



*The Lauren Kristy Excursion*

# Fire Island Communities Civic Engagement Roundtable

## **Civic Engagement**

*is a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels that reinforces the commitment of both NPS and the public to the preservation of heritage resources, both cultural and natural, and strengthens public understanding of the meaning and contemporary relevance of these resources. Civic engagement encompasses all in a dialogue about the meaning and future of the Nation's heritage resources.*

— NPS Director's Orders 75A –  
Civic Engagement & Public  
Involvement

## **Foundations for the Future:**

### ***A Report of the Civic Engagement Meeting Conducted Aboard the Lauren Kristy, July 30, 2006***

Fire Island National Seashore is developing a new General Management Plan (GMP)/ Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will propose a long-term approach to managing the park, consistent with its mission and NPS policy and other laws and regulations. The park's last GMP was completed in 1978.

Since 1978, seven miles of the barrier island within park boundaries were designated as federally-designated wilderness, five federally-listed threatened and endangered species were identified, vector-borne diseases like Lyme Disease and West Nile Virus emerged as resource management issues. Federal jurisdiction over commercial operations, off-road vehicles, wildlife, waste management, construction of structures, etc., on private lands within national parks has been clarified since 1978.

Civic engagement is an important facet of the general management planning process. During the course of this process, the planning team will be engaged in public outreach and community involvement at every opportunity. The planning process will generate a range of alternatives that will guide the management of the park over the next 15 to 20 years.

In the summer of 2006, Fire Island National Seashore undertook a civic engagement project in advance of the park's new GMP.

This report summarizes the results and conveys the spirit generated from this historic meeting between the park and its community stakeholders.





View from the top of the Lighthouse, looking east towards the western Fire Island communities.

## Project Background

Fire Island National Seashore is located along the south shore of Long Island in Suffolk County, New York. The park encompasses 19,579 acres of upland and tidal lands on the mainland and along a 26 mile stretch of barrier island – part of a much larger system of barrier islands and bluffs stretching from New York City to the west to Montauk Point at the very eastern end of Long Island. In addition to miles of a dynamic barrier island with high dunes, Fire Island includes centuries-old maritime forests, 5 federally-listed species, and desolate beaches within close proximity to densely populated urban centers. Fire Island also includes the William Floyd Estate, the home of one of New York's signers of the *Declaration of Independence*; nearly 1400 acres of federally designated wilderness, and Fire Island Lighthouse.

Interspersed within the national seashore are 17 diverse private communities, which were established before the seashore's authorization. The park's enabling legislation included provisions for private land to be retained or developed if zoning requirements were met. There is no hard-surfaced road connecting the communities, so they are accessible mainly by ferry or private boat. Without paved roads and with limited traffic, the communities have retained much of their original character. Some of these communities have hotels or facilities for overnight guests, while others are strictly residential. There are approximately 4,100 developed properties on Fire Island. Approximately 500 year-round residents live on the island.

Since its establishment in 1964, Fire Island National Seashore's relationship with local communities has had its ups and downs. Often the park's mission as perceived by park managers did not mesh with the expectations of the community and vice versa.

Current park superintendent Michael Reynolds recognized that addressing the underlying communication issues that fueled these perceptions and fostering greater opportunities for cooperation between the park and the communities would be central to a successful GMP process. With some effort, he felt an improved and more productive relationship could emerge. The intent of this project was to get the Fire Island communities together to begin a dialogue with the park to foster greater cooperation and communication given the expectation of a potentially significant amount of controversy in undertaking the GMP planning effort.

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### Acronyms

**CE** - Civic Engagement  
**FIA** - Fire Island Association  
**FIS** - Fire Island National Seashore  
**FINS** - Fire Island National Seashore  
**GMP** - General Management Plan  
**MOU** - Memorandum of Understanding  
**NPS** - National Park Service  
**NYC** - New York State  
**PMIS** - Project Management Information System  
**TNC** - The Nature Conservancy



## Getting Organized

To get the project started, the park worked with Delia Clark, Community Engagement Program Director with the Conservation Study Institute, to help the park organize and facilitate the community event. In considering how to best organize the civic engagement events, Delia initially suggested the development of a steering committee of community representatives to participate in organizing the meeting and addressing logistics. The goal of seeking community participation in setting up the meeting was to engender in the participants some ownership of the process and ideally have them openly support the process and encourage the participation of others in the community.

In June, 2006 a group of community representatives who were considered possible steering committee members was invited to an organizational meeting at the park. Delia Clark presented the proposed plan to hold two large workshops for community residents. There was a significant amount of discussion regarding the purpose of the proposed meetings and what would be addressed. Community representatives were skeptical that large open community meetings would be of much value. Past experience with that format led many of them to believe that the dialogue would be repetitive and contentious. It became immediately apparent that the park would have to reconsider its strategy for the civic engagement project to offer a more productive format for the proposed meeting.

As a result, the park decided to take advantage of this ready group of community representatives and ask them to be the spokespeople for their respective communities in a much smaller civic engagement forum.

### Agenda

1. Introductions – Goals
2. Vision for Success
3. Parks Perspective
4. What's Working Well in Communications & Relationship?
5. What Needs Changing?
6. Lunch – Informal Networking
7. Solutions List
8. Analyze Impact/ Feasibility of Solutions
9. Action Steps



## A New Strategy

A major goal of the civic engagement effort was to begin to build better communication between the park and the 17 Fire Island Communities. Having made the decision to keep the meeting small, the park needed to structure an agenda that would keep the participants active, participatory, and truly focused on the meeting goal. Planning for the meeting required very clear task assignments among meeting organizers to ensure a successful event.

Identifying and securing commitments from invitees, selecting and booking an appropriate venue, and developing the meeting agenda all involved much consultation and coordination among team members.

With their meeting facilitator, the park decided to charter a tour boat (the *Lauren Kristy*) for the day offering a retreat-like environment in which the participants would meet to discuss the complexities of creating a positive collaborative environment for planning. As participants met, the boat would traverse Great South Bay allowing opportunities to view areas of Fire Island from the water – perhaps prompting further discussion.

The team developed an agenda that deliberately omitted time constraints, recognizing that flexibility during the meeting was of paramount concern. The agenda would be presented at the beginning of the meeting, and would make clear to the meeting participants what the expectations for the meeting would be.

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Photo courtesy of Diane Abell

Fire Island Community of Ocean Beach

## Aboard the *Lauren Kristy*

A total of twenty-two people participated in the work session representing the Fire Island communities, Fire Island National Seashore, NPS planners and planning consultants. Upon boarding the boat, the participants engaged in a preliminary meet and greet session. Acquaintances were made, or re-made, and preliminary speculations regarding what to expect during the course of the day were discussed. The boat left the dock at 10:30 a.m., and the meeting began.



### Introductions - Goals

At the beginning of the formal work session, Superintendent Michael Reynolds outlined the goals of this meeting. That major goal was *to build a solid foundation for positive, mutually-beneficial cooperation and collaboration between the Seashore and the Fire Island communities.* Given that the relationship between the park and the communities has been rocky throughout the years, this goal also qualified as an invitation to the participants to work with the park and with each other to achieve this goal. As the superintendent and facilitator explained, in order for FINS to achieve success in the park's GMP process and beyond, everyone needed to work toward a clear set of goals.



Before delving into the agenda, meeting facilitator Delia Clark laid out some ground rules. Ground rules are used to establish a sense of order and insure respect among participants. To stay on topic, the group agreed that some topics would be “tabled” for this meeting and noted on a board identified as the “parking lot.” The items placed in the parking lot would be the subject of future meetings.

### Ground Rules

The following ground rules were outlined by the meeting facilitator and adopted by the participants:

- Identify when you are speaking as the representative of an organization rather than as an individual.
- Stay focused on our goals for today. If you want to bring up other issues, explain how they connect to our goals.
- We will assume that anything said here is public information. If you wish something to remain confidential, invoke “the cone of silence.”
- Listen!

## Goals:

- Develop a well-recognized community liaison group
- Determine the role for that group throughout the GMP planning process and beyond
- Identify challenges to a positive park - community relationship
- Identify and prioritizing solutions to these challenges
- Determine solution action-steps



## Parking Lot

- \*Add missing players to group:
  - Town of Islip police, fire emergency services
  - Town of Brookhaven delegation
- \* Sand
- \* Ferries - all lines plus concessionaires
- \* State Parks and neighboring lands
- \* TNC status / MOU
- \* Sand project in GMP
- \* Mosquitoes

## Visions For Success

After the initial round of introductions, meeting participants were invited to share their visions of success for both this meeting and for the future. This exercise was very helpful in that it seemed to fuel the group's sense of purpose and instill an understanding that they shared some inherent common interests. It set a positive tone for the rest of the day, as each participant committed to this shared sense of purpose. The articulated visions were:



- NPS staff working cooperatively with communities
- All communities support new plan and seek funding to make it a success
- GMP is action-oriented, used, solution-driven, happens
- Communities remain involved, building on this good start
- Everyone feels that the plan is fair and wants to actively volunteer to support it
- Visitors know it's a National Seashore and local community members feel proud and happy to live in a National Seashore
- People know history and heritage of park and want to contribute to it
- Community members maintain their unique qualities, while still feeling part of National Seashore
- Preservation – Maintain FIIS as it is today, respecting heritage of FIIS and long-time residents.
- People set aside personal and economic interests and consider what is best for Seashore
- Process leads to FIIS setting standard for parks around the country in terms of how seashores work – a model
- Continued and in-depth collaboration between communities and seashore through communications and recognition of Fire Island's unique nature (diverse community), collaboration, understanding, communication
- KISS – Keep it Simple Stupid, and to a reasonable time frame
- We hold on to our sense of place – protect communities as natural, cultural, historic communities, in addition to natural qualities and link to preservation on the mainland
- NPS and Superintendent move to next stage of relationship to Fire Island = hero –to- adversity –to- irrelevant –to- savior in time to help with current critical issues
- Group will be able to look beyond sand
- We'll have an on-going process and partnership to deal with future issues
- We head off future issues before they get big
- Once plan is in place, it doesn't get upset at Federal Register level
- We deal successfully with beach replenishment program in a timely way
- We listen well to each other



- Partnership – communities are glued together in a functional way and communicate well together
- FIIS helps communities work well together
- We have a shared stewardship that sets the standard within NPS
- We use this opportunity to reflect on how to do it better, to be flexible within standards, to build on past successes, and move forward
- Implement intent of Congress in establishing FIIS
- To create a new and different model for partnering around juxtaposition of culture and wilderness area, including allowing for education and interpretation
- FIIS supports communities in establishing erosion control district
- Group has on - going involvement throughout this process and beyond
- Communities feel they are being “listened to”

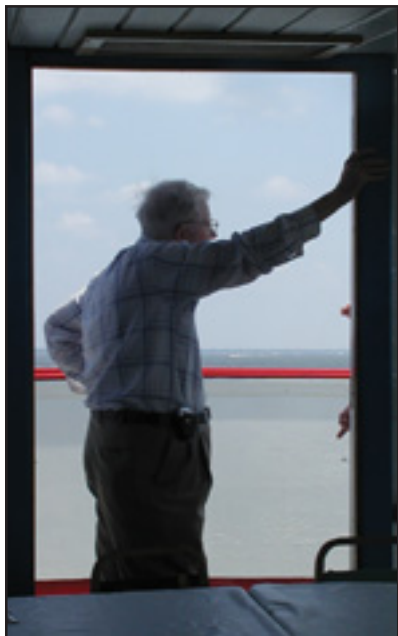
Delia Clark summarized the group’s vision as follows:

- *Increase communication between the park and the communities*
- *Foster communication between communities*
- *Develop some kind of recognized status for a community group during, and possibly after the GMP process- Communities see this group as representing them and trust they’re being heard*
- *To be a part of the solution*



## What Works Well

The balance of the morning discussion focused on how things work now. The meeting became a forum for discussion among representatives of the park and the communities regarding the basis for the park's management requirements, the definition of what a good working relationship with the communities should be, and some past experiences that exemplify these good experiences. Some examples of good working relationships on Fire Island include:



- Fire Island Law enforcement council
- Establishment of FINS was a good thing
- FINS has not been abolished or reduced (abandoning west end)
- NPS has not taken the easy way out of abandoning the west end
- Many things already work to integrate communities:
  - Long Island Power Authority (LIPA)
  - Suffolk County Water Authority (SCWA)
  - Ferry companies
  - 2 newspapers
  - Cons. Soc. ??
  - Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society
- Budget review process – of Suffolk County shared strong tourist economy and builds case on mainland for protection
- Undercurrent beyond official channels allows things to get done on Fire Island – unofficial level of connectivity
- NPS held good meeting related to driving
- This process is finally making people feel heard
- Personal availability and accessibility of Superintendent
  - Intellectual engagement
  - Cell phone number
  - Flexibility
  - Sense of humor

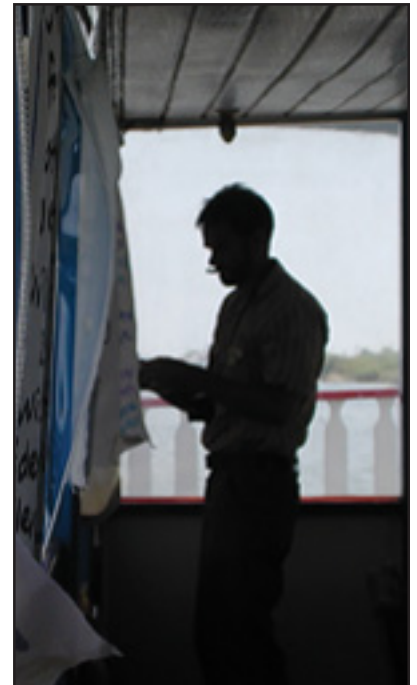


## What Needs Changing

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Conversely, meeting participants discussed what they felt were not working between the communities and FIIS. Examples of what they would like to see changed in the relationship between FINS and the communities include:

- FIIS needs to establish a clear identity
- More public transparency of working together of NPS and Corps of Engineers - Determine how The Nature Conservancy (TNC)/Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) vision fits with the group's vision.
- This group has similar relationship to NPS as the TNC has to Corps
- TNC has not responded to offers for public debate
- Communities don't feel listened to and feel that others (e.g. TNC ) have more status than they do
- This group – collation of communities on Fire Island, needs to have an identity beyond FIA
- Communities are seen as part of a problem rather than solution
- FIIS needs to solve driving issue in order to move forward with all else and give intercommunity communications
- NPS staff (more) should live on Island
- Can't solve problems by non-enforcement
- Confusing permitting process – too complicated forms, state, NPS
- Growth pressure has affected resources – pressure for unlimited growth on limited resources
- Year-rounders are being priced out of existence
- Damage by former administration
- Insect control on Fire Island



## The Solutions Activity

During the afternoon session, meeting participants were organized into break-out groups. Four groups were organized and are referred to by color – Red, Light Green, Purple, and Dark Green. Once everyone was situated they were instructed to identify some concrete, specific solutions to building a strong collaborative partnership between FIIS and the Fire Island communities, as well as between communities.

The individual responses were then grouped into general categories. By organizing the issues in this manner, and getting some modicum of collective agreement about their relative importance within the scope of more generalized categories, these issues could become more “tangible” and therefore, more addressable throughout the GMP planning effort.



The **Red Group** identified the following categories for their solutions:

- Communication: “An Army of Davids”
- Interactive Grassroots Problem Solving
- Mainland Interaction and support · FIIS Community Outreach
- Using the Fire Island Association

The **Light Green Group** categories were:

- Resolving Legal Mumbo-Jumbo
- Share the Love
- Effective and Frequent Communication
- Organization of Cross-Community Groups

The **Purple Group** categories were:

- NYS Department of Environmental Protection
- Vehicles and Regulations
- Communication / Information Gathering / Collaboration / Outreach

The **Dark Green Group** identified:

- Joint People, Program and Issues Development
- Education
- Federal Regulations and Administration / Interagency Coordination
- Community Relations / Advocacy
- Informal / Formal Channels of Communication.

Upon comparing notes at the end of the exercise, it was interesting to note that although one group may have thought about something that other groups didn't, all groups generally had the same thoughts about what the issues are and what solutions would could be implemented to resolve them. And, although different wording may have been used, each group was really suggesting very similar solutions to the broad spectrum of identified issues and problems. For instance, communication was strongly articulated in all four groups, with all four groups stating that frequent, regular and increased communications between FIIS and the communities and between each other would be an essential component for any solution to be successful. Other specific items shared by the groups included resolving perceived or real legal contradictions between government agencies, educational components and building shared trust.



## Communication: “An Army of Davids”

- Regular e-mail forum/discussion
- E-mail list
- Phone tree
- Scheduled meetings with groups
- Stopping rumors the best we can
- Develop website to reference GMP (?illegible)
- Create update system to ensure all understand “accurately” what’s going on (web site, newsletter, chat groups)

## Interactive Grassroots Problem Solving

- Creating an official committee or MOU w/ NPS for the communities
- Come together for meaningful meetings “Speak as a Group” meetings with a purpose of identified outcome desired
- Specific work groups to concentrate on solving a specific issue
- Small committees working on specific problems
- Connecting peer- to-peer relationships on the Island: Rangers linked with Police, managers of villages linked with Superintendent, deputies
- All groups listening and understanding each other

## Mainland Interaction and Support

- Build collaboration between FINS and economic interest groups related to Long Island’s coastal economy
- Make presentation before town, county and village Boards at public hearings addressing issues related to performance (? illegible) and GMP
- Develop a strategy for using internet and information technology to communicate FINS vision of success to mainland population

## FINS Community Outreach

- Mechanism/Inclusion for this coalition to go out to their constituents to spread understanding
- Field trip(s) to show people to resources - issues/qualities of all Fire Island
- Create speakers’ bureau to communicate FI issues that involve mainland to crisis
- Signs, information boards in communities with information about endangered species and park programs and park do’s and don’ts
- An ability to get through each crisis through increased trust

## Using FIA

- Add businesses to FI Board – FIA Business Council
- Move summer FIA meeting among communities.
- Regular attendance by Mike and/or Sean at FIA meetings
- Occasional FIA meetings on LI during shoulder seasons



## **Light Green Marker Group**

### **Resolving Legal Mumbo-Jumbo**

- Long term permits to expand permit process for driving permits on beach
- Standard regulations which are compatible with other state, federal and local government agencies specifically with building permits
- Building community support for redefining their own role and structures under local law and federal authority
- Workshop or series of workshops for FINS employees and other NPS officials to clarify/redefine the NPS “identity” with respect to the seashore and its communities
- Allowing Suffolk County Police to enforce regulations of violations

### **Share the Love**

- Community inclusion in some FIIS all-employee meetings/parties/gatherings

### **Effective and Frequent Communication**

- Bi-monthly/bi -annual meetings of this group and FIIS
- Checking back with one another frequently: i.e., quarterly or annual meetings don't work
- Park newsletter – electronic & hard copy
- Internal readout of where FINS plan is going in various areas
- Community articles contribution to NPS newsletters
- NPS – open houses of gov't administrative and field offices
- Designate one resident from each community as official liaison with the park. Important seashore literature, announcements, etc will be sent to each liaison
- Establish a public affairs officer for FINS – either full-time job or volunteer position

### **Organization of Cross-Community Group**

- Formal fed advisory group is a good thing, but DOI has disfavored it over the last 15 years – Tragedy!
- NPS advocacy from this group
- Non-profit (501(c)3) organization – to represent the 17 communities in their dealings with Fire Island National Seashore
- Break - out issue specific committees
- Multi-lateral group needs adequate staffm funding and statutory purpose



### NYSDEC

- Seashore should try to contact DEC regarding mosquito and tick and green fly problems. Use traps or spraying with as much nontoxic material as possible.
- Regular steering committee meetings
- Comprehensive meeting with all legislative groups
- Willingness to speak for communities on larger issues: spraying, Suff. Co. water use
- Strategy to enlist national, state and local government officials to obtain funding for mutually approved objectives
- Communities self-regulate driving

### Informal / Formal Channels of Communication

- Communication: e-mail, phone chain, call in hours
- Increased communication between FINS and communities
- Increased written communications from park service
- Weekly/monthly meeting with FINS to discuss/resolve problems they have: i.e., nude beach, - communities can support NPS with gov't officials.

### Vehicles and Regs

- Vehicle access should be decided on individual basis. The east end has different problems than the west end. Mr. Valentine has done a good job of recognizing this
- Vehicles: Get rid of Erie \_\_\_\_\_ (? illegible)
- Vehicles: Finish Reg Neg in 2006

### Communication / Information Gathering / Collaboration / Outreach

- Re-invigorate the Fire Island Tourism working groups
- Communication: Find a way to let 90% of population know FI is a National Park
- Regular opinion polls with various groups with distribution of results and specific FINS comments. Newsletter
- Communication: More newsletters and info to communities
- Organize/support the Fire Island Trek every year
- Approaches: Continue to improve the open exchange of ideas
- Include more park field staff in meetings with communities
- Group configurations: Seashore should meet with various interests in small groups: i.e., Contractors, Fire and Police, Utilities, Town Officials, Service Companies.
- Have community reps to meet at meetings as needed for problems that arise



## Dark Green Marker Group

### Joint People, Program and Issues Development

- Support NPS needs to improve operations/facility by philanthropy/political support
- Home rule initiatives to assist in asset management
- All-Island fund raising party for a specific cause
- Help getting grants
- Park exp into addition or space
- Park funding – how is it developed?
- Housing in community – visit as guests
- Insure park personnel “get out” of Patchogue and visit (one - on - one) with each community. FINS is much too insular!

### Education

- Invite NPS to have an educational presence in communities

### Fed Regs and Admin / Interagency Coordination

- Fish and Wildlife authority over Park

### Community Relations / Advocacy

- Park willing to be advocate with townships
- Friends of Park org – just for communities
- Creative thinking by FINS – New initiatives





## Action Steps

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Following the Solutions Activity, the whole group reconvened to discuss action items to support the implementation of solutions discussed during the break out session. The action steps are meant to keep the momentum generated during the work session on a positive course. And, as clearly understood from the very beginning of the day, we all have a vested interest in achieving success. Following are the items recommended for subsequent actions along with an assigned task lead and a timeframe.

### Action Steps Assignments

	<u>WHO</u>	<u>WHEN</u>
<b>Communities collaborate with each other</b>		
Form a sub-group of community managers to work out joint solutions to day-to-day management Issues. Set up a "Community Operations Group" - of FIA. Include FIIS as an ex-officio member. ....	Suzy	9/15
Diagram how Fire Island works – org chart .....	Suzy & Diane	9/20
Create lists of do-ers w/ input from managers & leaders .....	Suzy, Joe, Justin, John	8/10
Call all community leaders for permission to contact mgrs .....	Walter	
<b>Formally create Liaison Group between FIIS – Communities</b>		
Set up first conf. call/mtg Explore web strategy for FIIS/Comm communication ....	Mike	~9/20
<b>Support GMP &amp; content development</b>		
Get helpful media involvement - in-depth article on process .....	Gerry	7/31
Create clear flow chart of GMP, Roles, timeline .....	Ellen	10/1
Clarify legal status of GMP & relationship to park mgt. ....	Robin	~9/20
Clarify GMP segments & big picture .....	NPS team	2/1/07
<b>Build FIIS and community trust</b>		
Have each community have a rep to greet trek as it goes by 9/11-14 .....	Paula	9/10

## Conclusion

Although this project had a rather rocky start, it concluded on a very positive tone, with all participants greatly encouraged with the idea of working together to achieve the single goal that clearly is shared by all members – that being the protection and preservation of Fire Island.

As the meeting started, one goal that the superintendent articulated was to **develop a well-recognized community liaison group**. Without a doubt, this has been accomplished. As of this writing, this group meets regularly, at times with park staff, to work through park - related issues.

A second goal was to **determine the role for the liaison group throughout the GMP planning process and beyond**. Again, as of this writing, the group is living up to this task. The regular meetings that they hold are apparently their own internal efforts to understand those roles and meet the challenges that this undertaking presents.

One of the most important goals that was articulated was to **identify challenges to a positive park - community relationship**.

In response to the two positive goal outcomes discussed above, this one is falling well into place.

Both park personnel and community members are **working together to identify and prioritize solutions** (Goal 4), thereby gaining a more positive understanding of each others' perspectives.

Subsequently **solution action - steps are being determined**, which is the fifth and most evolving of the five goals set forth at the beginning of the *Lauren Kristy* Excursion.

As the GMP process progresses, this initial coming together for a community/park working group will be the foundation of a new collaborative era for Fire Island National Seashore. The small battle of creating collaboration has been won. This portends a much more meaningful win down the road, as the GMP reaches a presumed successful conclusion to what could have otherwise been a small war. We are all encouraged.



## Workshop Participants

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### **NPS:**

Michael Reynolds, FIIS Superintendent  
Sean McGuinness, FIIS Deputy Superintendent  
Diane Abell, FIIS Park Planner  
Robin Lepore, GMP Project Manager  
Ellen Carlson, GMP Project Coordinator  
Paula Valentine, FIIS Chief of Interpretation

### **Consultants:**

Delia Clark, Conservation Studies Institute  
Ann Moss, Shapins Associates  
Tom Gibney, Shapins Associates

### **Community Members:**

Suzy Goldhirsch, Seaview  
Erica Fried, Fair Harbor  
Jerry Feder, Fair Harbor  
Claire Seigal, Blue Point Beach  
Walter Boss, Fire Island Pines  
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Joe Loeffler, Ocean Beach  
Natalie Rogers, Ocean Beach  
Justin McCarthy, Point O'Woods  
John Lund, Davis Park  
Gerry Stoddard, Fire Island Association  
Bob Spencer, Davis Park  
Kevin Gillespie, Fire Island Year Rounders  
Association



Photo courtesy of Diane Abell

Sailing on the Great South Bay

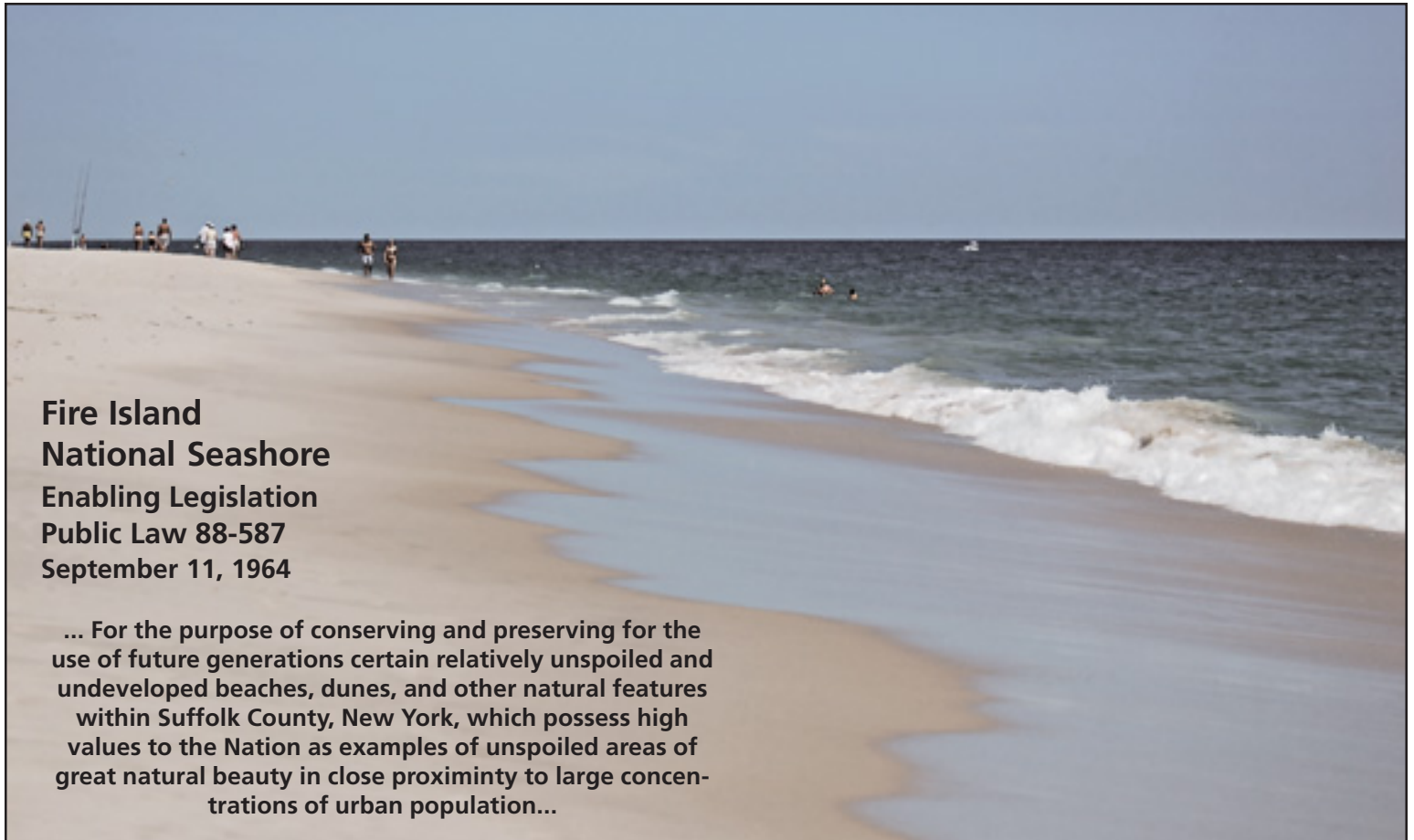


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**Fire Island  
National Seashore  
Enabling Legislation  
Public Law 88-587  
September 11, 1964**

... For the purpose of conserving and preserving for the use of future generations certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes, and other natural features within Suffolk County, New York, which possess high values to the Nation as examples of unspoiled areas of great natural beauty in close proximity to large concentrations of urban population...