

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service, Northeast Region**

RECORD OF DECISION

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
Fire Island National Seashore, New York**

INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS), has prepared this Record of Decision (ROD) for the General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (GMP/EIS) for Fire Island National Seashore. This ROD identifies the decision/selected action, including mitigation measures; describes other alternatives analyzed; identifies the environmentally preferable alternative; and includes a brief discussion of the rationale for the decision reached. In accordance with NPS policy, a non-impairment determination is attached.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The purpose of a General Management Plan (GMP) is to have 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 National Seashore 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. The approved GMP will serve as the foundation for all subsequent planning and management decisions. As specific actions in the approved GMP are implemented, site-specific planning, public involvement, and compliance would be carried out in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other applicable laws and NPS policies.

NEED FOR THE PLAN

Fire Island National Seashore's last General Management Plan (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. Since 1977, a number of new management conditions and challenges have emerged:

- Seven miles of the barrier island became federally designated wilderness;
- Five federally listed threatened and endangered species have been identified;
- Vector-borne diseases like Lyme disease and West Nile Virus have emerged as resource management issues;

- The Seashore assumed responsibility for the management of two major cultural resource areas – Fire Island Light on the west end of the island and the 613-acre William Floyd Estate on Long Island; and
- Subsequent cultural resource studies have deepened the NPS’ understanding of the full extent of cultural resources represented across Fire Island.

PLANNING PRIORITIES

Through the planning process, the planning team identified the following list of planning issues and priorities:

- Acknowledging the dynamic character of the barrier island, and addressing climate change and sea-level rise
- Recognizing a complex mosaic of jurisdictions
- Reinterpreting island resources; both natural and cultural
- Placing new emphasis on marine and ocean- based resources
- Broadening the park’s visitation
- Addressing aging infrastructure
- The William Floyd estate
 - o Defining the Message
 - o Creating an education destination
 - o Improving access
 - o Addressing health, safety and security for visitors and staff
 - o Improving relationships with neighbors and local agencies

MANAGEMENT GOALS

Management goals articulate the ideal conditions that NPS managers strive to attain in perpetuity. Following are specific goals for Fire Island National Seashore (not listed in priority order):

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Partner with the public, Fire Island communities, state and local governments, and others in the stewardship and preservation of Fire Island’s natural and cultural resources and its distinctive character.
- Provide for the stewardship of the coastal environment and its cultural and natural systems, while recognizing that the Seashore is part of a larger ecological, social, economic, and cultural context.
- Management decisions about natural and cultural resources are based on scholarly and scientific information, fundamental resources and values, consultation with appropriate agencies and communities, and consideration of the broader context of the resources and Fire Island.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

- Partner with others to ensure that land-use and development practices undertaken on Fire Island promote ecological health and environmental quality in this dynamic environment,

and acknowledge and respect the community character and the continued presence of Fire Island's communities.

SEASHORE EXPERIENCE

- Through outreach and education, the Seashore will foster public understanding and appreciation of the purpose and significance of the Seashore and its natural and cultural resources, as well as the public's vital stewardship role in protecting Fire Island.
- Provide a wide variety of quality recreational and interpretive experiences for a broad range of audiences, emphasizing human interactions with the environment and the historical and cultural values of the Seashore.

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS

- Preserve the "roadless" character of Fire Island and ensure that water-based transportation is the primary form of access to Fire Island whenever and wherever feasible.
- Ensure that the transportation routes to and from NPS facilities on Fire Island and Long Island are well known, well-marked, and easy and safe to navigate.
- Enable broad access to NPS facilities by all members of the public regardless of income or physical ability to the greatest extent practicable.

PARK OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE/FACILITIES

- Provide a safe, healthy, and accessible environment for visitors, residents, and NPS employees as feasible and appropriate.
- Develop facilities that are environmentally sensitive and sustainable and can be adapted to the changing environment.
- Assume a leadership role in implementing sustainable design and management practices.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION)

The NPS decision is to implement Management Alternative 3 for Fire Island and Management Alternative B for the William Floyd Estate as described in the Draft GMP/EIS and as amended by the errata in the Abbreviated Final GMP/EIS, and which were identified in both as the NPS preferred alternatives. The selected action is briefly described below. Where the term "GMP/EIS" is used, it refers collectively to the Draft GMP/EIS and the Abbreviated Final GMP/EIS.

The Seashore includes two separate and distinct units – Fire Island and the William Floyd Estate (the Estate) on Long Island. Also located on Long Island in the Village of Patchogue is the Seashore's headquarters and primary maintenance facility, and the Patchogue-Watch Hill Ferry Terminal. 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 each unit, the selected action includes two separate management alternatives, one for Fire Island and one for the William Floyd Estate.

The selected action also incorporates a Wilderness Stewardship Plan for the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dunes Wilderness Area (Fire Island Wilderness) located in the Fire Island unit of the Seashore. Although a Wilderness Stewardship Plan is typically completed after a GMP is approved, the Draft Wilderness Stewardship Plan was appended to the Draft GMP/EIS so that the two documents could be circulated for public review concurrently, affording the public an opportunity to better understand how management of the wilderness is incorporated into the overall management of the Seashore. A final Wilderness Stewardship Plan will be approved and released after this Record of Decision.

SUMMARY OF THE SELECTED ACTION

COOPERATIVE STEWARDSHIP - The NPS will 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 proposes the creation of a regular forum for communication, coordination, and collaboration in managing Fire Island.

COASTAL LAND USE AND SHORELINE MANAGEMENT PLAN - The NPS will 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 plan for Fire Island. 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 multi-lateral, collaborative effort.

MARINE RESOURCES - NPS will 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.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT - The NPS will collaborate with others, including the Fire Island communities and local towns to revise the Secretary's zoning standards and to address local land use regulations and inconsistencies, provide greater specificity and/or guidance, and to define with greater clarity the role of NPS. The NPS will seek the necessary authority to realign 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 Fire Island Wilderness would continue to be managed to maintain its wilderness character consistent with the Wilderness Act, as outlined in the final Wilderness Stewardship Plan that is incorporated into the selected action.

RECOGNIZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN USE AND NATURE - The selected action 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. 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. The Seashore experience and interpretation would recognize the relationship between human involvement with the dynamic natural landscape of the barrier island. Existing infrastructure would be retained and, over time, would be improved and/or reoriented to be greener, more efficient, and better adapted to the coastal environment.

WILLIAM FLOYD ESTATE AS A HISTORICAL PARK AND MUSEUM – The selected action advances 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.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Management Alternative 1 (No-Action Alternative).

Under management alternative 1, current management practices and the use of approved and interim plans would continue. NPS would continue to collaborate with local, county, and state officials on an as-needed basis to address common regulatory, policy, and management issues. The NPS would continue to meet day-to-day operations, management, legal, and regulatory requirements based on existing plans and the availability of funds.

Management Alternative 2.

Under management alternative 2, greater emphasis would be placed on the protection and restoration of natural, ecological systems, patterns, and resources 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 resources. A proactive, collaborative approach to stewardship among existing and new partners would be considered fundamental to the plan's success.

Management Alternative A (No-Action Alternative for the William Floyd Estate).

Under management alternative A, current management practices and the use of approved and interim plans would continue at the William Floyd Estate. 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.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION REACHED

In selecting Management Alternative 3 in combination with Management Alternative B, the NPS evaluated each alternative based on its ability to meet planning priorities and management goals and convey the greatest number of significant beneficial results relative to its potential impacts in comparison with other alternatives as discussed in the GMP/EIS. The selected action encourages cooperative stewardship of Fire Island's dynamic coastal environment and its cultural and natural systems because it incorporates a holistic approach that considers both the need to protect the resources of the Seashore and the needs of the residents and the public. The emphasis on partnerships and collaboration under Management Alternative 3, plus the heightened recognition of the cultural resources represented across Fire Island, will do the most to protect the resources of the Seashore while recognizing its larger ecological, social, economic, and cultural context. This combination would also meet the specific needs and management goals related to the William Floyd Estate.

Management Alternative 2 fails to meet or fully meet the planning priorities and management goals and does not address the cultural overlay or cooperative stewardship that is necessary for the NPS and the Seashore to address the planning needs that have emerged since the previous GMP. Although emphasis is placed on the natural resources of the Seashore, the visitor experience would be narrowed, as well as opportunities to highlight the cultural resources of Fire Island, including the communities.

Both Management Alternative 1 and Management Alternative A (No-Action alternatives) fail to meet or fully meet the objectives of the plan, since no action would be taken to address the need for a new General Management Plan in order to direct and guide park managers in subsequent planning and management for Fire Island and the William Floyd Estate. There would be no overarching direction for addressing the new management needs and challenges that have emerged since the previous GMP was completed. The Seashore would remain in the position of having to address issues such as climate change and new recreational uses on an individual or ad hoc basis rather than in the context of a comprehensive GMP.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

After evaluating the potential impacts of the management alternatives on cultural and natural resources, the NPS has determined that the selected action - Management Alternative 3 in combination with Management Alternative B as described for the William Floyd Estate - is the environmentally preferable alternative because it best protects, preserves, and enhances the Seashore's natural, cultural, and recreational resources. The selected action 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.

CONCLUSION

Overall, among the five alternatives considered, the selected combination of actions best meets the purpose, need, and objectives of the plan/EIS and is expected to support the long-term management directives for the Seashore. These actions protect and highlight the natural and cultural resources at Fire Island National Seashore.

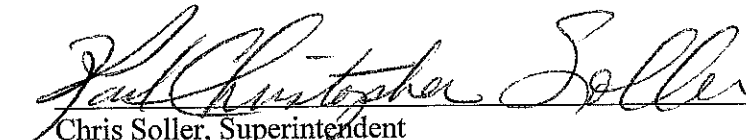
The required "no-action period" before approval of this Record of Decision began on October 21, 2016, with publication by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of a Notice of Availability of the Abbreviated Final GMP/EIS in the *Federal Register* (81 FR 936). The no-action period ended on November 20, 2016.

This Record of Decision and the Draft and Abbreviated Final GMP/EIS constitute the record of the environmental impact analysis and decision-making process for the General Management Plan for Fire Island National Seashore.


The official responsible for approving this Record of Decision is the Regional Director, Northeast Region, National Park Service.

The official responsible for implementing the selected alternative is the Superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore, New York.

RECOMMENDED:

 December 15, 2016
Chris Soller, Superintendent
Fire Island National Seashore Date

APPROVED:

 December 16, 2016
Michael A. Caldwell, Regional Director
Northeast Region, National Park Service Date

Fire Island National Seashore General Management Plan Non-Impairment Determination

By enacting the NPS Organic Act of 1916 (Organic Act), Congress directed the U.S. Department of Interior and the NPS to manage “to conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wild life in the [National Park] System units and to provide for the enjoyment of the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wild life in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (54 USC 100101(a)). Congress reaffirmed this mandate in 1978 by stating that NPS must conduct its actions in a manner that will ensure no “derogation of the values and purposes for which the System units have been established, except as directly and specifically provided by Congress.” (54 USC 100101(b)(2)).

NPS Management Policies 2006, Section 1.4.4, explains the prohibition on impairment of park resources and values:

While Congress has given the Service the management discretion to allow impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement (generally enforceable by the federal courts) that the Park Service must leave park resources and values unimpaired unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise. This, the cornerstone of the Organic Act, establishes the primary responsibility of the Nation Park Service. It ensures that park resources and values will continue to exist in a condition that will allow the American people to have present and future opportunities for enjoyment of them.

The NPS has discretion to allow impacts on Park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a Park (NPS 2006 sec. 1.4.3). However, the NPS cannot allow an adverse impact that would constitute impairment of the affected resources and values (NPS 2006 sec 1.4.3). An action constitutes an impairment when its impacts “harm the integrity of Park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values” (NPS 2006 sec 1.4.5). To determine impairment, the NPS must evaluate “the particular resources and values that would be affected; the severity, duration, and timing of the impact; the direct and indirect effects of the impact; and the cumulative effects of the impact in question and other impacts” (NPS 2006 sec 1.4.5).

This determination on impairment has been prepared for the selected action described in this Record of Decision. An impairment determination is made for all natural and cultural resource impact topics analyzed for the selected action. An impairment determination is not made for visitor use and experience, Fire Island communities and adjacent landowners, public health and safety, and Seashore operations because impairment findings relate to park resources and values, and these impact areas are not generally considered to be park resources or values according to the Organic Act; thus, these cannot be impaired in the same way that an action can impair park resources and values and are not subject to the impairment standard of the Organic Act. Similarly, while wilderness is subject to its own requirements under the Wilderness Act, it is not

itself a park resource or value subject to the impairment standard of the Organic Act, and is not included here.

Natural Resources

The selected action will not result in impairment of natural resources at Fire Island National Seashore because the selected action supports natural processes, thereby protecting the habitats and wildlife therein. The selected action encourages scientific and scholarly research that will support managers by better understanding the natural resources of Fire Island and inform its management. The selected action identifies the continued collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies and management in accordance with all applicable laws, policies, and regulations. Each natural resource analyzed in detail in the GMP/EIS is addressed below.

Coastal Processes and Floodplains

Coastal processes influence Fire Island's physical formation and evolution overtime. The selected action will not result in impairment because it protects, and where possible, enhances or reestablishes natural coastal processes which, in turn will create a more sustainable and resilient barrier island. Encouragement of scientific and scholarly research will support managers by better understanding the natural resources of Fire Island and its management.

The selected action will result in notably improved conditions within the context of the barrier island system through future planning efforts such as a shoreline management plan that will promote the restoration/enhancement of coastal processes, erosion buffers, and restoration of coastal habitats. This planning effort would be informed through a comprehensive research and monitoring program in coordination with the North Atlantic Coast Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU), other appropriate CESUs within the national network, and other applicable agencies. The Seashore would engage in strategies that seek to mitigate the Seashore's contribution to climate change as well as adapt to the associated changing conditions. These strategies would include educating NPS staff, its partners, and the public about climate change and sea-level rise to encourage adaptive planning at a larger scale. All of these efforts under the selected action will benefit coastal processes and floodplains and will not result in impairment of these resources.

Water Resources

A significant percentage of Fire Island National Seashore's natural resources consist of marine, estuarine, and wetland habitats that supports a complex system of flora and fauna. The selected action will not result in impairment of water resources because the selected action supports increased research focused around water resources, including marine, estuarine habitats and ground water. The selected action also calls for an increase in partnerships between the Seashore, Fire Island communities, and local and state agencies and institutions to better understand the impacts of inadequate ground water treatment on Fire Island and nearby communities on the main land of Long Island. Such efforts are expected to result in long-term improvement in water quality conditions within the Seashore and adjoining marine waters.

Vegetation

Native vegetation is necessary to fulfill the purposes for which the Seashore was established and is key to the natural and cultural integrity and enjoyment of the Seashore. Vegetation is part of diverse ecosystems and the basis for ecological communities, meaning that other important resources (including coastal processes) depend on vegetation. The selected action may result in adverse impacts on vegetation where facility development, repair and maintenance, and visitor uses occur. However, the selected action will not result in impairment of vegetation because it focuses on protection, restoration and regeneration of native species through actions such as developing and implementing an invasive species management plan, increased education programming, careful planning and design that directs human uses away from sensitive vegetation, and support for continued research related to vegetation communities and climate change that may help find ways to improve the resiliency of the vegetation on Fire Island.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

The Seashore is responsible for maintaining all plants and animals native to the park's ecosystems as described in *NPS Management Policies 2006* (section 4.4et seq.). The selected action will not result in impairment of wildlife and wildlife habitat because of interrelated planning, research and monitoring, and protection efforts associated with other resources. As components of wildlife habitat, the protection of coastal processes and floodplains, water resources, and vegetation subsequently protect wildlife habitat and wildlife by providing sustainable nesting and foraging habitat for local fauna.

Through collaboration with the agencies, institutions, and the public to monitor and research wildlife communities, the Seashore will be informed on how best to protect and conserve wildlife habitat and wildlife. These efforts include utilizing volunteer bird-watching groups, and educating the residents of Fire Island and the public on wildlife biology and human-wildlife interactions at the Seashore.

Special-Status Species

The NPS is mandated to manage and protect state and federal special-status species within the Seashore. The selected alternative will not result in impairment of special-status species because the alternative continues the Seashore's efforts of monitoring, protecting, and conducting research of these species. Routine surveys to locate and document population numbers of listed plants and animals would continue as well as assessment of these resources and compilation of data. The Seashore's Threatened and Endangers Species Plan will be updated to incorporate more up-to-date information on the park's resources and best protection measures. Other efforts associated with the protection of other natural resources under the selected alternative would benefit special-status species, as well.

Cultural Resources

The selected alternative will not result in impairment of cultural resources at Fire Island National Seashore because the selected action supports the protection and conservation of the Seashore's cultural landscapes, historic structures, archeological resources, and museum collections. The selected action encourages research and future planning efforts that will support the continued

and enhanced protection of the cultural resources of Fire Island and the William Floyd Estate. The selected action identifies strategic planning for protecting cultural resources, identifying new cultural resources, and collaborating with local partners to promote historic education and research opportunities. Each cultural resource analyzed in detail in the GMP/EIS is addressed below.

Cultural Landscapes

Fire Island represents a cultural landscape that has been shaped by both human intervention and the forces of nature. In particular, the cultural landscape associated with the Fire Island Light Station and the William Floyd Estate are considered fundamental resources of Fire Island National Seashore.

Under the selected action, the NPS would undertake research and documentation of federal cultural properties (Fire Island Light Station, Carrington Estate, William Floyd Estate), including the preparation of historic resource studies and cultural landscape reports. These research initiatives would provide the necessary guidance to understand, interpret, and treat the Seashore's currently identified cultural landscapes. These efforts are expected to result in the greater protection and preservation of character-defining features associated with the Fire Island Light Station and the William Floyd Estate through either rehabilitation or restoration. Therefore, implementation of the selected action will not result in impairment of the cultural landscapes of Fire Island.

Historic Structures

The Fire Island Lighthouse, the Fire Island Light Station district, the Old Mastic House at the William Floyd Estate, and The Carrington House and Cottage are all on the National Register of Historic Places and are significant cultural resources for Fire Island National Seashore. Under the selected action, the NPS will undertake research and National Register documentation of historic properties at the William Floyd Estate, Sailors Haven and the Carrington Estate. These efforts will better inform management of the historic structures associated with these properties. At the William Floyd Estate, the Seashore will complete work on the stabilization of the Old Mastic house and continue to preserve and interpret the Estate's historic outbuildings. The selected action will not result in impairment of historic structures because these actions will improve the long-term protection and management of the Seashore's historic structures.

Archeological Resources

Under the selected action, the NPS will set properties and formulate a strategy for archeological resources management and research. Research will include work related to prehistoric archeological resources, resources at risk from coastal erosion, and submerged archeological resources. An outcome of the archeological research will be the creation of a comprehensive archeological management plan at the William Floyd Estate. The selected action will not result in impairment of archeological resources of Fire Island National Seashore because these initiatives would enhance efforts to protect archeological resources and result in long-term improvement in management and protection.

Museum Collections

The Seashore maintains a museum and archival collection that includes over 100,000 items that pertain to both the William Floyd Estate and Fire Island that has been recognized as a fundamental resource. The preservation of museum collections is an ongoing process of preventative conservation with the primary goal of preserving artifacts in as stable a condition as possible to prevent damage and minimize deterioration. The selected action will not result in impairment of museum collections because it would ensure the long-term protection of artifacts related to the fundamental resources of the Seashore. Efforts would include expansion and reorganization of the existing curatorial storage facility and improve collections storage, as well as workspace for conservation and research activities. NPS will work with Fire Island communities and others to identify, document, and protect Fire Island-related collections. The expansion and reorganization of the curatorial storage space could also reduce the risk of theft and damage to museum collections. In addition, encouragement of increased research opportunities and educational workshops would promote awareness of the historical importance and subsequent stewardship of these collections.

Conclusion

In the professional judgement of the NPS decision-maker, implementing the selected action will protect and improve the resources of the Seashore and will not result in impairment. This determination is based on consideration of the Seashore's purpose and significance, a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the final GMP/EIS, relevant scientific studies, the comments provided by the public and others, and the professional judgment of the decision maker guided by the direction of the *NPS Management Policies 2006* (NPS 2006).