



Foundation Document Overview

Dry Tortugas National Park

Florida



Contact Information

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Purpose



DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK preserves and protects the unique subtropical marine ecosystem and natural, cultural, and scenic resources of the Dry Tortugas for the education, inspiration, scientific understanding, and enjoyment of present and future generations.



Significance

Significance statements express why Dry Tortugas National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Dry Tortugas National Park protects one of the most pristine and diverse portions of the 170-mile-long Florida Keys Reef Tract, which is the only living coral barrier reef in the continental United States and the third-largest barrier reef system in the world.
- The marine ecosystems within Dry Tortugas National Park provide rare, high-quality habitats for feeding, spawning, and the recruitment of a diversity of fish and other marine species, which contributes to sustainable fish populations along the rest of Florida and the Atlantic Coast, supporting a multibillion-dollar fishery.
- Dry Tortugas National Park protects one of the most isolated and least disturbed feeding and nesting habitats for several species of threatened and endangered sea turtles in the United States.
- Dry Tortugas National Park supports the only significant sooty tern, brown noddy, masked booby, and frigate bird nesting colonies in the continental United States, and serves as a remote shelter for thousands of migratory birds each year.



Significance



- The imposing presence of Fort Jefferson, unrivaled in its 19th century technological innovations and ambitious scale, represents more than 100 years of military history in the Dry Tortugas and illustrates this location's strategic importance and the role of coastal defenses in the protection of the United States.
- At the nautical crossroads of the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea, the Dry Tortugas have a rich maritime heritage that includes one of the greatest concentrations of shipwrecks in North America as well as historic navigational aids such as the Dry Tortugas Light Station on Loggerhead Key and the Garden Key Harbor Light.
- Dry Tortugas National Park continues a legacy of scientific research and scholarship regarding the relationship between humans and the marine environment, a legacy that began in 1904 with establishment of the Tortugas Marine Biological Laboratory by the Carnegie Institution for Science, and continues today with implementation of the park's research natural area and innovations in historic preservation.
- The vast expanses of open sea and sky, along with the remote location of Dry Tortugas National Park, offer unique recreational opportunities and visitor experiences in a subtropical marine environment unlike any other in the national park service.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Subtropical Marine Ecosystem, including the Coral Reef Community**
- **Terrestrial Islands Habitats**
- **Fish and Shellfish**
- **Sea Turtles**
- **Birds**
- **Military History Resources**
- **Maritime Heritage Resources**
- **Scientific Research and Education**
- **Sensory Experiences of the Dry Tortugas**
- **Recreational Opportunities**

Dry Tortugas National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Monuments**
- **Museum Collections**
- **Carnegie Institution Tortugas Marine Biological Laboratory**



Description

Dry Tortugas National Park is approximately 70 miles west of Key West in the Straits of Florida, and consists of roughly 101 square miles at the westernmost extent of the Florida Keys. The park currently encompasses seven keys which account for less than one-fifth of a square mile and include Garden, Loggerhead, Bush, Long, East, Hospital, and Middle Keys, collectively known as the Dry Tortugas. These keys were of strategic importance for national defense, and the underwater reefs have posed a serious navigation hazard to passing ships over the centuries, making this area one of the nation's principal ship graveyards.

Dry Tortugas National Park protects a rich biodiversity of coastal and marine life, including seagrass beds, diverse fisheries, and high-quality sea turtle and bird nesting habitat. The subtropical coral reefs of the Dry Tortugas are some of the most pristine on the continent. The park's designated no-take research natural area protects spawning habitat that supports healthy fish populations and a diversity of other aquatic species that spread to other areas of the Straits of Florida and beyond, resulting in benefits to regional fisheries far beyond the park's boundary. These resources play a vital role in sustaining Florida's coastal ecosystems and fisheries.

