

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Glacier Bay National Park

Draft Marine Management Plan and Environmental Assessment including updates to Vessel Quotas and Operating Requirements

November 2022

1. Why is the NPS proposing changes to marine management at Glacier Bay National Park (the park)?

Planning for the management of marine waters at the park began in 2020 with a park Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) review of the existing marine management framework, visitor opportunities, and resource conditions. Consultation with federally-recognized tribes was also initiated at this early stage recognizing the marine systems as a unique cultural landscape which informed, and is integral to, the culture and identity of the Huna and Yakutat Tlingit. The IDT discussed the central issues driving the need for a comprehensive marine management plan, and possible changes to the vessel management quotas last established in 2003. A detailed summary of these issues is included in Chapter 1 of the draft Marine Management Plan.

The IDT determined that action is needed at this time to provide a long-term marine management plan that addresses (1) changing visitor use patterns, (2) potential new vessel technology, (3) rapidly changing environmental conditions in the context of research results that established and improved the understanding of relationships between resources and vessel activities after the 2003 VQOR ROD was completed, (4) restoring opportunities to visit the park according to founding park purposes, and (5) providing visitors on private vessels with balanced and equitable access to the park in a manner that helps achieve the park's desired conditions.

The purpose of this planning effort is to: 1) establish marine management zones within the park to guide future management decisions; 2) meet desired conditions by establishing new vessel types, updating the vessel quotas for private vessels, and revising operating requirements across all vessel types; and 3) addressing programs and facilities that support communication and the management and monitoring of the park's marine environment.

2. How do the draft Marine Management Plan (draft plan) and Environmental Assessment (EA) relate to other recent park plans?

National Park system units can develop General Management Plans (GMP) to meet broad NPS management goals, like the park did with its 1984 GMP, or can develop more targeted plans to address specific park issues. These documents typically articulate management objectives,

describe future conditions, and provide management guidance that meets the NPS GMP statutory planning requirements. Under NPS Director's Order (DO) 2: Park Planning, the NPS takes a portfolio approach to general management planning, such that planning guidance can now be provided through any number of other documents that address statutory planning requirements parkwide or for a particular park area.

The park manages marine vessel access within Glacier Bay across multiple management zones. Initiated in 1979 and adjusted by Congress in 2003, this management structure helps balance the protection of park resources while providing a range of rewarding opportunities for visitors consistent with the park's purpose and values. This draft plan and EA update and clarify many decisions within the broader Glacier Bay access and vessel management area. Figures and text in the draft plan and EA clarify where this overlay currently applies, and where changes are proposed by the park.

The draft Marine Management Plan considers the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems and focuses on most marine waters in the park. Some marine areas in the park subject to vessel management decisions (including vessel quotas and operating requirements) set by this draft plan are zoned and managed by other park plans to better address their unique visitor use patterns and stewardship considerations. The park's Frontcountry Management Plan (FMP), completed in 2019, focused on Bartlett Cove, the Inner Lagoon, and part of the Beardslee Islands Tidal Cut. The park's Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan (BWMP), released in draft form in July 2022 for public review, focuses on designated Wilderness lands and waters.

In separating out these three plans, the NPS was able to focus each planning effort on the zones, desired conditions, and management strategies specific to each area of the park. Additionally, this approach allowed the NPS to produce focused and concise NEPA documents consistent with CEQ regulations at 40 CFR 1501.5. The Marine Management Plan EA includes actions from the FMP and BWMP when addressing cumulative effects to park resources.

3. What studies and data collection efforts have informed the draft Marine Management Plan (draft plan) and Environmental Assessment (EA)?

Studies and data collection efforts that informed the draft plan and EA are cited in the document and can be found in Appendix A- References.

4. How will the draft plan and EA affect access to sport fishing and other recreational pursuits in Glacier Bay?

Park objectives include preserving native fishes and their habitats and providing recreational fishing opportunities for the enjoyment of park visitors now and into the future. Changes to the permitting system for private vessels is not anticipated to reduce access to sport fishing or other recreational opportunities for most visitors. Based on the changes to permit distribution under Alternatives B and C and the use of overnight and day use permits, the opportunity for some local visitors to engage in day use activities, like fishing, may change. However, in 2017 there were only 9% of days (8 days) that all private vessel permits were occupied, and in 2018, 24% of days (22 days) had all vessel permits occupied. Additionally, up to ten unused overnight permits may

be converted to day use permits on short notice, possibly expanding opportunities for visitors to recreate in Glacier Bay without having to overnight. Based on recent data showing low private permit saturation (in 2017 only 9% of days were full and in 2018 only 24% of days were full), and even with the implementation of numerous actions intended to more fully utilize private vessel permits, it can be assumed that at most times, more than five permits would be available for day use activities such as fishing under either Alternative B or C. The NPS' preferred alternative, Alternative D, does not distinguish between overnight or day use permits and presents less of a change from current conditions related to the distribution of private vessel permits.

Lastly, the proposed expansion of the permit season from June 1 to May 1 and then from August 31 to September 30 for private vessels would not affect the quota season, which remains from June 1 to August 31. In May and September, private motorized vessels would be required to hold a permit, but this permit would be obtained online or through in-person registration, and no quotas or capacity thresholds would apply during these months. The purpose of expanding the permit and orientation season is to help the park track visitor and vessel use numbers. This information could assist the NPS in providing a high-quality visitor experience and maintaining desired conditions. Additionally, it would allow the NPS to provide important resource protection information to boaters as well as access key trip information from visitors, potentially increasing the NPS' ability to quickly respond to emergency situations. The extension of the permit season would not restrict sport fishing or other recreational pursuits in Glacier Bay.

5. How is commercial fishing managed within the park and how will this draft plan and EA affect it?

Commercial fishing, where allowed under Public Law 105-277 Sec. 123, in the park is limited. To participate in one or more of the authorized commercial fisheries in Glacier Bay a person must possess a Lifetime Access Permit. Lifetime Access Permits are not transferrable to another person; thus, commercial fishing within Glacier Bay will continue to decrease until no Lifetime Access Permits are left. The current draft plan and EA do not propose any changes to commercial fishing.

6. Will the prioritization of lower-impact vessels under Alternatives B and C restrict the use of motorboats in Glacier Bay?

No. The park is proposing to formalize a definition for lower-impact motorized vessels as a vessel that by design or technology consumes less fuel, produces less pollution (air or water), minimal noise, small wakes, and lower maximum speeds, thereby having fewer negative impacts on wildlife, park resources, and other visitors. Under alternatives B and C, lower-impact vessels would receive priority in the permitting system for a small number of vessels for advance-notice permits only. Alternative D, the preferred alternative, takes a different approach to promoting lower impact vessels. Lower-impact vessels would not have priority in the private vessel permit allocation system and the park may exclude lower-impact vessels from requirements directly related to the effects of the vessel type under existing regulatory processes (36 CFR § 13.50), such as distance to shore requirements. The NPS may discontinue operating requirements tailored to lower-impact vessels if desired conditions are not being met. In defining lower-impact vessels,

the NPS seeks to encourage private vessel owners to adopt lower-impact technologies that benefit park resources and visitor experiences, not to exclude motorboats from Glacier Bay.

7. What opportunities for public involvement are you providing for this draft plan and EA?

The NPS initiated a formal NEPA process and began a 30-day public scoping period for the Marine Management Plan and EA on August 9, 2022. The NPS released a newsletter that provided the public with background on the planning effort, a purpose and need statement, preliminary alternatives for the EA, environmental issues, and how to comment on elements of the proposal. The NPS held three public meetings in Gustavus, Juneau, and Hoonah Alaska and accepted public comments through September 9, 2022.

The NPS released the draft plan and EA on November 30 for a 30-day public review period, concluding December 30. The public is encouraged to submit comments through NPS's PEPC website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/Gbwaters>. Comments will also be accepted during the meetings, by US mail, in person at the park and emailed to GLBA_public_comments@nps.gov. The NPS will hold two hearings near the park in:

- Gustavus, Alaska
 - Gustavus Public Library, 14 Gustavus Road
 - Wednesday, December 7
 - 5:00PM–8:00PM
- Juneau, Alaska
 - Juneau Public Library, Valley Branch, 3025 Dimond Park Loop
 - Tuesday, December 13, 2022
 - 5:00PM–8:00PM

The NPS will give a short presentation at the bottom of every hour and a court reporter will be available to take testimony.

8. How will the conditional transit permit for entry to and exit from Bartlett Cove be issued? Do I need a private vessel permit to exit or enter Bartlett Cove?

As described in 36 CFR 13.1156(b), a motor vessel operating in Bartlett Cove waters east of a line extending from the long axis of the fuel dock to the Wilderness boundary of Lester Island does not require a private vessel permit. However, to enter or exit from Bartlett Cove, a vessel is required to have a private vessel permit per 36 CFR 13.1160. In order to assist with the movement of vessels, a transit permit was used at the park to enable private vessels to transit from Icy Strait directly to Bartlett Cove or vice versa, with an average of 67.6 vessels (2007-2011) using the permit annually. The requirement to issue a transit permit ended in 2011 (36 CFR § 13.1160) and this plan proposes to formalize a conditional transit permit to assist with vessel movement.

Under all action alternatives, no more than one conditional transit permit would be allowed at any one time (with a limit of one way per day per vessel) and would depend on availability within the

daily private vessel quota. If private vessel seasonal day-use quotas (2,300 seasonal limit) are exceeded, the availability of these conditional transit permits would be reduced in the future. The first purpose of this permit is to enable private vessels to directly exit or enter Bartlett Cove and not take away permits from others seeking a full day visit for purposes for which the park was established. The second purpose of this permit is to promote high-quality visitor experiences in the frontcountry consistent with park management plans. Private vessels using the conditional transit permit would be time-limited on a mid-channel or other prescribed course. The conditional transit permit would only be available to owner-occupied private vessels for recreational purposes upon confirmation that none of the occupants aboard have any business interests and where staging the boat in the park does not offer any commercial advantage (per existing NPS policy).

9. Can you explain the difference between the permit season, quota season, and peak season?

The private vessel permit season will be expanded to begin on May 1 and end on September 30 to coincide with the seasonal call-in/call-out requirement, which will remain May 1 through September 30. In May and September, private motorized vessels will be required to hold a permit, but this permit would be obtained online or through in-person registration, and no quotas or capacity thresholds will apply during these months. The purpose of expanding the permit and orientation season is to help the park track visitor and vessel use numbers. This information could assist the NPS in providing a high-quality visitor experience and maintaining desired conditions. Additionally, it will allow the NPS to provide important resource protection information to boaters as well as access key trip information from visitors, potentially increasing the NPS' ability to quickly respond to emergency situations.

The quota season is defined in 36 CFR 13.1160 as June 1- August 31 when a daily vessel quota of 25 is established for private vessel permits.

Under Alternatives B and C, a peak season would be defined in timing and duration as the busiest weeks in the permit season when private vessel permits are typically 90% full. During the peak season, the NPS would implement adaptive strategies to fairly allocate use and preserve Glacier Bay access opportunities for a diversity of visitors, consistent with park purposes. The peak season would initially be defined as the six-week period from the last week in June to the first week in August. The peak season would be reevaluated every three to five years, and if a change to the peak season is required, it would be disclosed in the Superintendent's Compendium.

10. Why are communication upgrades proposed in this planning effort?

Under all action alternatives, the NPS proposes to upgrade existing and deploy new communications infrastructure within the next one to three years. The primary communications system would be an automatic identification system (AIS), an automatic vessel tracking system that uses transceivers on vessels and land-based receiver stations. AIS information supplements marine radar, which is the primary method of collision avoidance for marine vessels. AIS infrastructure would also enhance safety and search and rescue capabilities in the park. Currently, only one AIS transponder site is located in the park at a Coast Guard installation that has provided aids to navigation since 1912 on a headland at Cape Spencer. Currently, AIS is also required for all concessions vessels in Glacier Bay in order to track contract compliance and

increase safety. As most of the park's visitation occurs in the park's marine waters and adjoining shorelines, expanding AIS coverage would provide a navigational aid to support the safe enjoyment by visitors, commercial operators, and private vessels throughout Glacier Bay. AIS transponder sites would co-located at up to 10 existing sites in the park with the goal of full coverage of park waters.

Additionally, existing VHF radio (e.g., ParkNet) infrastructure may be upgraded (e.g., in the park at Beartrack Mountain, Idaho Ridge, Bartlett Cove, and Deception Hills; also at Althorp Peak (US Forest Service)). The continued maintenance of VHF repeaters is vital to park operations. Failure of repeaters would present risks to health and safety of park employees and visitors.

Once the scope and design for these actions are sufficiently developed, the park would complete additional site-specific NEPA reviews as appropriate, prior to implementation.

11. What is the intent of nonmotorized vessel management triggers? If a trigger is met, does this mean the park will turn nonmotorized users away?

Nonmotorized vessel use is not distributed evenly across all park waters. The park has some tools to assess trends in resource conditions and biophysical impacts that result from backcountry recreation (Goonan 2015), but more is needed. The goal of setting a nonmotorized use indicator, triggers, and thresholds is to provide a measure by which to evaluate and protect park resources and provide quality experiences for nonmotorized vessel users, while maximizing opportunities for users to freely explore the park.

Should a trigger be met, the park will identify which desired conditions are not being met under these conditions and would select which Management Action Progressions (Chapter 3 of the draft plan) should be used to better align nonmotorized vessel use levels with desired conditions (Chapter 2 of the draft plan).

If monitoring suggests that management actions do not achieve and maintain desired conditions, the park would continue to implement actions within the management actions progressions list to avoid meeting the threshold. In some scenarios, more detailed monitoring, such as number of nonmotorized user groups encountered, may be used to inform park decisions. If there are substantial changes, such as environmental changes that drastically affect nonmotorized use, the park may re-evaluate the identified triggers and thresholds for nonmotorized users in a subsequent effort.