



# Special Resource Study News

June 2008

## Message From Study Team

We are pleased to share with you an update on the progress of the National Park Service's (NPS) special resource study (SRS) of Virginia Key Beach Park (VKBP). The study team would like to thank all the participants who have previously provided input on this study. We are once again asking for your input.

This newsletter outlines the study team's evaluation and findings of national significance, suitability, feasibility, and assessment for direct NPS management of the VKBP site for consideration as a new unit of the National Park System. Your participation is an important component of the SRS effort, and as such, we would like to hear your thoughts on the study's findings. Please consider using the enclosed postage paid response form to share your thoughts with the study team. We also encourage you to attend one of the upcoming public open house meetings.

## What is a Special Resource Study?

On December 17, 2002, Public Law 107-343 was established. It directs the Secretary of the Interior to "conduct a study of VKBP, which was used for recreation by African Americans at a time when public beaches were racially segregated by law."

The purpose of the VKBP SRS is to assess the potential of the site for inclusion as a unit of the National Park System. New areas are typically added to the National Park System by an Act of Congress. Before deciding to establish a new park, Congress often authorizes the NPS to gather information regarding the area's resources and its ability to meet the established criteria. This study evaluates the VKBP site and formulates recommendations for consideration by Congress.

To receive a favorable recommendation from the NPS, a proposed addition to the National Park System must (1) possess nationally significant resources, (2) be a suitable addition to the System, (3) be a feasible addition to the System, and (4) require direct management by the NPS instead of protection by another public agency or the private sector.

These criteria are designed to ensure that the National Park System includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation's natural, cultural, and recreational resources. They also recognize that there are other management alternatives for preserving the nation's outstanding resources.

## Update on the Study's Progress

On December 4, 2006, NPS leadership provided their assessment on the study team's initial finding for the national significance, suitability, and feasibility of the VKBP site. Since then, a number of internal meetings and presentations were conducted between the study team and NPS colleagues that culminated in an approval from NPS leadership to proceed with notifying the public of the findings. An abbreviated summary of the NPS's findings is presented in this newsletter.

## Public Meeting Schedule

We would like to invite you to attend either of the public open house meetings listed below so the NPS can listen to your comments and answer any questions you might have.

### Charles Hadley Park

Community Room  
1300 NW 50th Street  
Miami, FL 33142  
(Free public parking is available.)

**Tuesday, July 15, 2008; 5:00 – 7:30 pm**

### Rosenstiel School (RSMAS)

Graduate Studies Seminar Room  
4600 Rickenbacker Causeway  
Miami, FL 33149-1098  
(Free public parking outside the main gate. The guard will direct you to the meeting room.)

**Wednesday, July 16, 2008; 4:00 – 6:30 pm**

Each open house meeting will feature a brief slide presentation.

## Preliminary Evaluation of National Significance

For the resources of VKBP to be considered nationally significant, they must meet the criteria in the NPS *Management Policies, 2006*. These policies state that national significance for cultural resources will be evaluated by applying the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) criteria. The study team examined the following NHL criteria as they relate to VKBP:

### (1) Sites associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of United States history.

VKBP was founded in 1945 following a one- day wade- in demonstration at the “whites- only” Baker’s Haulover Beach, located approximately 20 miles north of Virginia Key Beach. Although this event is an early instance of a successful planned nonviolent act of civil disobedience in the South, the event did not take place at Virginia Key Beach. This aside, neither the demonstration itself nor the location of the demonstration at Baker’s Haulover Beach ever achieved a strong association with the broader civil rights struggle and did not spur other events or lead to broader civil rights movements.

### (2) Sites associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.

VKBP is associated with Judge Lawson Thomas. Thomas directed the wade- in at Baker’s Haulover Beach which led to the establishment of VKBP. He was an important figure in and around Miami at the local level, but he was not individually exceptionally significant within a national historic context. In addition, although nationally prominent celebrities and Civil Rights leaders recreated at the park, they were not “associated importantly” with the site as the criterion calls for, as they also recreated at other sites around the country,

such as American Beach, FL. To be associated importantly, the site has to be the one site that best represents the person’s nationally historic contributions.

The analysis of the NHL criteria was sent to the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program for review. The opinion from the Program states that VKBP did not represent a major event or turning point in the national struggle for civil rights and is not associated importantly with persons nationally significant in the history of the Civil Rights Movement.

***Preliminary findings of the study:***  
*Based upon the opinion of the NHL Program and an analysis of the NHL criteria for national significance, the preliminary determination does not find VKBP to be nationally significant as defined in the NPS Management Policies, 2006, despite the site’s remarkable local significance in the struggle for civil rights.*

## Preliminary Evaluation of Suitability

For VKBP to be considered a suitable addition to the National Park System, it must represent a cultural resource type that is not already adequately represented and protected for public enjoyment in the National Park System or by other federal agencies; tribal, state, or local governments; or the private sector.

VKBP is an impressive example of a segregated beach-front recreational facility. However, in assessing a comparison of VKBP to other NPS, State, and local properties, it is apparent that resources similar to those of VKBP are adequately represented by other public entities. Examples of areas protected for public enjoyment are:

- American Beach at Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, Florida – established in 1932 and brought into Timucuan in 2004
- Twin Lakes State Park, Virginia – established in 1949

Another way that VKBP could be considered suitable is to determine if the site fits into an appropriate NHL theme study. The theme study entitled, “Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites” (2003), identifies property types that are associated with important events in the national struggle for civil rights. VKBP fits best under the property type known as gathering place. According to the theme study, a gathering place must:





site is located two miles east of downtown Miami and is easily accessible by a toll road. Although certain facilities necessary for the park to operate already exist, additional facilities and improvements would be needed.

The city of Miami owns the park and its intent is to preserve and protect the park. There are currently no anticipated land use conflicts associated with the areas surrounding the site.

Site analyses have not uncovered management feasibility issues related to land ownership, political or community support, acquisition

costs, threats to the resource, potential access, property size, or configuration. The historic and natural settings of the park are of sufficient size and shape to ensure long- term protection of resources and accommodate public use.

#### ***Preliminary findings of the study:***

***Apart from potential NPS operational and development costs, VKBP appears to be feasible for inclusion in the National Park System.***

- (1) mark the site of a major event or phase of civil rights history;
- (2) be associated with a model grass- roots demonstration; and
- (3) be the focal point of a grass- roots project at the national level.

The National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program's opinion is that VKBP (or 20 miles north at Baker's Haulover Beach) does not meet these three criteria.

#### ***Preliminary findings of the study:***

***Although the park is an impressive example of a segregated beach- front recreational facility, in assessing a comparison of VKBP to other NPS, State, and local properties, it is apparent that resources similar to those of VKBP are adequately represented by other public entities.***

***In addition, VKBP does not meet the requirements to be categorized in an appropriate NHL theme study. Therefore, VKBP does not meet the criteria to be considered suitable for addition to the National Park System.***

### **Preliminary Evaluation of Feasibility**

In addition to meeting national significance and suitability requirements, VKBP must also meet criteria for feasibility. To be considered feasible, a proposed area must be of sufficient size and configuration to ensure long- term sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment. It must also have the potential for efficient administration at a reasonable cost.

The 82.5- acre park site is of appropriate size and configuration to allow for park service management. The

### **Requires Direct NPS Management**

The fourth criterion requires that VKBP needs direct NPS management for its protection instead of management by other public agencies or the private sector. Based on the amount of current interest to protect and interpret the site by the city of Miami and the current site manager – the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust – the preliminary determination is that the site does not require direct NPS management for its protection.





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## Next Steps:

***Review and Analyze Public Comment.*** The study team will review and analyze comments received from stakeholders and the public regarding the contents of this newsletter and the public meetings.

***Prepare and Publish Study Report.*** The study team will prepare a special resource study report that includes background information regarding Virginia Key Beach Park (VKBP) and a more detailed evaluation of significance, suitability, feasibility, and whether VKBP requires direct management by the National Park Service (NPS).

***Transmit Study Report to Congress.*** A legislative package that includes the final study report, preliminary recommendations based on

the NPS's findings, and summary of public comments will be assembled and transmitted to the Director of the NPS. The Director will use the study and the preliminary recommendation in finalizing an NPS recommendation that will be transmitted to the Secretary of the Interior.

The findings and recommendations of the study will then be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget and then the Committee of Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate and the Committee on Resources of the United States House of Representatives. After review of the report and recommendation, Congress has the option to pursue legislation establishing a new national park system unit or other designation.

## ***Virginia Key Beach Park Special Resource Study***