



Dear Friends,

On behalf of the planning team I am pleased to share with you an update on our general management planning effort for Gulf Islands National Seashore. It has been more than two years (May 2004, before Hurricane Ivan's wrath) since we shared our first newsletter outlining the purpose and schedule of the planning effort with you. With the hurricanes in this region during 2004-2005, we put the planning effort on hold and focused on the more immediate needs of storm recovery. However, the substantial recovery efforts underway over the past months have generated renewed interests in confirming the long-term vision for managing national seashore resources and values. During the winter of 2006, we requested a restart of the general management planning effort at the national seashore.

An updated general management plan will help us refine our long-term goals for resource and visitor use management and provide a framework for future management decisions. The plan will guide the management direction of national seashore resources and values during the next 15 to 20 years. In the first newsletter we informed you about the start of this project and requested your comments about what you think is important about the national seashore, how the national seashore's significant resources should be managed, and what your visions are for the national seashore's future. We appreciated hearing about your ideas and visions. Using your prior input, as well as the foundation provided in the legislation establishing the national seashore, the purpose and significance statements, the primary interpretive themes, and the planning issues, the planning team has developed three preliminary alternative concepts for managing the national seashore for the next 15 to 20 years.

This newsletter is your first opportunity to review the work that the team has been engaged in and to respond to the preliminary management alternative concepts. We will be scheduling public meetings later this spring to share your ideas, and will notify you of the exact dates, time, and location once they have been scheduled. Please consider filling out the enclosed response form; we welcome your continued comments and guidance on this planning effort!

Sincerely,

Jerry Eubanks, Superintendent
Gulf Islands National Seashore



Preliminary Alternative Management Concepts

Developing a vision for the future is the primary role of the national seashore's general management plan. Several possible visions for the national seashore's future (called alternatives) are developed and analyzed before a preferred direction is selected. Evaluating a range of alternatives enables us to compare and contrast the advantages of one course of action over another, and provides a sound approach to decision making required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

Before engaging in a detailed analysis of each alternative, a preliminary range of alternatives is developed by the planning team to be shared with stakeholders for their review and input. The following alternative management concepts are brief statements that provide a unifying vision around which an alternative can be developed. Each concept must be guided by the planning framework of the national seashore's legislated purpose and its significance, planning issues, and primary interpretive themes (Sea, Sand, Salt Marshes, and Woodlands; Forts and Firepower; Preservation and Protection; Location and Legacy; and Recreation and Remembrances). It is intended that all of the interpretive themes would be covered, but with different emphasis, in each alternative. Additional information on each of the national seashore's primary interpretive themes is available on the national seashore's website.

The following preliminary alternative management concepts explore a range of possibilities for managing resources, shaping visitor experience, and providing facilities. Although each alternative has an explicit vision for the next 15 to 20 years, it should be recognized that these alternatives are not mutually exclusive. Many of the ideas will more than likely be repackaged as the preferred alternative in the next stage of the planning process.

Please review each alternative and tell us whether they reflect an appropriate range for further study and analysis. Keep in mind that in a general management plan the level of detail will remain fairly broad. It is possible that you may like some but not all the elements of one alternative, or that you may like a concept but disagree with the way we have translated it. Maybe you have an entirely different vision that would address the national seashore's planning issues. It would be most helpful to the planning team to understand the reasons for your likes and dislikes. With your comments we can reevaluate the alternatives and modify them as necessary. This is the kind of feedback that will help us formulate the best possible future direction for the national seashore.

As you review the alternatives on the next page, you might track the ideas and concepts that most closely represent your desired future for Gulf Islands National Seashore and forward those opinions on the accompanying comment response form. If you think we are overlooking possibilities, please forward those ideas as well.

Additional information regarding the Gulf Islands National Seashore General Management Plan, including a copy of the first newsletter, is available on the national seashore's website:

[http://www.nps.gov/guis/parkmgmt/
general-management-plan.htm](http://www.nps.gov/guis/parkmgmt/general-management-plan.htm)

or by contacting
the national seashore at:

Gulf Islands National Seashore
1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway
Gulf Breeze, FL 32563

850-934-2600 (FL)
228-875-9057 x100 (MS)

Alternative 1 – Continue Current Management Trends including Full Hurricane Recovery

Concept Statement

The current management trend would continue operations throughout the national seashore similar to that provided before the hurricanes of 2004-2005. The level of visitor services and facilities will be repaired, replaced, or recovered as nearly as possible to pre-hurricane conditions.

Cultural Resource Conditions

Based on the cultural resource condition assessments, stabilization efforts would continue on the historic fortifications, associated structures, archeological sites, and museum collections. Access by the public for interpretive purposes would resume when safe conditions can be ensured.

Natural Resource Conditions

Similar to cultural resource condition assessments, natural resource condition assessments would continue to determine the full extent of resource impacts sustained. Monitoring of flora and fauna recovery and reestablishment in the seashore would continue. However, stabilization efforts would not necessarily be implemented as many of the changes to seashore natural resources are part of the dynamics associated with coastal processes.

Visitor Experience

In this alternative, the emphasis would be to restore the national seashore to conditions prior to the devastation caused by the 2004-2005 hurricanes and to maintain that level into the future. Facilities and areas would be reopened as reconstruction is completed and safety hazards are eliminated.

Until all visitor facilities are repaired, popular visitor programs would be shifted to other areas. Emphasis would be placed on making museum and outdoor wayside exhibits accessible.

Lands on Cat Island that are owned by the National Park Service would continue to be managed for primitive recreational opportunities.



Alternative 2 – Adapt to and Promote Natural Processes

Concept Statement

The national seashore would be managed to encourage, unimpeded, the dynamic coastal processes of a barrier island system. The national seashore would provide visitors with the opportunity to explore the wild barrier islands and coastal seashores of the northern Gulf of Mexico. Visitor access, beach recreation, and management would adapt to the changing natural environment. Collaboration and cooperation between a consortium of academia, visiting scientists, other agencies, and conservation organizations (including hosting symposiums to promote coastal resource management, stewardship, and understanding of the Gulf of Mexico) would be encouraged and actively pursued. The historic coastal fortifications would continue to be stabilized for visitor exploration and interpretation of coastal occupation.

Cultural Resource Conditions

The current condition of the historic masonry forts, artillery batteries, and associated structures would be documented, stabilized, and preserved. Archeological sites would be tested to determine the level of significance, data potential, and condition. Subsequent to a major storm or other natural event, cultural resource conditions would be assessed and recovery efforts would be limited to repair and stabilization, and as possible, data acquisition from the impacted element. Collecting of museum objects would be focused on their applicability for future research and evaluation of coastal environments during the entire span of human occupation. Extensive use of these objects in educational/ interpretive displays would be encouraged.



Natural Resource Conditions

Natural systems would continue to evolve as part of the dynamic geologic, environmental, and ecological processes. Terrestrial and marine resources would adapt to the changing natural environment with minimal human and/or management intervention. Restoration measures would be limited to improve resource conditions that have been altered or impacted by human activity. This alternative would provide enhanced opportunities for scientific study and research to better determine the ecological health and vitality of the area, as well as to better understand the dynamic natural processes of the Gulf of Mexico coastal environment.

Visitor Experience

In this alternative, the emphasis would be to manage more of the national seashore for dispersed and primitive recreational opportunities. Visitors would have the opportunity to explore and recreate on vast sections of undeveloped barrier islands and the coastal mainland or at a few limited, developed recreational beaches.

The National Park Service would adapt their management actions to the changing natural conditions brought about by major storms while providing visitors with the opportunity to explore and witness the natural processes and dynamic environment of these coastal systems.

When major storms significantly impact barrier island roads and facilities, the developed recreational opportunities would be modified into more undeveloped and primitive activities. If the Fort Pickens Road or Perdido Key Road (east of Johnson Beach) are washed out by a storm, access could be modified and/or limited to modes such as boat, foot, or bicycle. Accommodations for interpretive/educational programs, visitor services, and recreational activities would adapt to these changing conditions.

The national seashore would provide visitors with opportunities for self-discovery while exploring the natural coastal environment in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

Lands on Cat Island that are owned by the National Park Service would be managed for primitive recreational opportunities.

Alternative 3 – Enhance Visitor Education

Concept Statement

Gulf Islands National Seashore would be managed as an outdoor classroom for exploring the natural and human history of the Gulf of Mexico's barrier islands and coastal environments. Interpretive programs would focus on illustrating how barrier islands act as protectors of the mainland coastline, and the part these islands have played in the last 5,000 years of historic human occupation. The national seashore would establish an environmental education center and develop an active stewardship program while providing educational and interpretive opportunities that explore the role that natural systems and coastal fortifications have played in the area. The wild and undeveloped nature of the national seashore would be maintained while providing visitor access to seashore educational and recreational opportunities.

Cultural Resource Conditions

Selected historic forts, artillery batteries, and associated structures would be rehabilitated to portray their appearance/function during a specific operational period(s). Actions would be taken to stabilize and preserve sites considered vulnerable to natural and human impacts. Unless data loss was otherwise expected, no archeological sites would be excavated. Extensive acquisition of natural and cultural museum objects would be used to document the regional Gulf Coast environment and serve as an important component of the national seashore's interpretive program and regional information base. Actions would not alter the integrity of historic properties to allow for the enhancement of visitor experience.

Natural Resource Conditions

The natural environment would serve as an outdoor laboratory for study of the natural systems of the Gulf Coast environment. Educational opportunities to learn dynamic natural processes of this coastal environment would be provided and expanded under this alternative. The natural evolution of geologic, environmental, and ecological processes would be explored by national seashore visitors. In nonsensitive areas, natural resources could be modified to accommodate limited development to support interpretive/educational programs, visitor services, and recreational activities.

Visitor Experience

In this alternative, the emphasis would be to manage the national seashore as an outdoor classroom for visitors to explore and learn about the Gulf of Mexico's coastal systems and human history while providing primitive recreational opportunities and access to recreational beaches.

Most national seashore facilities and trails would provide visitors with access to explore natural and cultural resources that illustrate the theme of islands as protectors, so that visitors could learn how barrier islands provide protection to the mainland coastline from the effects of major storms. In addition, visitors could explore the historic coastal fortifications and learn the strategies used to protect established communities from invading armies.

The National Park Service would establish an environmental education center to allow all ages to learn about the coastal environment and history of the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, a stewardship program could provide neighbors and visitors with an opportunity to participate in activities to preserve and protect the national seashore's resources.

Selected coastal fortifications would be enhanced with vignettes and furnishings relating to significant periods of their history so that visitors could more fully understand the role of the fortifications as protectors.

Lands on Cat Island that are managed by the National Park Service would be used for educational and research opportunities.



Alternative 4 – Expand and Diversify Visitor Opportunities

Concept Statement

Gulf Islands National Seashore would provide a diversity of recreational and visitor educational opportunities to experience the Gulf of Mexico coastal environments. The National Park Service would seek to collaborate with educational and cultural institutions, nonprofit organizations, and commercial services to provide a greater array of recreational and educational opportunities.

Cultural Resource Conditions

Where their integrity would not be compromised, the masonry forts, artillery batteries, and their associated structures would be adaptively used to support a diverse range of recreational, interpretive, and educational opportunities. Archeological sites listed or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Properties could be used for nonconsumptive interpretive and educational purposes. Museum objects specifically related to the national seashore could be used to support and broaden educational/ interpretive displays than what has existed in the past.

Natural Resource Conditions

Natural resources would be managed to provide a variety of settings that support access and opportunities for visitors. More intervention and management techniques might be required to provide such

opportunities while also protecting the natural environment to the greatest extent possible. In nonsensitive areas, natural resources could be modified to provide and accommodate a range of recreational activities, visitor services, and interpretive/educational programs. Exceptional and critical ecosystems, habitats, and processes would be monitored to identify emerging impacts created by human activities that require corrective management response.

Visitor Experience

In this alternative, the emphasis would be to manage Gulf Islands National Seashore for visitors to access a diversity of appropriate recreational and educational opportunities among a variety of coastal settings while preserving the natural and cultural resources. Selected sites in the national seashore might include areas that accommodate a high level of visitor use while providing for a diversity of visitor opportunities, sites that provide access to undeveloped beaches for traditional seashore activities, or settings that provide dispersed and primitive opportunities on land and water.

The National Park Service would collaborate with educational and cultural institutions, nonprofit organizations, and commercial services to provide visitors with more diverse seashore opportunities. Potential examples of this partnership could include recreational equipment outfitters, water-based transportation, kayak rentals, food service, guided educational programs, and other collaborations that enhance visitor opportunities while protecting the valuable resources of the national seashore.

The National Park Service would establish an environmental education center that is administered and managed by a consortium of educational and cultural institutions with a focus on the coastal environment of the Gulf of Mexico.

Lands on Cat Island that are owned by the National Park Service would be managed to provide a diversity of recreational and educational opportunities. The National Park Service could seek opportunities with the island's private service providers and other partnerships in accommodating visitor needs and opportunities.



Management Zones

To illustrate the differences between each preliminary management action alternative, the team developed a range of management zones, which were overlaid on distinct areas of the national seashore. Each management zone has a corresponding description outlining the goals for the desired conditions of natural resources, cultural resources, and visitor experiences of that zone. The management zones also establish the range and levels of management, access, development, and visitor services appropriate in achieving those goals. Management zones guide short-term operations and long-term decision making. They inform managers, visitors, neighboring landowners, and communities on how different areas of the national seashore will generally be managed.

Six different management zones were developed for the national seashore. A brief overview of the concepts for each management zone follows:

Diverse Visitor Opportunities: Areas are capable of absorbing a diverse range of outdoor recreation and interpretive visitor opportunities intermixed within both natural and developed environments.

Recreational Beaches: Areas support traditional recreational beach activities and facilities.

Natural Settings with Dispersed Recreation: Areas of largely undeveloped, natural settings are managed for dispersed motorized and/or nonmotorized recreational activities.

Nonmotorized, Primitive Visitor Opportunities: Areas of undeveloped, primitive, intact wild lands are managed to perpetuate natural settings.

Resources Management and Science Priority: Areas of high resource sensitivity and intrinsic value are managed for the highest level of protection and contributions to scientific study of coastal systems, ecological processes, and/or cultural significance.



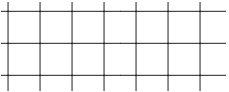



National Seashore Operations: Areas of low resource sensitivity are reserved for administrative and maintenance support of NPS operations.

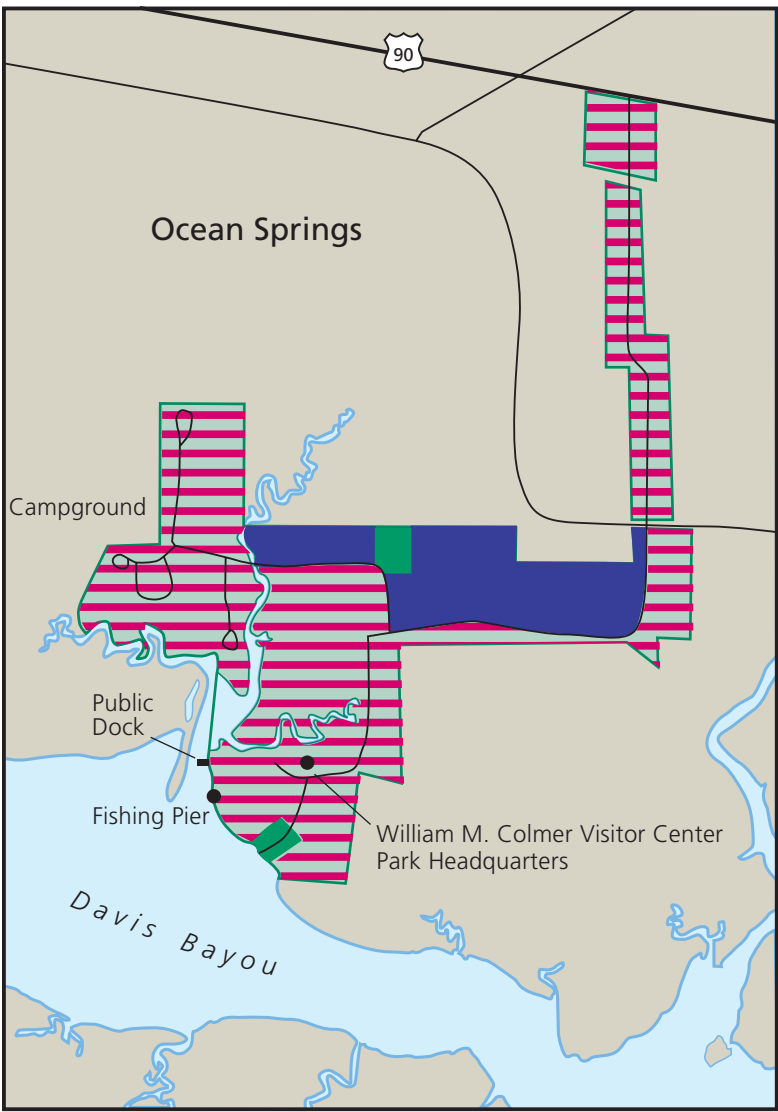


Gulf Islands National Seashore / Summary of Preliminary Management Zones

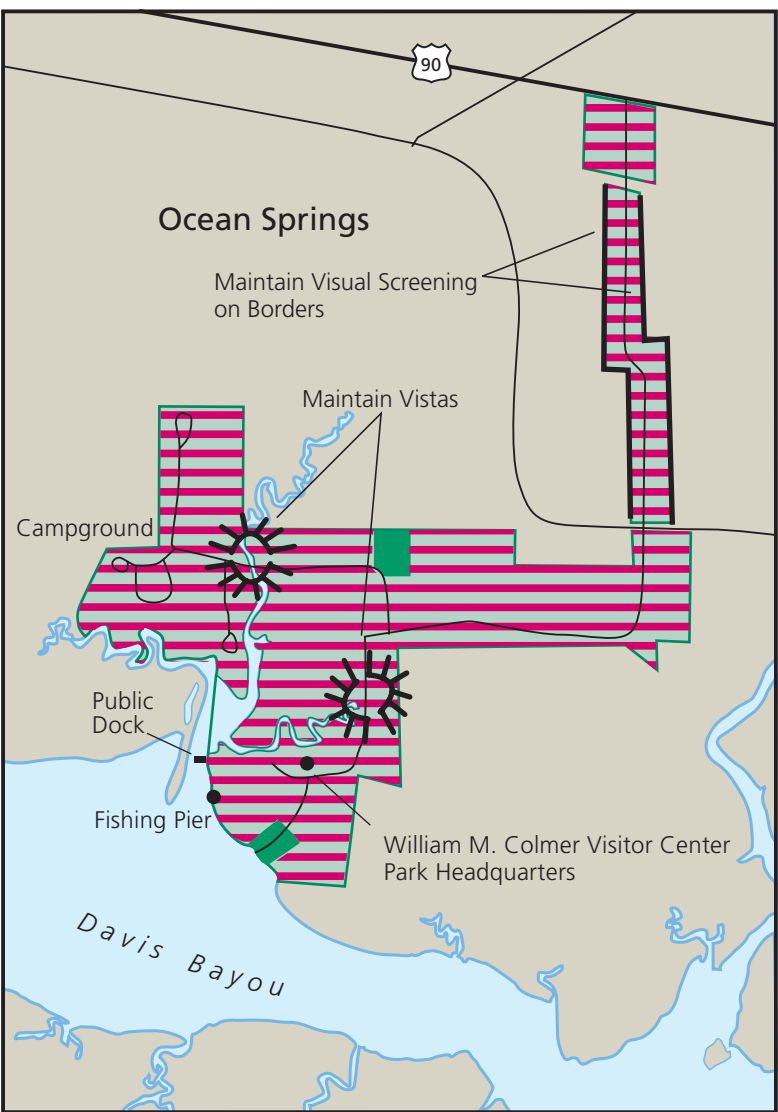
The table below contains a more expanded description of each management zone and desired conditions. The management zones were mapped in a variety of ways for each area of the national seashore to reflect the core concepts of each preliminary management action alternative (alternatives 2, 3, and 4), and are included after the table. Alternative 1 is not zoned because it reflects current conditions (the result of taking no new actions), and the national seashore is not currently under any zoning scheme.

Management Zone / Desired Condition

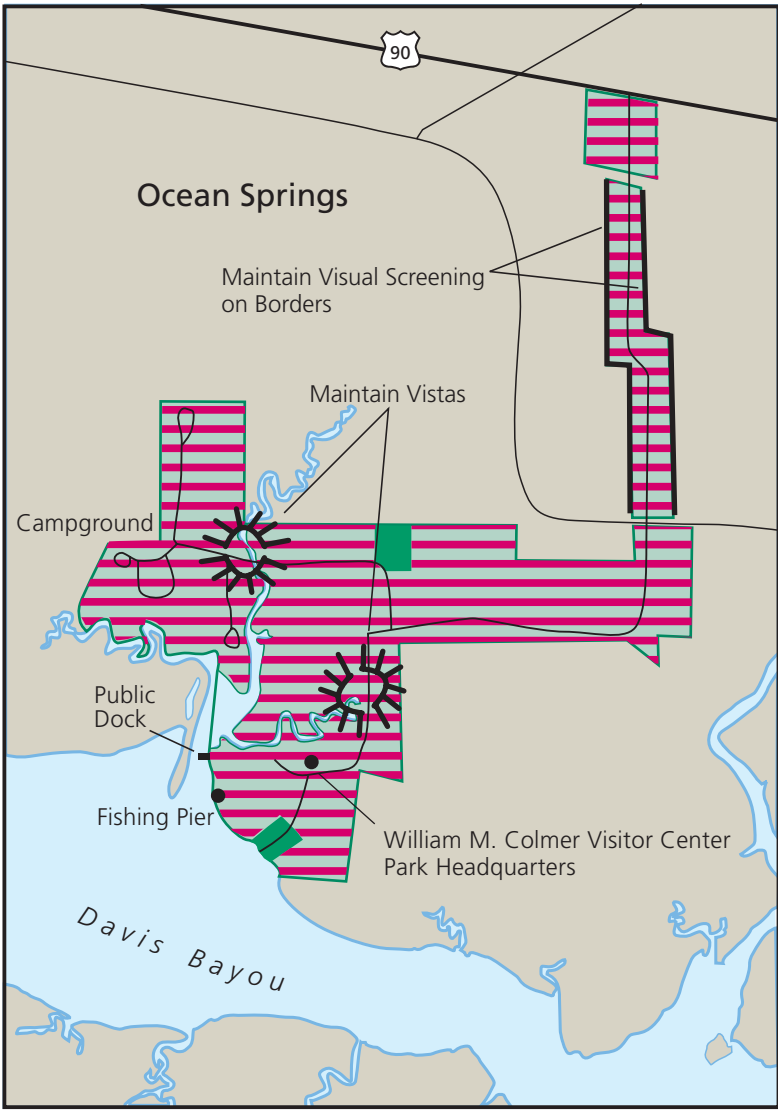
	Diverse Visitor Opportunities	Recreational Beaches	Natural Settings with Dispersed Recreation	Nonmotorized, Primitive Visitor Opportunities	Resources Management and Science Priority	National Seashore Operations
						
Concept	Areas capable of absorbing a diverse range of outdoor recreation and interpretive visitor opportunities intermixed within both natural and developed environments.	Areas support traditional recreational beach activities and facilities.	Areas of largely undeveloped, natural settings are managed for dispersed motorized and/or nonmotorized recreational activities.	Areas of undeveloped, primitive, intact wild lands are managed to perpetuate natural settings.	Areas of high resource sensitivity and intrinsic value are managed for the highest level of protection and contributions to the scientific study of coastal systems, ecological processes, and/or cultural significance.	Areas of low resource sensitivity are reserved for administrative and maintenance support of national seashore operations.
Visitor Experience	<p>Visitors are provided with seashore orientation as well as a wide range of recreational, interpretive, and educational opportunities. These activities are supported by a variety of visitor services that complement and enhance these opportunities.</p> <p>High levels of visitor encounters are expected; groups of all sizes are accommodated.</p>	<p>Visitors are provided convenient and easy access to recreational beaches for sunbathing, swimming, surfing, strolling, surf fishing, and sand castle play.</p> <p>Levels of visitor encounters are expected to be highest near access areas to and from the beach.</p>	<p>Visitors have an opportunity to get away from the sights and sounds of the urban environment and explore the natural features of the national seashore.</p> <p>Visitor encounters would range from solitude to informal gatherings depending upon time of day, week, or season.</p>	<p>Visitors have an opportunity to experience a sense of discovery and adventure in nonmotorized, primitive setting. Natural sounds, tranquility, and remoteness predominate.</p> <p>Visitors would need to be self-reliant and prepared for personal challenge.</p> <p>There would only be occasional encounters with others outside of one's group.</p>	<p>Visitor use is restricted, unless permitted for research and/or educational purposes.</p>	<p>Visitor use is discouraged in this area; however, visitors engaged in service projects or other official business may be involved in activities in this zone.</p>
Natural Resources	Resources are managed to maintain or restore their natural conditions, although some areas could be modified to accommodate visitor services, interpretation, and recreational activities.	Resources are managed to maintain or restore their natural conditions, although there could be an allowance for minor impacts associated with visitor access, sanitation, and public safety.	Resources are managed to maintain or restore their natural conditions, although there could be an allowance for minor impacts associated with visitor access and public safety.	Resources are managed to maintain or restore their natural conditions.	Resources are managed for the highest level of preservation and protection for exceptional and critical ecosystems, habitats, and processes.	Resources are managed to maintain or restore their natural conditions or they could be modified to accommodate NPS operations.
Cultural Resources	Resources are stabilized and preserved or they could be rehabilitated or adaptively reused to support visitor services and interpretation.	Resources are stabilized and preserved.	Resources are stabilized and preserved.	Resources are stabilized and preserved.	Resources are stabilized and preserved.	Resources are stabilized and preserved, or they can be rehabilitated or adaptively reused to accommodate NPS operations.
Facility Development	Facility development can include adaptively reusing historic structures or constructing modern facilities to accommodate seashore orientation, interpretive and/or educational programs, sales of seashore-related literature and mementos, equipment rental for recreational activities, food and beverage service, and sanitary facilities. Roads, trails, docks, and parking would provide convenient access links between visitor activity areas. Some administrative functions to support NPS operations may be colocated with visitor facilities.	North of the primary dune, facility development can include access roads, parking, picnic/shade shelters, interpretive waysides, and sanitary facilities concentrated at areas that access the beach. Beach areas south of the primary dune would remain mostly undeveloped with the exception of designated beach access trails over the primary dune, signs, and lifeguard stands.	Facility development is mostly limited to resource protection, visitor access, and public safety. Roads, trails, docks, and interpretive waysides can be used to enhance interpretation, sightseeing, and access opportunities.	There is no facility development in this zone outside of limited primitive trail stabilization and signs for vital safety messages.	There is no facility development in this zone unless determined essential for resource protection, research, and/or monitoring purposes.	Facility development can include adaptively reusing historic structures or constructing modern facilities to support NPS operations such as administrative and management office space, emergency and resource protection response, employee housing, maintenance, utility treatment, storage, and associated roads and parking.



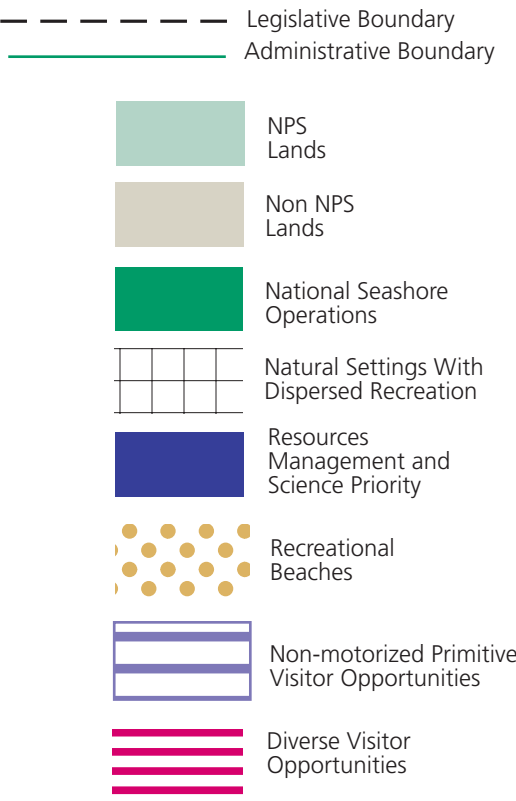
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education

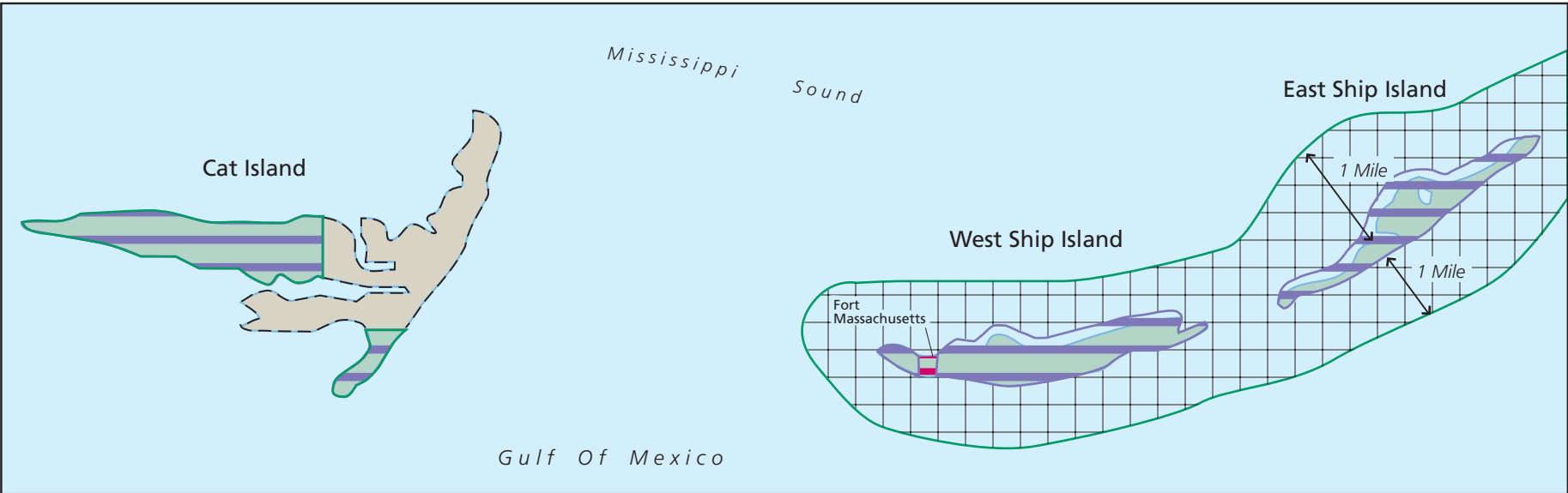


Alternative 4, Diversity

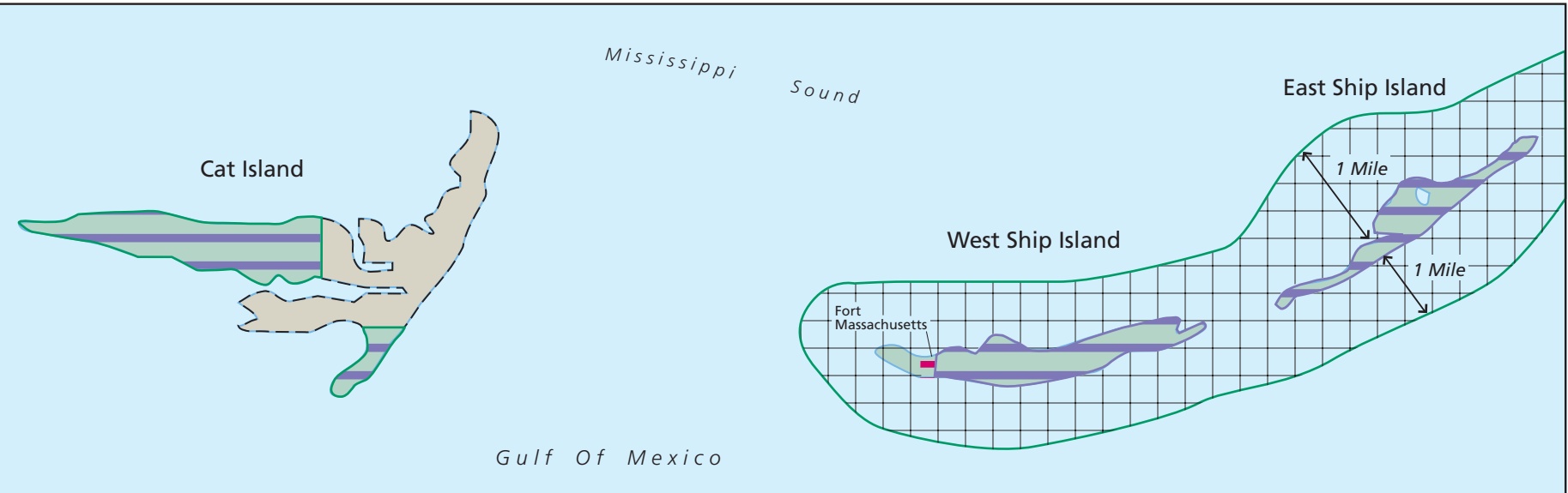


Davis Bayou Gulf Islands National Seashore Mississippi • Florida

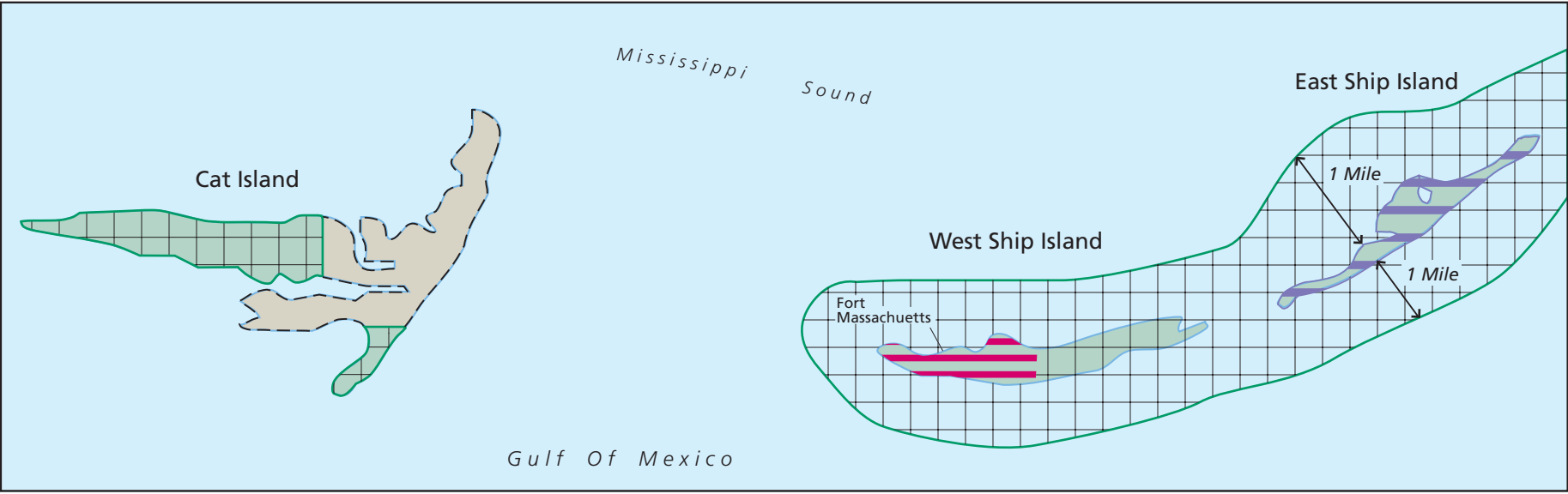
National Park Service
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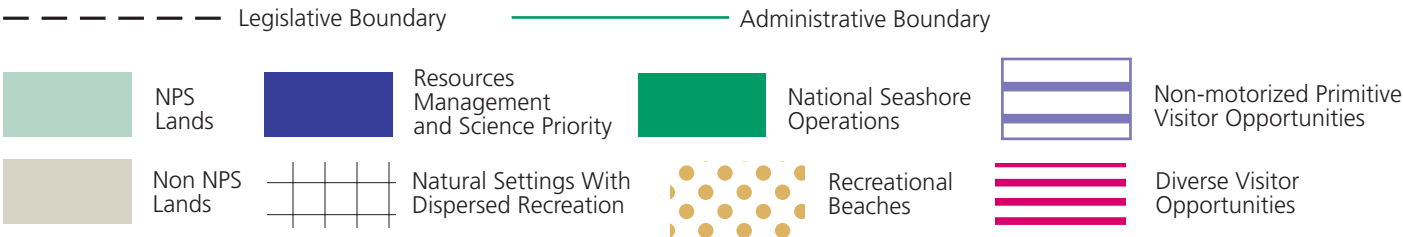
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education

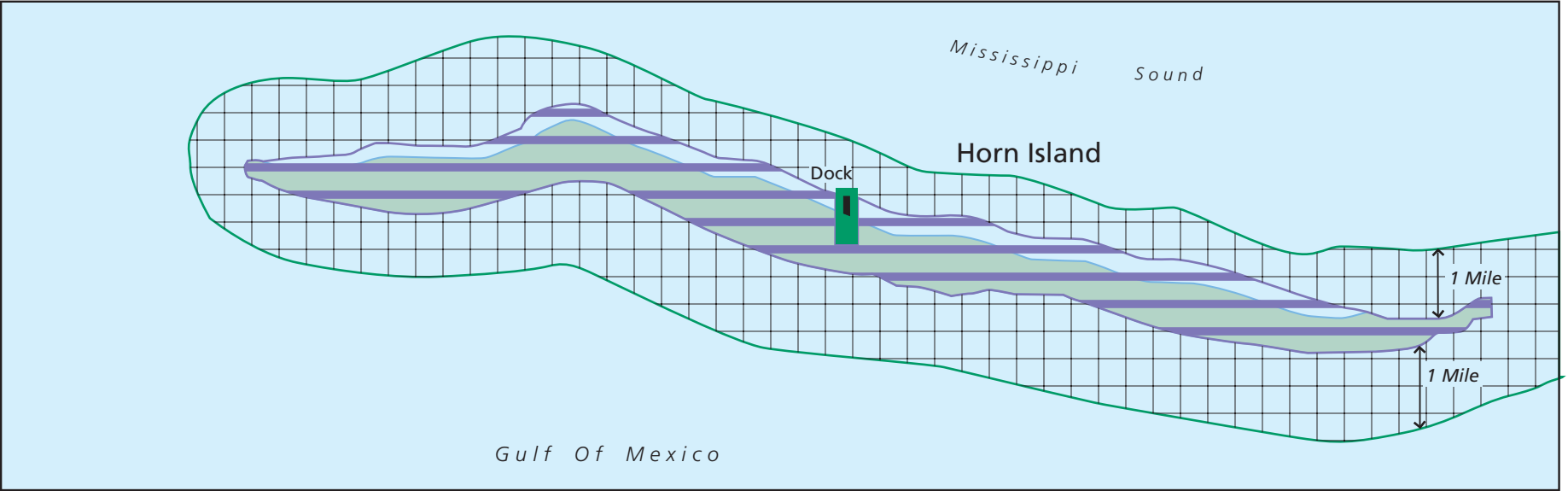


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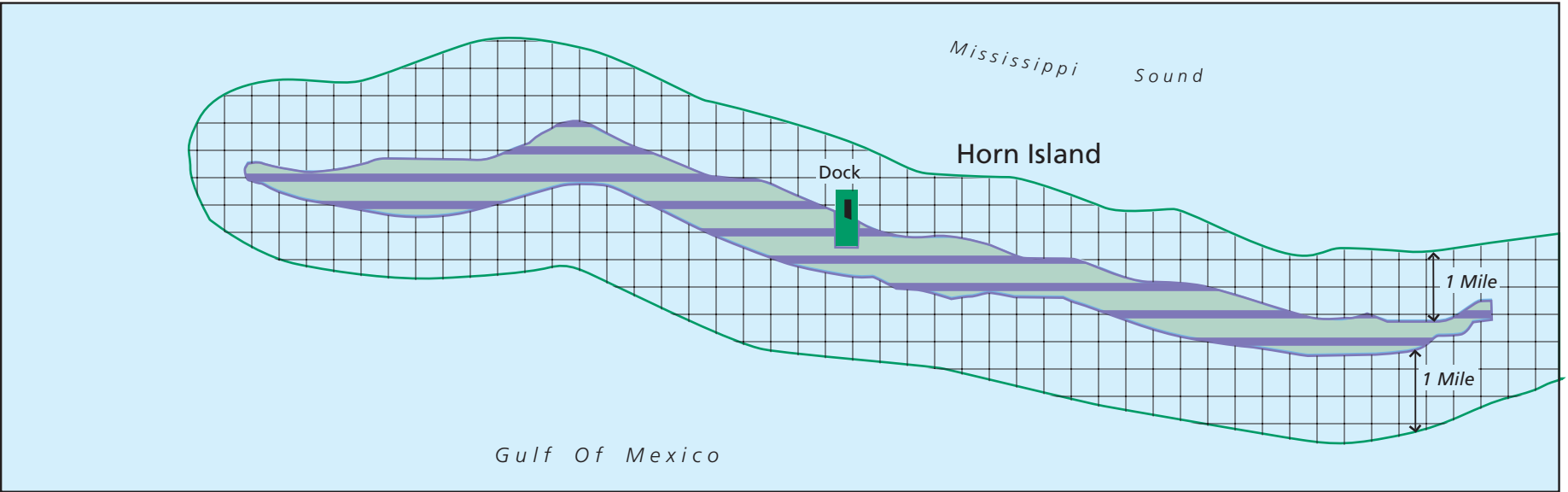


Cat Island, West Ship Island, East Ship Island **Gulf Islands** National Seashore Mississippi • Florida

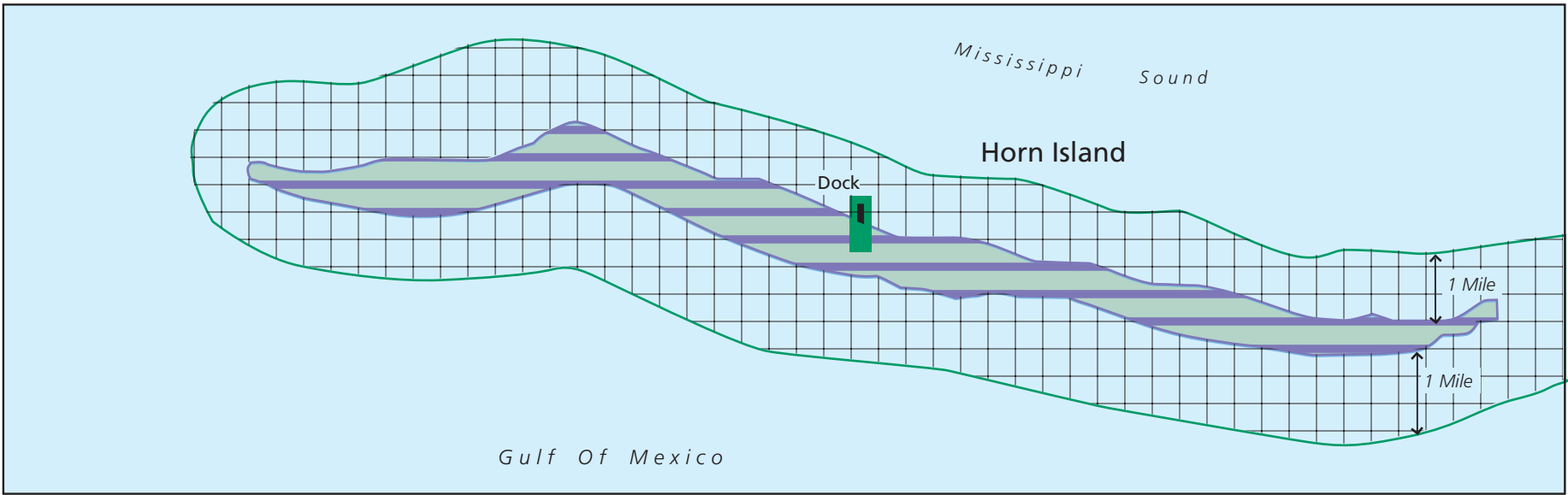
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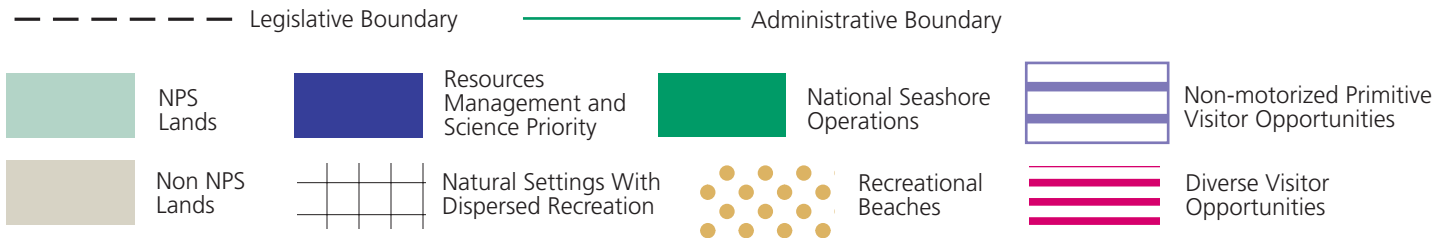
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education

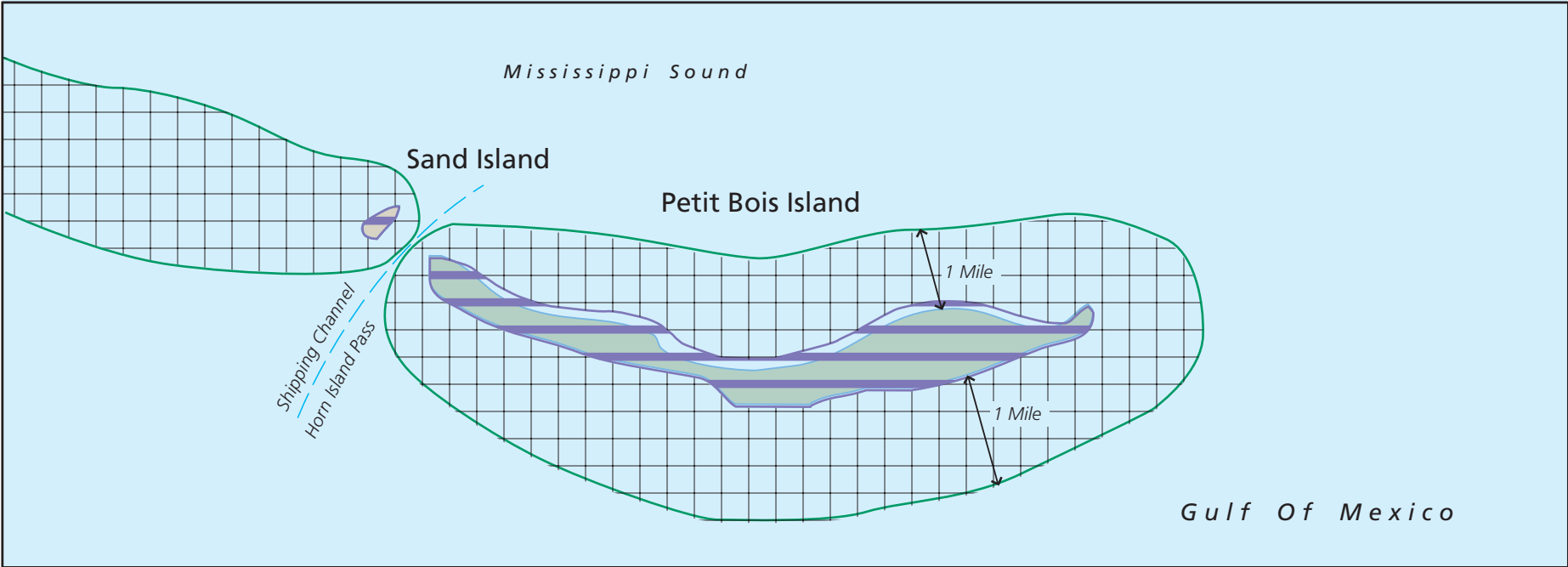


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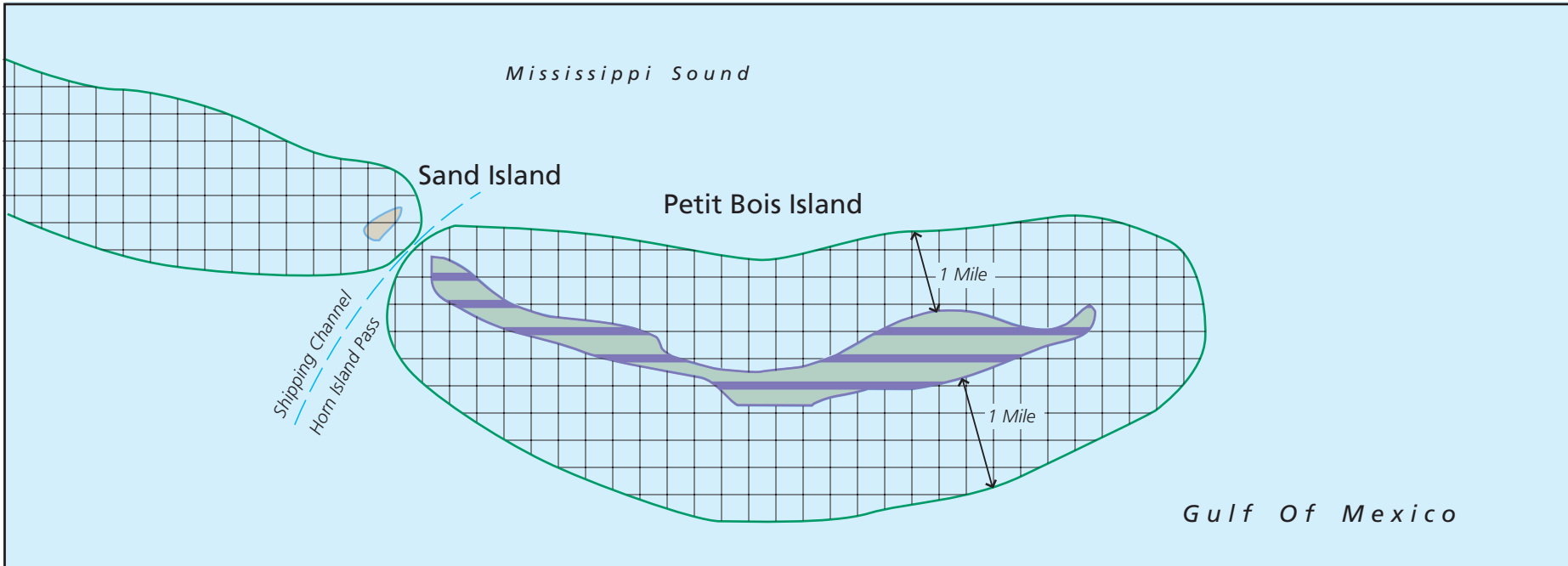


Horn Island Gulf Islands National Seashore Mississippi • Florida

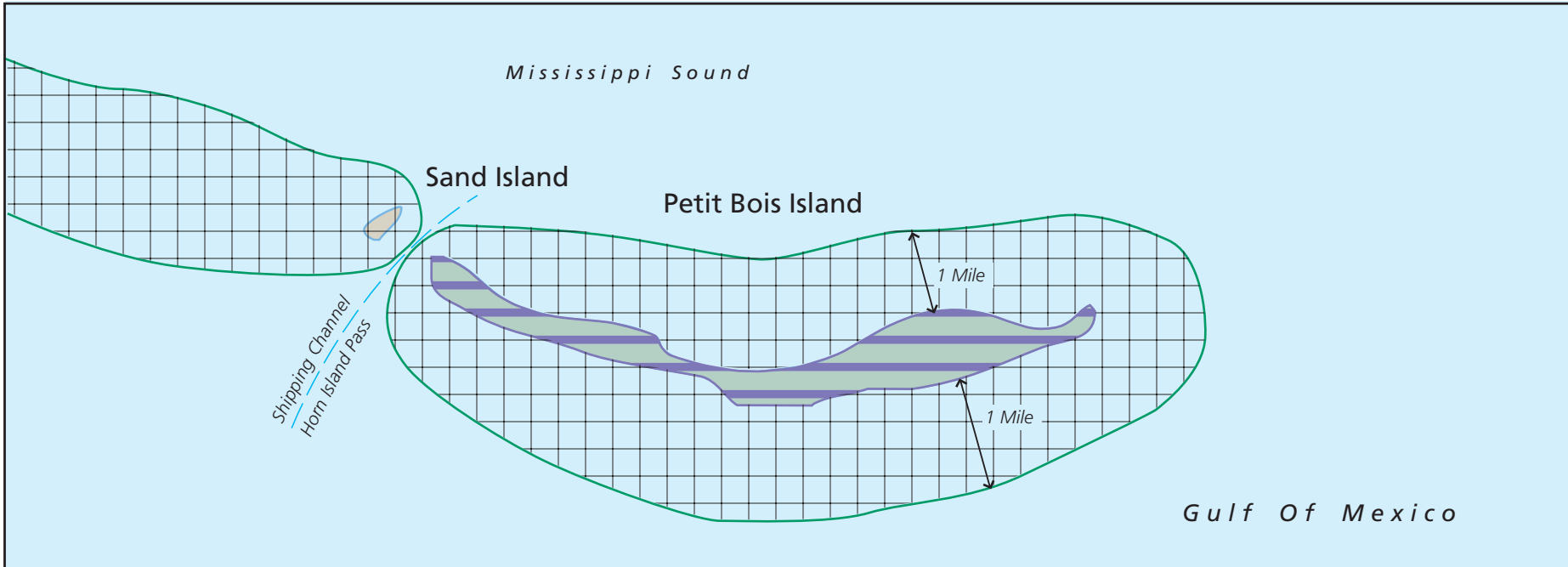
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Alternative 2, Natural Processes

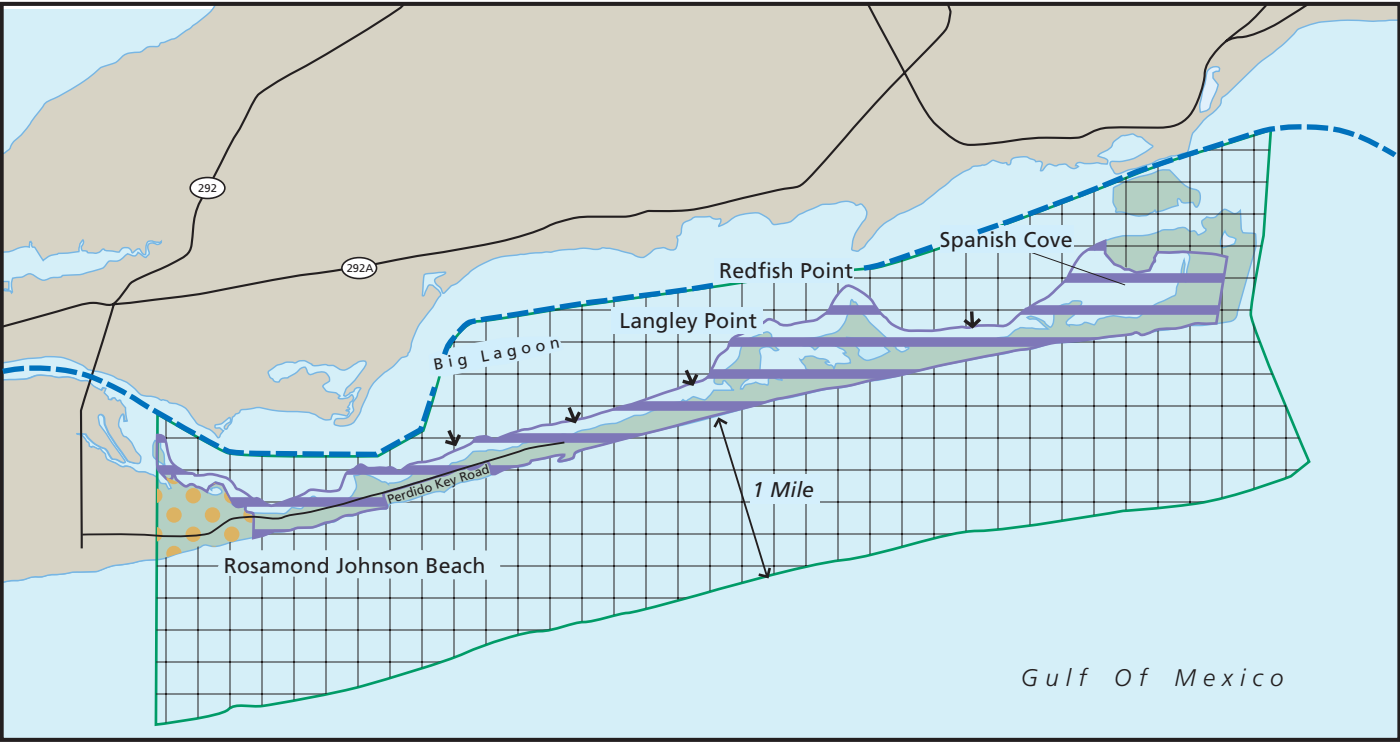


Alternative 3, Education

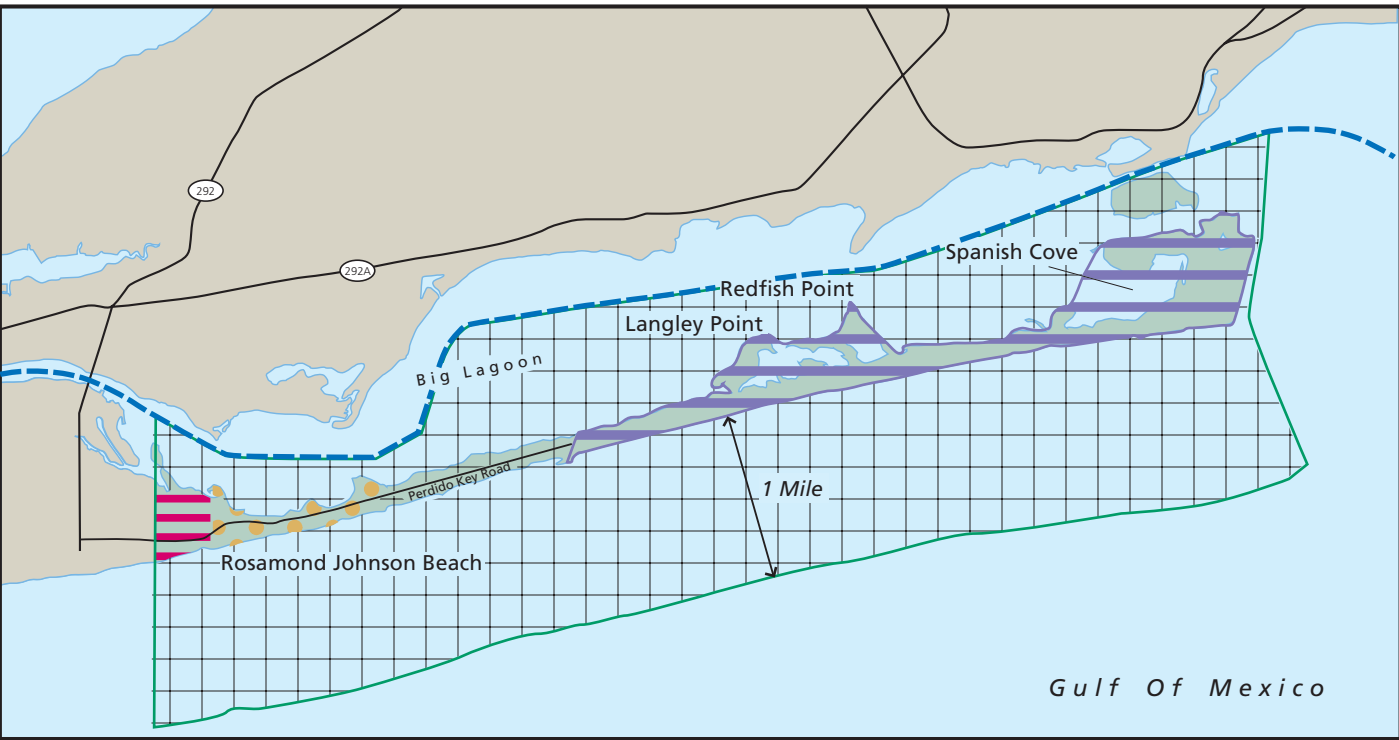


Alternative 4, Diversity

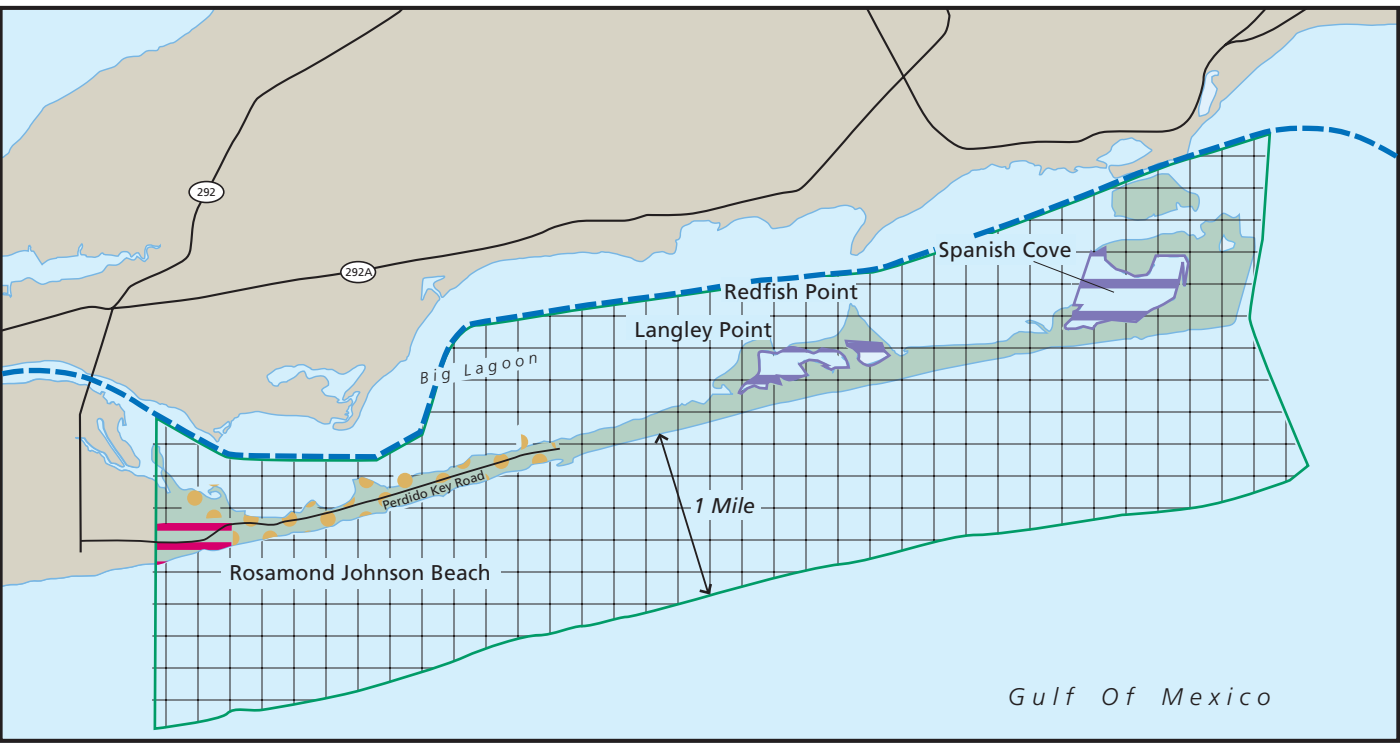




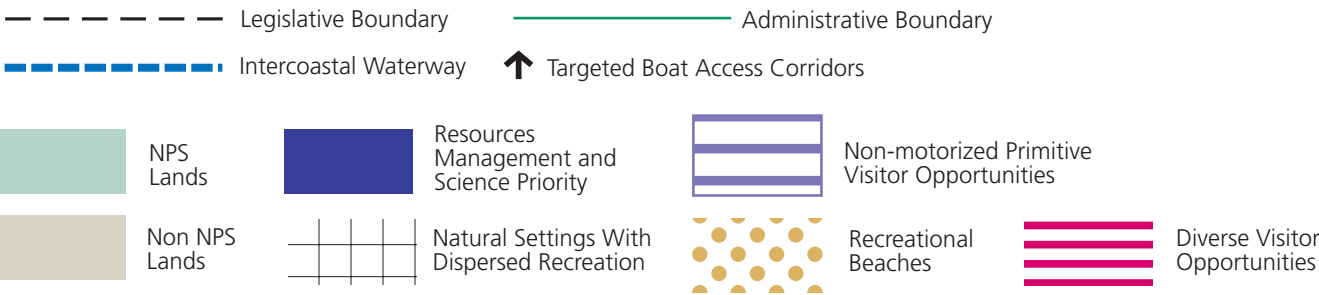
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education

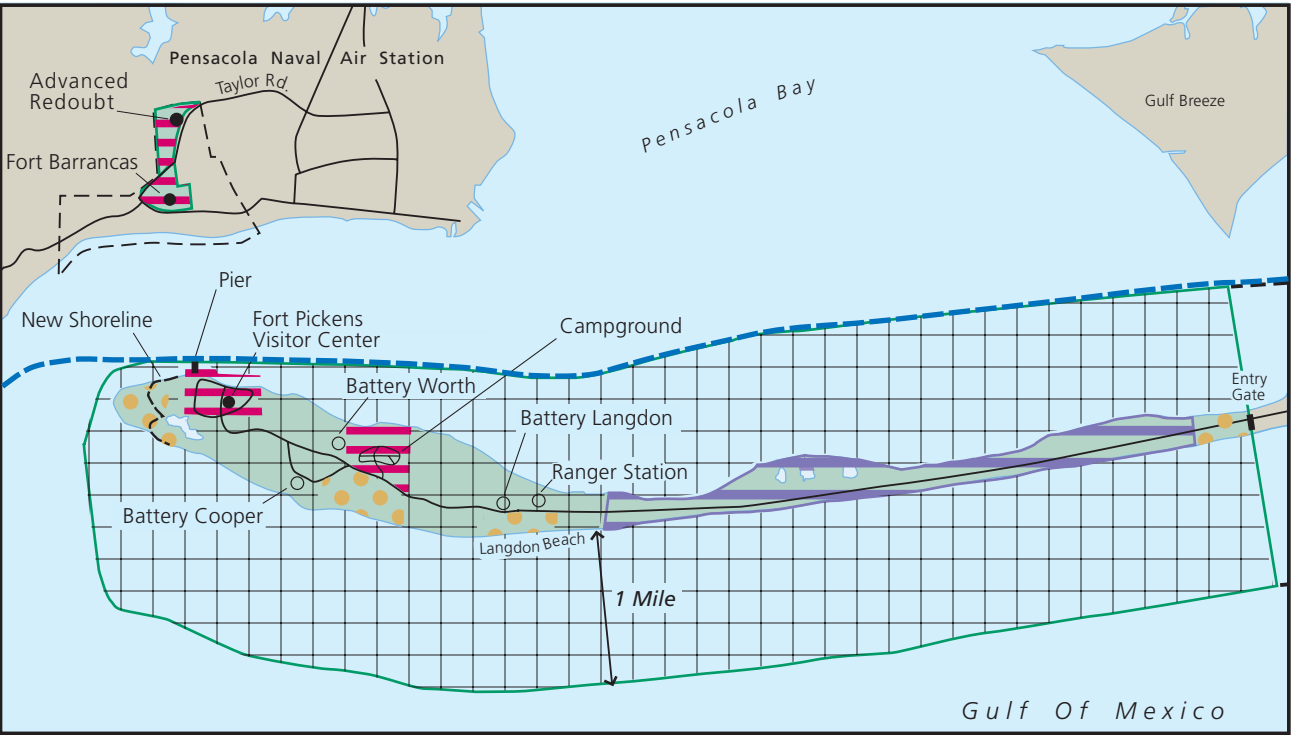


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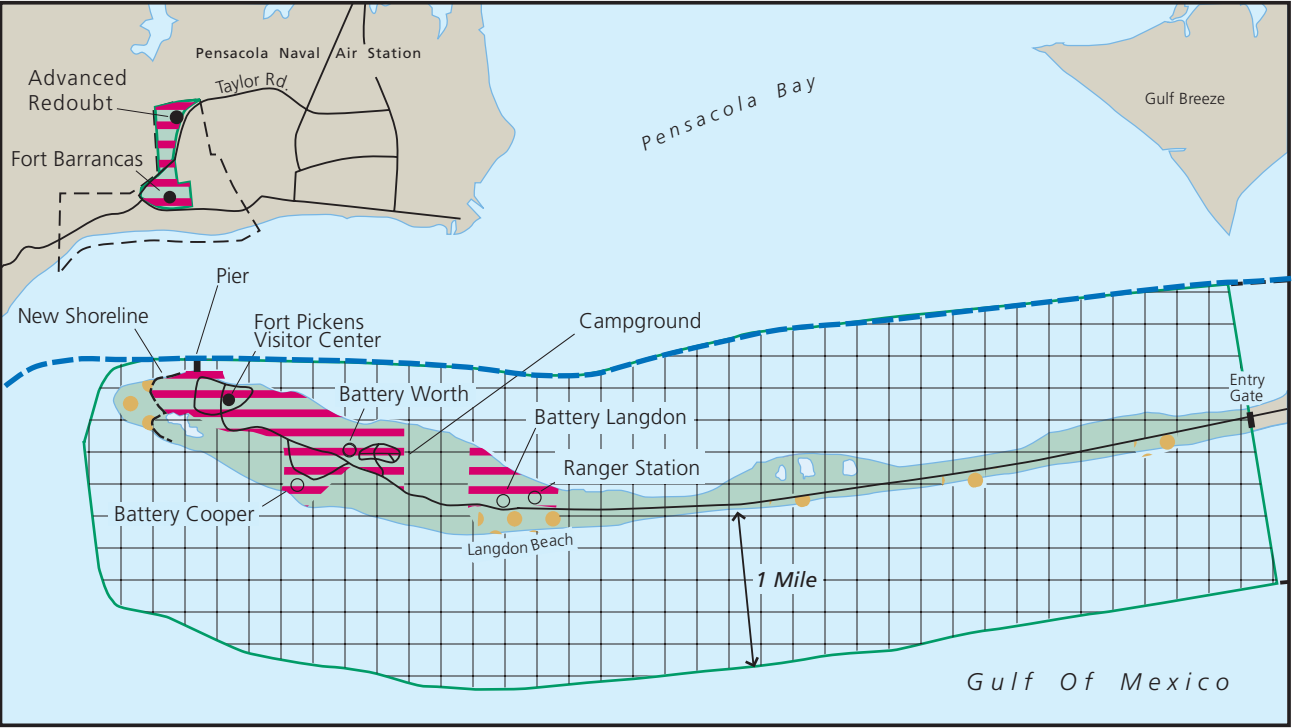


Perdido Key
Gulf Islands
 National Seashore
 Mississippi • Florida

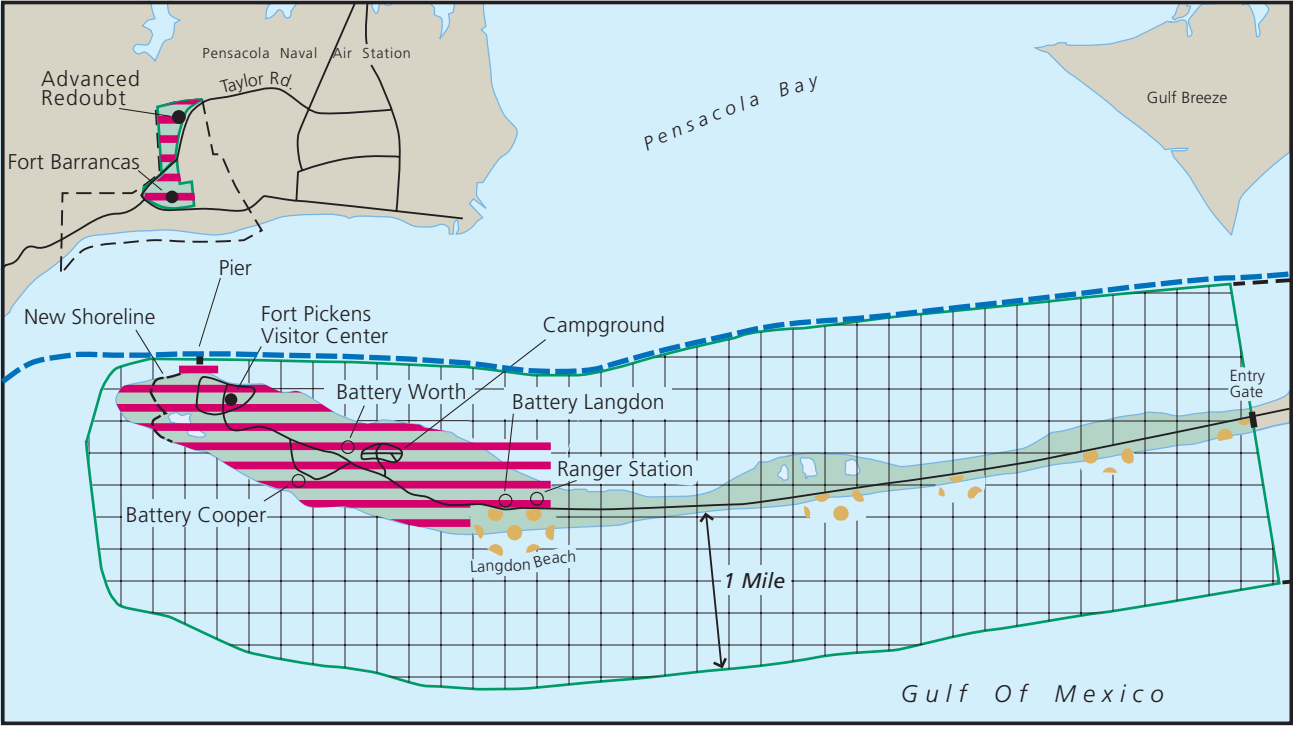
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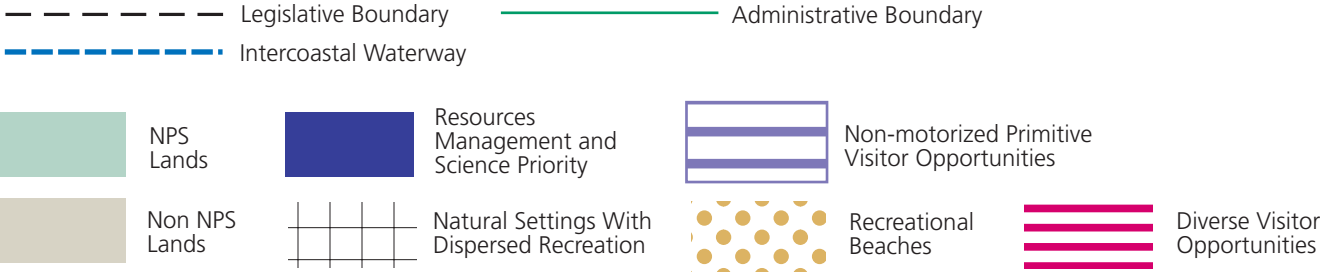
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education

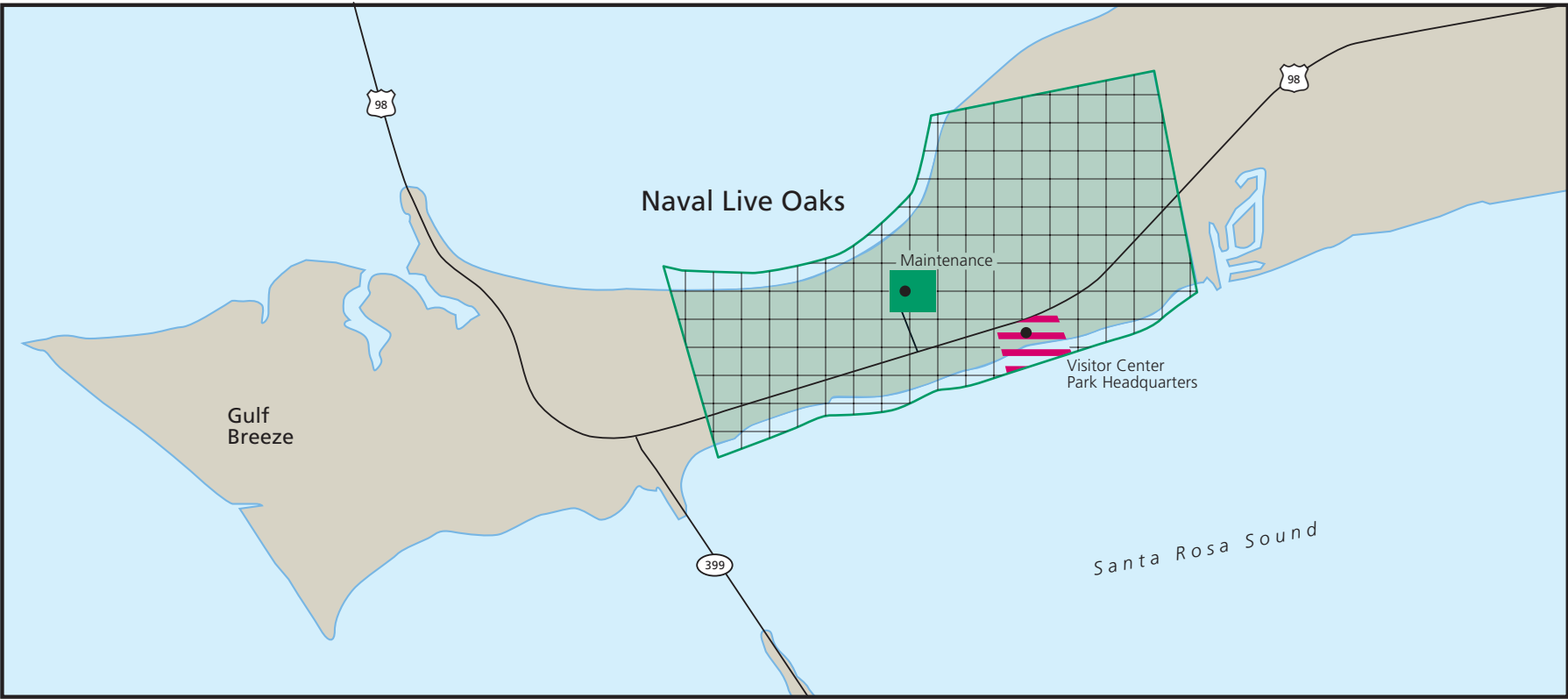


Alternative 4, Diversity

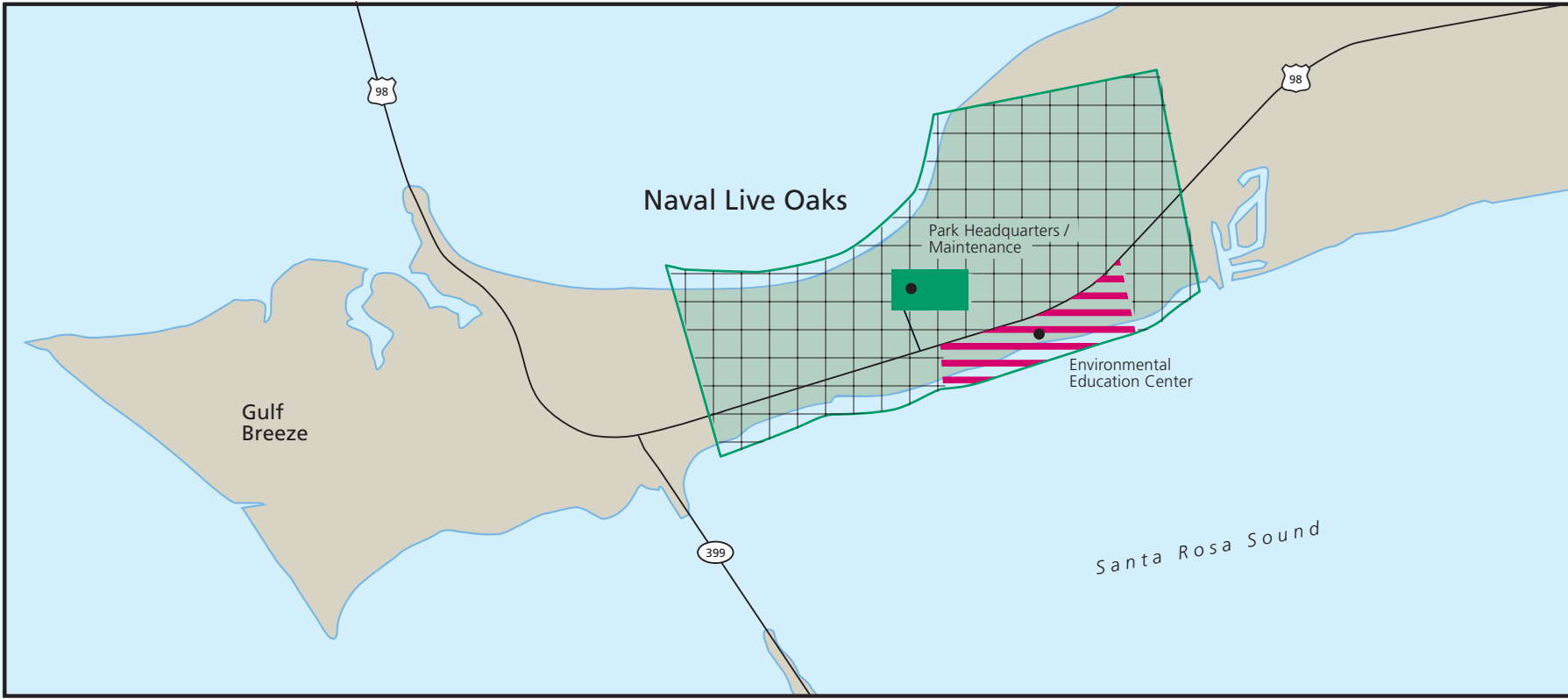


Fort Pickens /
Fort Barrancas
Gulf Islands
National Seashore
Mississippi • Florida

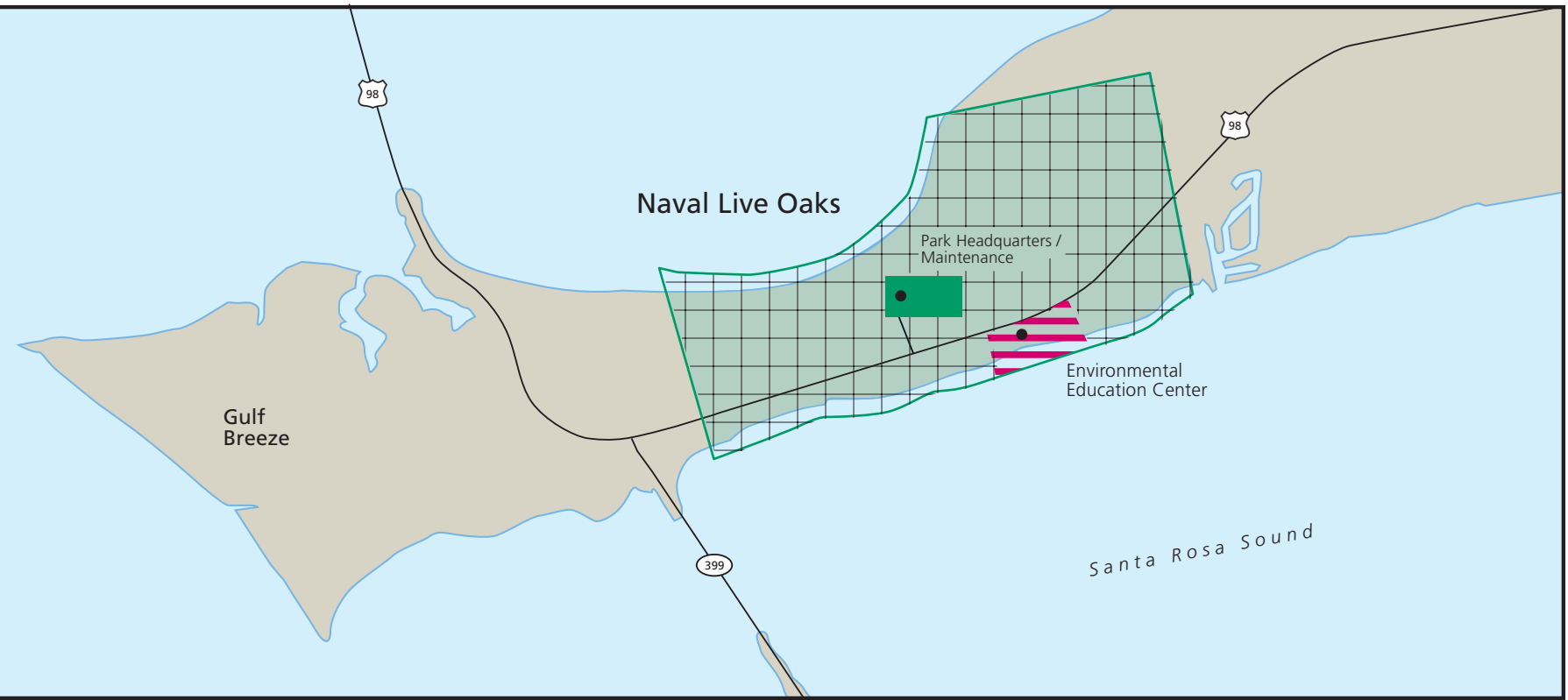
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



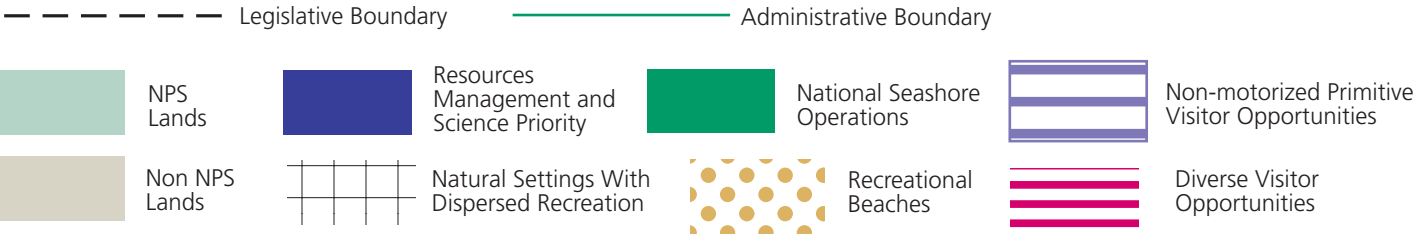
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education

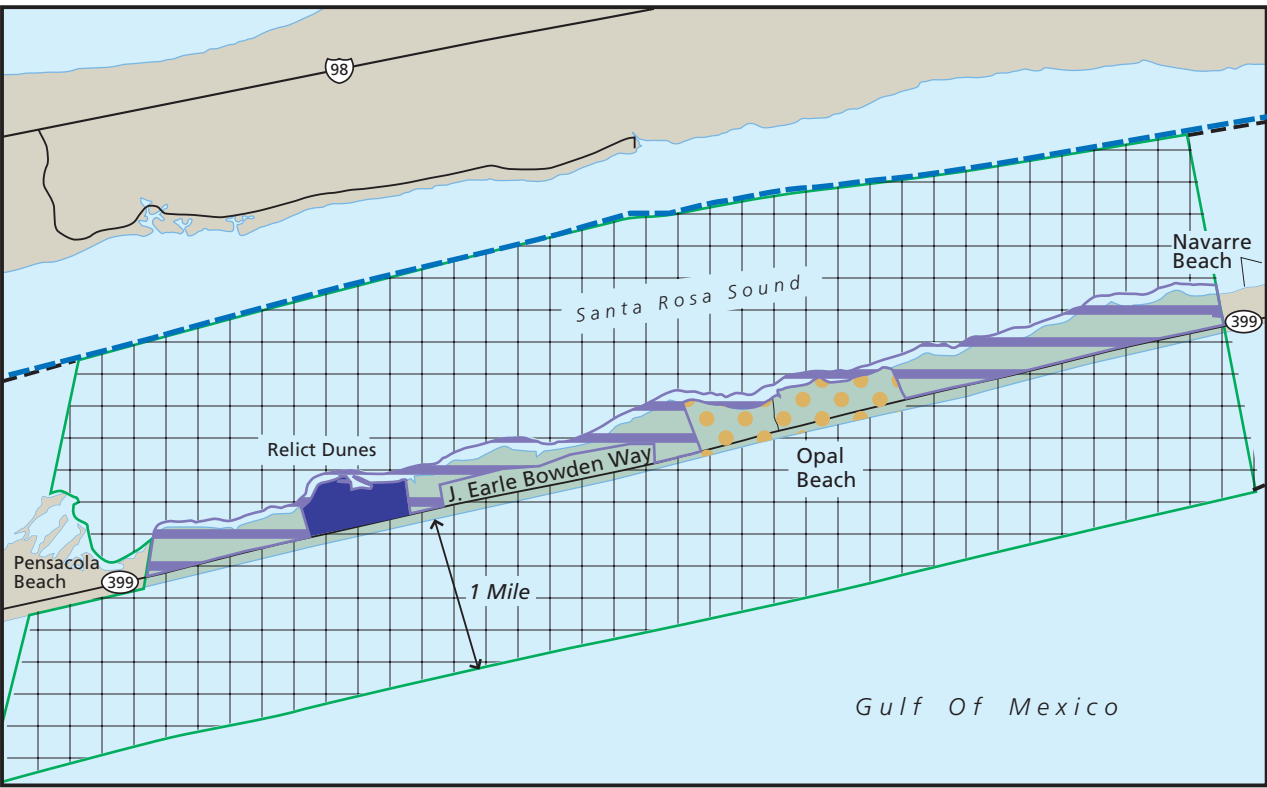


Alternative 4, Diversity

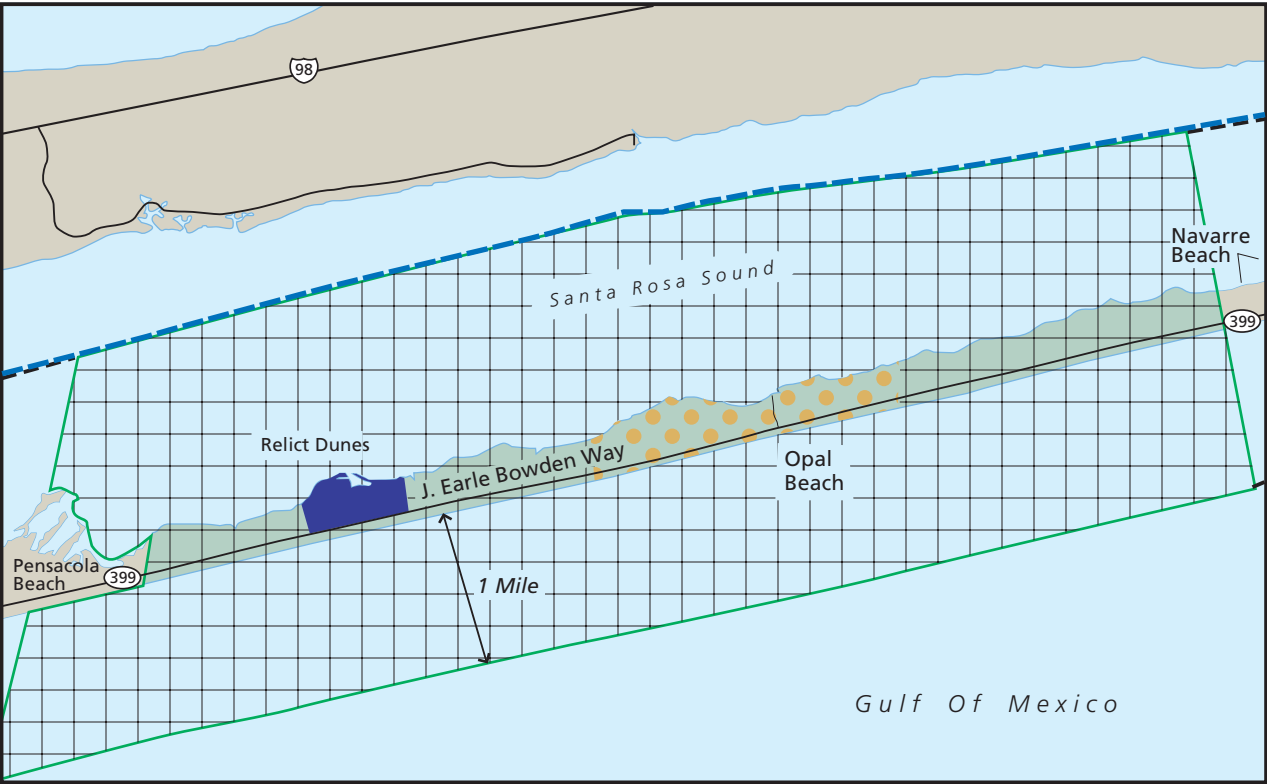


Naval Live Oaks **Gulf Islands** National Seashore Mississippi • Florida

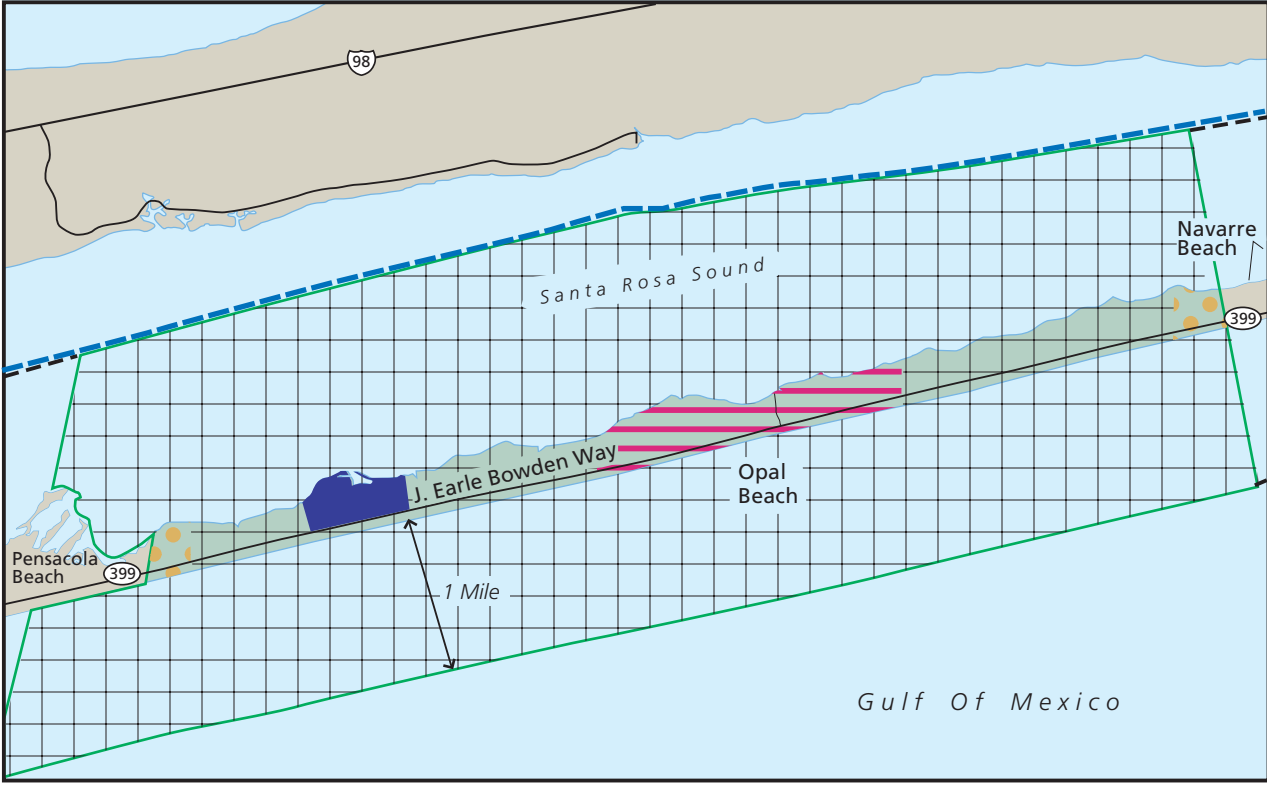
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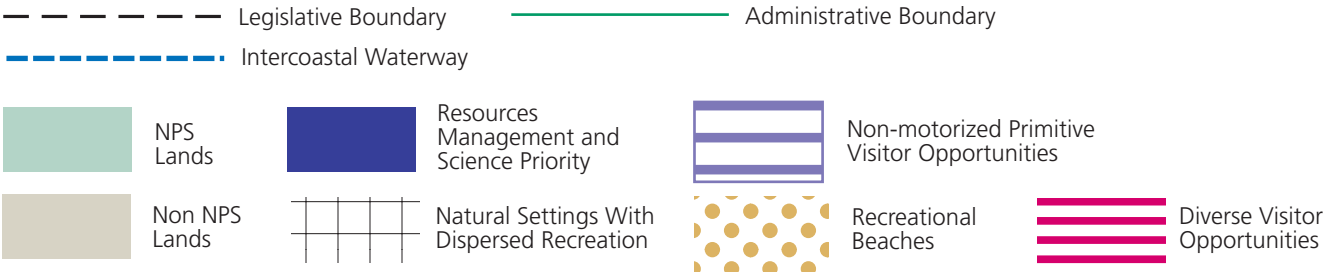
Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education



Alternative 4, Diversity



Santa Rosa Area
(between Pensacola
Beach and Navarre
Beach)
Gulf Islands
National Seashore
Mississippi • Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

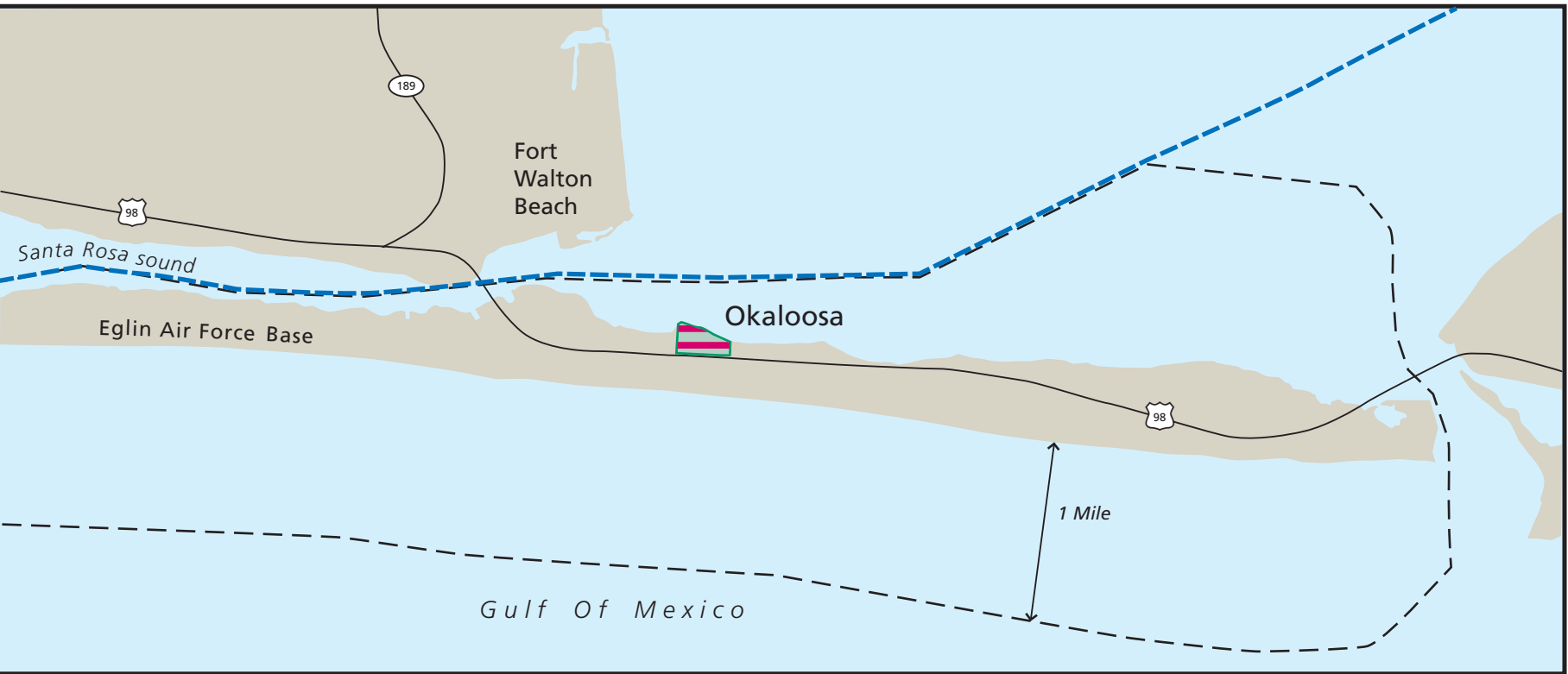
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Alternative 2, Natural Processes



Alternative 3, Education



Alternative 4, Diversity



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635/20058/DSC/Jan 2007

Next Steps

Following NPS and public review, the planning team will revise the alternatives as needed. Then the team will analyze each alternative for its potential for resource impacts, potential for affecting visitor experiences, and implementation costs. The team will then analyze the relative advantages of each alternative. Based on this analysis, the superintendent and other decision makers will select the alternative that offers the best advantages for the national seashore. This alternative, termed the "preferred alternative," may be very similar to one of the preliminary alternatives, may combine elements of more than one alternative, or may introduce entirely new ideas.

Public comments are an important factor in selecting a preferred alternative. The decision is also influenced by the potential for minimizing resource impacts and costs; the potential for enhancing visitor experiences; and laws, policies, and regulations that guide NPS management and decision making. Outside influences such as political considerations and the concerns of national seashore neighbors must also be considered. You will have an opportunity to comment on the preferred alternative once it has been selected, and a *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* has been prepared and published for public review during winter 2008.

Planning Time Frame

Gulf Islands National Seashore's general management plan process is expected to take several years to complete. A summary of the process and anticipated time frame is presented below. You will have opportunities to share ideas and comments throughout the process.

Step	Time Frame	Planning Activity	Public Involvement Opportunities
1	Summer 2003– Winter 2004	Initiate Project The planning team assembles and begins to identify the project's scope, customize the planning process, and establish contacts with participants.	
2	Spring 2004– Fall 2004	Define Planning Context and Foundation The team examines WHY the national seashore was established and affirms purpose, significance, and primary interpretive themes. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public input.	
2a	Fall 2005– Winter 2006	GMP Effort Placed on Hold Planning effort is suspended to allow national seashore staff to focus on hurricane recovery efforts.	
We Are Here	3	Publish Alternatives Newsletter Using staff and public input, the team explores WHAT the national seashore's future could look like and proposes a range of alternatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read this newsletter.• Send us your ideas and comments.• Come to public meetings and share your ideas.
	4	Publish Draft Document <i>A Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement</i> is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and impacts of implementing each alternative. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read draft document.• Send us your ideas and comments.• Come to public meetings and share your ideas.
	5	Publish Final Document Based on review by the National Park Service, other agencies and organizations, and the public, the team revises the plan and distributes a <i>Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement</i> . The final plan is approved in a published "Record of Decision."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the final document, including NPS responses to substantive comments and official letters.
	6	Implement the Approved Plan After the "Record of Decision" is issued, begin implementing the plan as funding permits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with national seashore staff to implement plan.

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