

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ON
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT
CAPE LOOKOUT NATIONAL SEASHORE
NORTH CAROLINA

INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the General Management Plan Amendment (GMP Amendment) for Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina. The GMP Amendment/EA addresses the issues of transportation services and overnight accommodation services on the Core Banks while protecting the seashore's natural and cultural resources. The preferred plan and alternatives are described in detail in the EA.

The purpose of this document is to record the selection of the preferred plan with the following clarifications and a Finding of No Significant Impact pursuant to the Council of Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. This document should be attached to the EA.

SUMMARY OF THE PREFERRED PLAN AND ITS ALTERNATIVE

In summary, the preferred plan proposes that the National Park Service will:

- negotiate long-term contracts with concessionaires to transport visitors and vehicles from the towns of Davis, North Carolina and Atlantic, North Carolina to Great Island and Long Point, both sites on the Core Banks, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina;
- improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing 30 new cabins;
- add 10 new cabins at Long Point
- improve IBP relationships by issuing biennial IBPs to small craft operators that provide transport services to visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area;
- reduce the number of parking spaces near the Keeper's Quarters; and
- develop an Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Plan.

In the Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, the National Park Service proposed one Alternative Plan and a no action alternative. The National Park Service considered

other alternatives during the planning process, but these were considered not feasible. In summary, the Alternative Plan proposed that the National Park Service would:

- negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point;
- improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island, constructing new 30 units, of which 10 units would be rustic with communal baths;
- add 10 rustic lodging units with communal baths at Long Point;
- improve IBP relationships and issue annual IBPs to small craft operators to provide transport services for visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area;
- reduce the number of parking spaces near the Keeper's Quarters; and
- reduce the number of parking spaces from 60 to 30 during primary nesting/hatchling season at Long Point and Great Island.

In summary, the no action alternative continues the current conditions:

- maintain short-term contract with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point;
- maintain overnight accommodations at Great Island;
- maintain the current number of cabins at Long Point;
- maintain annual IBPs to small craft operators to provide transport services for visitors to Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters; and
- maintain the number of spaces at all parking areas on the island.

The Alternative Plan differs from the Preferred Plan in that the 10 units at Long Point would be rustic with communal baths. Ten of the 30 units at Great Island would be rustic with communal baths. Only 30 parking spaces would be available for parking at Long Point and Great Island during the primary turtle and plover nesting/hatchling period. IBPs would be issued annually instead of biennially; and the NPS would not develop an Off Road Vehicle Plan.

Based on an analysis of impacts and input from the public, the NPS selected the Preferred Plan in lieu of the Alternative Plan and no action because:

The design of cabins will, in general, reflect the successful new cabins at Long Point and not be constructed to a more rustic standard. These cabins will appeal to a broader group of visitors than surf fishermen, but will still be in keeping with fairly spare accommodations and not compete with accommodations on the mainland. The new cabins at Great Island will occupy a much smaller area than the current 163-acre configuration, thus allowing a significant area to revert to natural conditions. This restored area at Great Island will be considerably larger than the area to be disturbed and eventually occupied by the new units at Long Point, thus resulting in a net gain of area restored to natural conditions.

The cabin sites have historically been used for lodging and vehicle storage. Some immediate impacts associated with the demolition and construction of the cabins will occur. These short-term impacts, disturbed earth, dust, noise over the ambient, and disarray, will be gone at the

conclusion of the demolition and construction phase of this project. Short-term impacts may be mitigated through construction best management practices. Regularly sprinkling the roads and vehicle circulation routes with water will reduce dust. Regular pick-up and disposal of litter and construction debris will reduce the litter problems. Noise and disarray are functions of a construction site and will disappear at the conclusion of construction. Remaining for the long term will be cabins, roads and fewer parking areas.

Reducing the size of some parking areas while maintaining the other parking areas will allow the restoration of natural conditions in one area while providing adequate parking for the many surf fishermen. All in all, the area occupied by facilities under the Preferred Plan and restored to natural conditions will be reduced from the current situation.

Extending long-term contracts to concessioners will help ensure a high-level of service to many of the seashore's visitors by providing reliable transportation and adequate accommodations. Concessioners will be able to make needed investments in services and facilities that will ultimately benefit the visitor. The appreciation for resource protection will be enhanced through long-term joint NPS-concessioner educational efforts.

Biennial issuance of IBP permits will reduce administrative time and costs. It will also allow the holder of the IBP sufficient time to develop a reliable service for the visitor.

The location of cabins and ferry landing sites will result in no adverse impact on any of the Federal or State-listed threatened or endangered species or species of special concern on the Core Banks. Cabins and ferry landing sites are located a distance away from any of the Federal or State-listed threatened or endangered species. The NPS has entered into protocols with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure the protection of sea turtles, piping plovers, and seabeach amaranth. As a result of these protocols the NPS implements actions to ensure that visitor use occurring as a result of the occupation of the cabins and transport to the Core Banks by ferry do not result in a "take" of the mentioned species.

Improved educational efforts will heighten visitor understanding and awareness of the Core Banks and improve the chances that ORV operators and park visitors, in general, will respect efforts to protect the island's environment.

The NPS has made a commitment to prepare an ORV Plan to help determine the impact of ORVs on threatened and endangered species. This plan will assist in providing the NPS with the information to adjust its actions, if necessary, regarding the protection of threatened and endangered species. Any adjustment to the size of the parking areas, vehicle use, and vehicle routes would be predicated on the findings of the ORV Plan.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENTS

First public review of Draft GMP Amendment /EA:

A total of eight written comments were received during the public review of the EA which

commenced on July 14, 1999. Close consultation with agencies, organizations, and neighbors throughout the planning process resulted in the incorporation of many of their ideas into the plan. In December 2000 as a result of the comments arising from the 1999 review, the National Park Service reissued the Draft GMP Amendment/ EA to address State-listed species and a no action alternative.

As a result of comments from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the NPS recognizes that protocols for managing threatened and endangered species may be adjusted from the GMP Amendment's Preferred Plan to reflect the findings of the ORV Plan.

The North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources commented that two National Register-listed properties, the Cape Lookout Village Historic District and the Cape Lookout Light Station, lie within the geographical area covered by the amendment. The State noted that the GMP Amendment/EA should be clarified to discuss the impacts on the National Register districts. Subsequent discussions with the State revealed that the eligibility of the Cape Lookout Village Historic District nomination is pending. Because the plan proposes to reduce the amount of space allocated to vehicle storage near the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters, the NPS anticipates an improvement to the historic scene associated with the district. The parking area near the environmental education center will be restored to "natural" conditions and a portion of another parking area, near the use and occupancy area, will also be restored. These actions are anticipated to enhance the landscape. Likewise, the proposed actions on the parking lots are anticipated to enhance the landscape associated with the pending Cape Lookout Village Historic District.

The NPS acknowledges the significance of the cultural landscapes associated with the national register districts. Alternatives that proposed intrusions to the districts were eliminated from further consideration during the planning process.

The State also reminded the NPS that prior to demolition of the cabins at Great Island, an assessment of the National Register eligibility of any building 50 years old or older must be undertaken and review by the State in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The NPS will involve the State Historic Preservation Office when it comes time to evaluate and or assess these cabins.

The GMP Amendment/EA were prepared in compliance with Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended. Executive Order 11593 (as noted as Item No. 5 in the Compliance Requirements section of the GMP Amendment/EA) was codified when Section 110 was added to the National Historic Preservation Act.

The NPS hosted two public meetings on the Draft GMP Amendment/EA at the Duke Marine Labs in Beaufort, North Carolina on September 28 and 29, 1999. Approximately 75 people attended the meetings. As a result of the public comments at the meetings and the letters received from members of the public, the NPS made several modifications to the proposed plan. Most significantly, the plan emphasizes the need to prepare an off road vehicle (ORV) plan for the national seashore to be undertaken in the near future. The conclusions of this plan will assist

the NPS in its management of the visitor in relation to threatened and endangered species.

Two other noteworthy changes have been made. Reference to a specific number of vehicles accommodated at the two vehicle storage areas near the Long Point and Great Island cabin areas has been eliminated. The plan also changed the reference to annual and “biannual” individual business permits to annual and “biennial” permits.

Some members of the public beseeched the NPS to remove the cabins and eliminate vehicle use in order to enhance the natural resources of the barrier island. The NPS believes that the plan balances the needs of the recreating public with those of the natural forces of the barrier island. Appendix D addresses a number of those comments. The proposed ORV plan will provide further direction to the NPS to ensure that its management of the national seashore will be in compliance with the protocols developed between it and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding threatened and endangered species.

Second public review of Draft GMP Amendment/EA:

Generally, responses (totaling 19) received during the second public review period addressed matters other than State-listed species and the no action alternative. Nevertheless, the NPS incorporated a number of these comments to strengthen the understanding of the document and to correct inaccuracies. Appendix E of the final plan and environmental assessment addresses many of these comments.

Two respondents insisted that the NPS prepare a new General Management Plan. The park has requested funding to prepare a new General Management Plan between 2002 and 2005; funding for this effort will be based upon service-wide competition.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE PREFERRED PLAN

The preferred plan will not result in impairment from indirect, direct, or cumulative impacts and will not violate the NPS Organic Act.

The preferred plan will not adversely affect endangered or threatened species. Section 7 consultation has been completed.

The preferred plan is in compliance with the Coastal Zone Management Act.

No Statement of Findings will be prepared for this project, as there will be no adverse impacts within the floodplain or wetlands. No prime or unique farmlands will be affected by the recommendations in the plan.

Consultation under Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act has been completed.

CONCLUSION

The preferred plan as described in the 2001 GMP Amendment/EA does not constitute a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment as defined in section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (Public Law 91-190, 83 Stat. 953). Therefore, the NPS will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

Signed and dated original on file at Southeast Regional Office, Atlanta, Georgia

Jerry Belson
Regional Director
Southeast Region

Date