



Fire Island National Seashore

INTERIM REPORT

Note From the Superintendent

It is with great pleasure that we take this opportunity to share some of the progress we've made since the formal beginning of the general management planning (GMP) process in summer 2006. The focus of this year's work has been placed squarely on getting a better grasp on what Fire Island is all about:

Who are the individuals, groups, agencies, and organizations that care about, and for this beloved, yet fragile, place?

What are the important issues that this plan will need to tackle?

What information is available? How do we fill information gaps?

We also devoted considerable time to defining our "Foundation for Planning," a collection of statements including the park's purpose, significance, and fundamental resources that zero in on why Fire Island National Seashore was created and its fundamental value to the nation. In addition to the Foundation for Planning, we felt we needed to go a step further to convey our appreciation of the complex environment in which we operate and our commitment to a collaborative approach to protecting our resources. To that end, we have developed a statement of our management philosophy. These statements represent an important "touchstone" that we will return to again and again as we proceed with the planning process. We hope that you will take a look at these statements and share your thoughts about them.

We look forward to another productive year as we turn our attention to developing a range of planning alternatives that will address the many questions raised during the scoping phase of the process. We encourage you to stay involved and informed and look forward to hearing from you.

Michael T. Reynolds

Michael T. Reynolds, Superintendent

WHAT IS A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN (GMP)?

A GMP lays out a vision for the park and provides guidance for management over the next 15 to 20 years. The planning process takes 2 to 3 years to complete. General management planning offers an open, structured decision making process that is (1) logical and trackable, (2) based on scholarly and scientific information and analysis, and (3) based on understanding and consideration of public input. General management plans provide the foundation for decision making in each of our 391 national parks.

Why a new GMP for Fire Island National Seashore? The park's existing plan was approved in 1978. In the intervening 30 years, new resource management issues have emerged as well as new ideas about how to best manage park resources. The Otis Pike High Dune Wilderness was designated and two major historic sites – Fire Island Light and the William Floyd Estate – were added to the park's portfolio of management responsibilities. During this time, the National Seashore's relationship with Fire Island communities has evolved, as have the communities themselves. New ideas about sustainable operations and facility design inspire a closer look at the environmental soundness and cost effectiveness of park facilities and management practices. Our increased understanding of natural processes give us greater ability to understand human impacts on our natural resources as well as how natural processes affect us. While visitation to the park has risen steadily, the economic, ethnic, and geographic diversity of that audience appears to have remained limited, particularly given its location in the metropolitan New York region. Fire Island National Seashore must ensure that its resources and stories continue to be relevant to current and future generations of Americans.

Based on input from park staff, community residents, park visitors, key park partners, and other important stakeholders and after reviewing the park's planning issues, the planning team arrived at four major questions that will be addressed by the general management plan. They are:

How do we develop an integrated management model that capitalizes on partnerships to encourage long-term protection of Fire Island's resources?

What are the ways that the National Park Service can facilitate a safe, rewarding and relevant experience for the public while ensuring resource preservation?

How do Fire Island National Seashore and its partners operate and maintain the park in a flexible, proactive, sustainable, and cost effective way over the long term?

What are the best and most appropriate methods for moving people, goods, and services to, from, and along Fire Island?



Photo courtesy of Shapins Belt Collins



Storm over Fire Island
Photo courtesy of Diane Abell

FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING

To develop the Foundation for Planning, the planning team held two major work sessions. The first, in February 2007, was geared toward the National Park Service community and included representation from the park staff, the Northeast Region, the Conservation Study Institute, and the Washington Office. Draft materials prepared at the February session became the jumping off point for a second workshop in June 2007. The June workshop also involved the park staff, but emphasized the involvement by many stakeholders. They included representatives of Fire Island communities, the towns of Islip and Brookhaven, the village of Patchogue, ferry operators, Friends groups, The Nature Conservancy, the Long Island Association, and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Based on the results of these work sessions, the planning team developed the draft statements that are presented on the following pages.



Dune growing at Sailors Haven
Photo courtesy of Diane Abell

DRAFT PURPOSE

Together with the Fire Island communities, government agencies, and other partners, Fire Island National Seashore conserves, preserves, and protects for the use and appreciation of current and future generations certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes, and other natural features and dynamic processes. These resources possess high values to the nation as examples of great natural beauty in close proximity to large concentrations of urban population.

Fire Island National Seashore conserves, preserves and protects the historic structures, cultural landscapes, museum collections and archeological resources associated with Fire Island National Seashore including the Fire Island Light Station and the William Floyd Estate.

Fire Island National Seashore preserves the primitive and natural character of the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness and protects its wilderness values of solitude and isolation.



Sailboat passing under Robert Moses Causeway
Photo Courtesy of Shapins Belt Collins

DRAFT SIGNIFICANCE

Fire Island National Seashore is a barrier island encompassing relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches and dunes and other natural features and dynamic processes that are of great beauty and quality within close proximity to the largest concentration of population of any national seashore in the United States.

The dynamic and relatively isolated barrier island environment of Fire Island has shaped and been shaped by the continuum of human involvement, giving rise to a distinctive American landscape.

The Sunken Forest, a 250-300-year-old American holly-shadblow-sassafras maritime forest, is a rare and important habitat in the Northeastern United States.

Fire Island National Seashore provides important habitat for marine and terrestrial plants and animals, including a number of rare, threatened and endangered species.

Situated along the Atlantic Flyway, Fire Island is a globally important area for more than 330 migratory, over wintering and resident bird species.

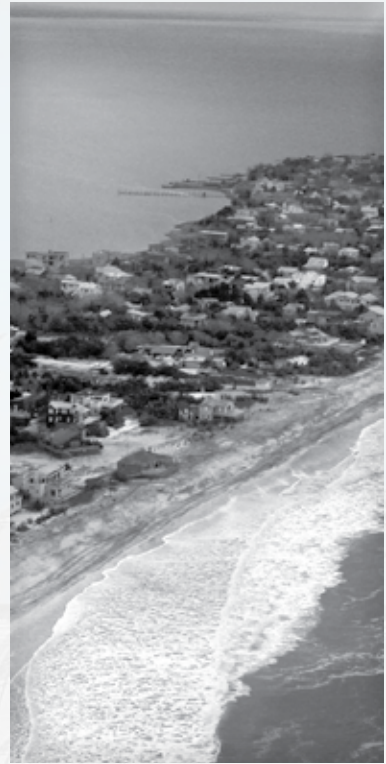
The Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness is the only federally designated wilderness within the National Park System that lies within the most populous metropolitan area in the United States, offering a rare opportunity for a broad spectrum of the American public to experience wilderness.

Owned and occupied by the Floyd Family from 1720 to 1976, the William Floyd Estate was the home of General William Floyd, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Fire Island Light was constructed in 1858 and has served as a critical navigation aid for the port of New York for more than 150 years. An active light has been at this location since 1826.



Piping Plover on the beach
Photo Courtesy of Diane Abell



Left: Marsh Mallow; Center: Great Egret; Right: Davis Park during storm in April 2007
Photos Courtesy of Shapins Belt Collins, Diane Abell, and Paula Valentine



Left: Fire Island preserves miles of undeveloped beach; Center: Old Mastic House at William Floyd Estate; Right: Small boats in Saltaire, one of seventeen pre-existing communities on Fire Island
Photos Courtesy of Shapins Belt Collins and Diane Abell

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

Fundamental Resources and Values are the features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other resources and values determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance. The park has identified the following resources and values as being fundamental to Fire Island National Seashore:

Barrier Island Habitats

Marine Resources

Dynamic Natural Systems

Wilderness and Undeveloped Lands

Cultural Resources

Visitor Experiences

COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Collectively, the island communities, local and county parks, and the national seashore offer a broad range of experiences and services for a diversity of visitors.



Children seining with a ranger at Watch Hill
Photo Courtesy of NPS



Boardwalk to the beach, Cherry Grove
Photo Courtesy of Diane Abell

MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

As the National Park Service engages in the development of a new general management plan for Fire Island National Seashore, it will acknowledge and embrace a management philosophy that is summarized by the following points:

- Fire Island is a dynamic place where natural and human forces have interwoven to create a distinctive landscape.
- As spelled out by Congress in the enabling legislation, the primary purpose of the National Seashore is to protect and preserve natural resources for future generations.
- Natural change is an integral part of the functioning of a barrier island. Within this context, the human needs of today and tomorrow must be mutually understood and addressed in a manner that supports long term resource protection.
- Fire Island National Seashore fosters a relationship between people and the natural and cultural environment that is healthy and sustainable.
- Activities and practices within the 17 preexisting communities affect National Seashore resources, just as park management activities can affect the communities.
- For these reasons, a collaborative approach to stewardship among the National Park Service, the Island communities, government agencies, and all Seashore partners is essential.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SCOPING

Fire Island National Seashore hosted a series of public scoping meetings during the summer and fall of 2006. During the summer months, public open houses were held on Fire Island at Ocean Beach, Davis Park, Sailors Haven, Watch Hill, Cherry Grove, Fire Island Pines, Saltaire and Lighthouse Beach. In September, three public meetings were held on Long Island at Mastic Beach, Patchogue, and Stony Brook followed by a public meeting in Manhattan in November. Over 500 members of the public participated in these sessions including many representatives of local government, special interest groups, and other organizations. We received approximately 32 sets of written comments delivered by hand, U.S. Mail, electronic mail or fax.

The types of issues raised varied widely. We learned that in general, there was broad public support for the National Seashore in both its resource management efforts and public programs. Many meeting participants expressed an interest in seeing a greater NPS ranger presence and

more visitor programming. We also learned that there was quite a bit of confusion on the part of the public about how the communities and the National Seashore related to one another – particularly relative to responsibilities for various functions and activities. This was particularly true relative to boardwalks and other infrastructure.

The comments that we received relative to resource management were dominated by concerns about coastal erosion, deer, mosquitoes, and invasive species. We also received numerous comments focusing on vehicular access – both for and against – and representing many varying interests including contractors, year round and part-time residents, and recreational drivers. Access to beaches for disabled visitors was also highlighted as a concern. Another issue noted was the scale and quality of development within the communities. Numerous comments were also received related to planning for the Wilderness Area. Proponents of the Wilderness Area supported the concept of updating the Wilderness Plan but raised concerns that it might not be treated holistically.



Sign advertising a public scoping meeting at Ocean Beach
Photo Courtesy of Shapins Belt Collins



Visitors to Fire Island provide input at a scoping meeting in Davis Park
 Photo courtesy of Shapins Belt Collins

Not surprisingly, certain topics took considerable precedent over others, depending on the location of the meeting. For instance, at Sailors Haven and Watch Hill, the vast majority of comments focused on the operation and condition of the marinas and associated facilities (e.g. showers). At Lighthouse Beach, a substantial number of people turned out in support of continued clothing optional use of the beach in that area.

The National Park Service distributed comment cards to the public at the public meetings and other venues. A total of 45 cards were returned. The questions asked of the public and a summary of their responses follows.

Question 1: What makes Fire Island National Seashore special to you?

Overwhelmingly, our commentators noted the natural quality, beauty and cleanliness of the beaches and dunes. The connection to nature and opportunities for solitude also figured prominently in people's responses. Many noted the lack of cars as a special characteristic of this place. Proximity to home and the city as well as the opportunities for people to share their Fire Island experience from one generation to the next were also cited as very special attributes.

Question 2: What opportunities and/or management activities would you like to see explored in the GMP?

In response to this question, many commentators expressed a desire to see facilities better maintained or upgraded – particularly bathhouses and restrooms. A number of comments revolved

around expanding opportunities for kayaking and canoeing including the development of a water trail. Protecting Fire Island's beaches from erosion was another common response. Several commentators also noted their objection to more recreational traffic on the beach and the use of personal watercraft – particularly near the Wilderness Area.

Question 3: What is your greatest concern about the future of the park?

A large number of commentators noted their concern about shoreline change and its effect on the beaches and dunes. An equally large number of respondents identified the level of development on the Island as an important concern. User conflict and carrying capacity issues were also raised by a number of people including concerns about impacts to park resources, litter, and the possibility of more vehicular traffic on the Island. Concerns about future funding for park operations were raised by multiple commentators. The future availability of areas for clothing-optional recreation was also noted as a concern.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

YEAR	GMP MILESTONES		
2006	**Project / Public Scoping	Public Outreach	Research, Data Collection & Analysis
2007	Park Purpose, Significance and Themes	Public Outreach	Park Goals
2008	**Alternatives Development	Public Outreach	Draft GMP/EIS - Internal Review
2009	Draft GMP/EIS Prepared for Publication	Public Outreach	**Draft GMP/EIS - Public Review
2010	Final GMP/EIS	Public Outreach	Record of Decision (Spring)
**Opportunities for Public Participation			



Fire Island National Seashore General Management Plan

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FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

PLEASE SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH US

We have included a pre-addressed mail back comment card for your convenience. Please take a moment to consider the content of this progress report and let us know what you think. Visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/fiis for links to the planning project web page, where you can also share your comments electronically. For more information, please contact the planning team at fire_island_gmp@nps.gov or Superintendent Michael Reynolds at (631) 687-4751.

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