all coastal park units in the Southeast Region with species of concern?

The programmatic plan will be applicable to all coastal parks in the region where the species of concern included in the plan are present. The plan will address species of concern that are common to coastal areas of the southeast region. It will focus on species, tools, and methods; not individual parks.

Data and information from the coastal park units in SER where the included species of concern are present will be used to characterize the affected environment and environmental consequences of the actions. If a park has some or all of the conditions that are covered in this plan then it will be able to tier off of the programmatic EA, with a park specific NEPA document, should that unit choose to do so. Additional information that is relevant to specific park units but is not included in the programmatic EA will be included in park-specific EAs at the time they are prepared.

Will all SER coastal park units with these species be required to implement the actions identified in the programmatic EA?

A park unit would not implement the actions identified in the programmatic EA unless it determines there is a need to take action to protect coastal species of concern from depredation. The programmatic EA will provide an excellent starting point for parks when they are ready to initiate their own effort. However, if a specific park unit does not feel the need to address depredation, or addressing depredation is not feasible due to other priorities, it would not be forced to do so as a result of the programmatic EA process. The intent is that for the sake of efficiency, park units will use the programmatic plan to the degree necessary to address specific issues, once they determine there is a need to take action.

How long will it take to finish the plan/programmatic EA?

NPS anticipates completing the plan/programmatic EA in the summer of 2018. The Regional Director for the Southeast Region will sign the decision document, which will formally select one of the alternatives for implementation.

If a park unit wants to implement actions identified in the programmatic EA, what additional steps are required at the park level?

A park unit would review the programmatic EA and determine which issues are relevant in its park. The park unit would then complete a park-specific EA that would address those issues, and would examine where and when the park would use the tools and methods included in the selected action from the programmatic EA; the park would not need to revisit what tools can or should be used to control predators in park-specific EAs. In many cases the park-specific EA could include only one or two action alternatives. Park-specific EAs would also need to address compliance with other laws and requirements (e.g., Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Tribal Consultation, etc.).

What are coastal species of concern?

For purposes of this plan, coastal species of concern are those species with federal designations as proposed, candidate, threatened, or endangered, and species with special designation by Southeast Region states. For this plan, examples of these species are snowy and piping plover shorebirds, least tern, loggerhead sea turtle, green sea turtle, Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, southeastern beach mouse and Perdido Key beach mouse.

What predators would this plan focus on?

This plan would focus on the protection of coastal species of concern. Common coastal predator species that depredate coastal species of concern include coyote, fox, raccoon, fish crow, feral hog, and armadillo. The plan would focus, generally, on tools or methods to decrease predation of coastal species of concern. Park units would more specifically identify coastal predators in the tiered, site-specific EA.

What predator control methods will NPS consider?

The alternatives in the programmatic plan will likely be presented as a “tool-box” approach, meaning there would be a wide variety of tools and methods analyzed, and park units can use the selected alternative to protect coastal species of concern from depredation. NPS is proposing to analyze both lethal and non-lethal tools for the management of predators. These tools could include exclusion fencing and screening, managing trash and other attractants, relocating predators within a park, and lethal removal of predators. Under the proposed action, the NPS would implement a comprehensive year-round program using a combination of lethal and non-lethal tools. The NPS is also considering the use of non-lethal control tools only, as well as a predator management program where species-specific thresholds for each park would be developed before predator control would occur.

How will the input of interested persons and groups (e.g., stakeholders) be obtained and included in the decision-making process?

NPS has arranged a series of opportunities to encourage public awareness and involvement in the plan including webinars and a newsletter. The public scoping period is used to gather public feedback on the range of preliminary alternative concepts and environmental issues to be considered in the plan. The public is invited to submit comments through April 15, 2017. Following this public comment period, NPS will analyze and consider all substantive feedback and begin the preparation of the programmatic environmental assessment. The public will have the opportunity to comment on the programmatic environmental assessment upon its release.

NPS has identified a proposed action, is this pre-decisional?

No. A proposed action is only the initial NPS proposal to address the purpose and need. The proposed action is one option or alternative for addressing the purpose and need. A proposed action is not necessarily, but may become during the NEPA process, the preferred alternative. While we start the NEPA process with a proposed action, during the development of alternatives and impact analysis, we may determine that there are other, better or less impactful ways to address the purpose and need and ultimately, one of those other alternatives may become the preferred alternative. No decision to implement any action can be made until the NEPA process is complete.