

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SEASHORE

Located 3 miles off the mainland coast and occupying more than 29,000 acres of land and water, Cape Lookout National Seashore protects one of the few remaining natural coastal barrier island systems in the world. While people historically used the barrier islands of the national seashore in many ways, the harsh maritime environment discouraged extensive settling of the area. As a result of its relative isolation, much of the islands' natural environment and ecosystems remain intact and undisturbed.

The barrier islands of Cape Lookout National Seashore are among the most dynamic in the United States. Storm waves periodically sweep over the landscape and are a dominant force in shaping and maintaining their characteristic low profile. A variety of closely associated plant and animal communities exist here and form a unique barrier island ecosystem. Native grasslands located at the national seashore comprise the only remaining natural grasslands in the eastern United States. Cape Lookout National Seashore is part of the northernmost nesting range of the loggerhead turtle — a marine turtle included on the Federal List of Endangered Species. The national seashore also provides the southernmost nesting range for the federally listed piping plover (Rare nesting events occurred in South Carolina in 1991 and 1993). In addition, small populations of the endangered seabach amaranth grow in suitable habitat and conditions within the national seashore.

Excellent opportunities for fishing, shellfishing, hunting, beachcombing, hiking, swimming, and camping in a remote setting are found at Cape Lookout National Seashore. No bridges link the islands to the mainland and overnight accommodations are limited and rustic in nature. Two concessionaire-operated ferries transport visitors, fishermen, and their vehicles to the Core Banks. Small craft operators from Harkers Island bring visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Many day users and campers use personal boats to reach the national seashore. Other operators leave from Beaufort and Moorehead City. Another service travels between Ocracoke and Portsmouth Island.

Thousands of visitors cross the sound annually to walk the beaches and view the Cape Lookout Lighthouse. The lighthouse, which was constructed in 1859, a summer kitchen, keeper's quarters, coal storage building, and woodshed comprise a historic lighthouse complex that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

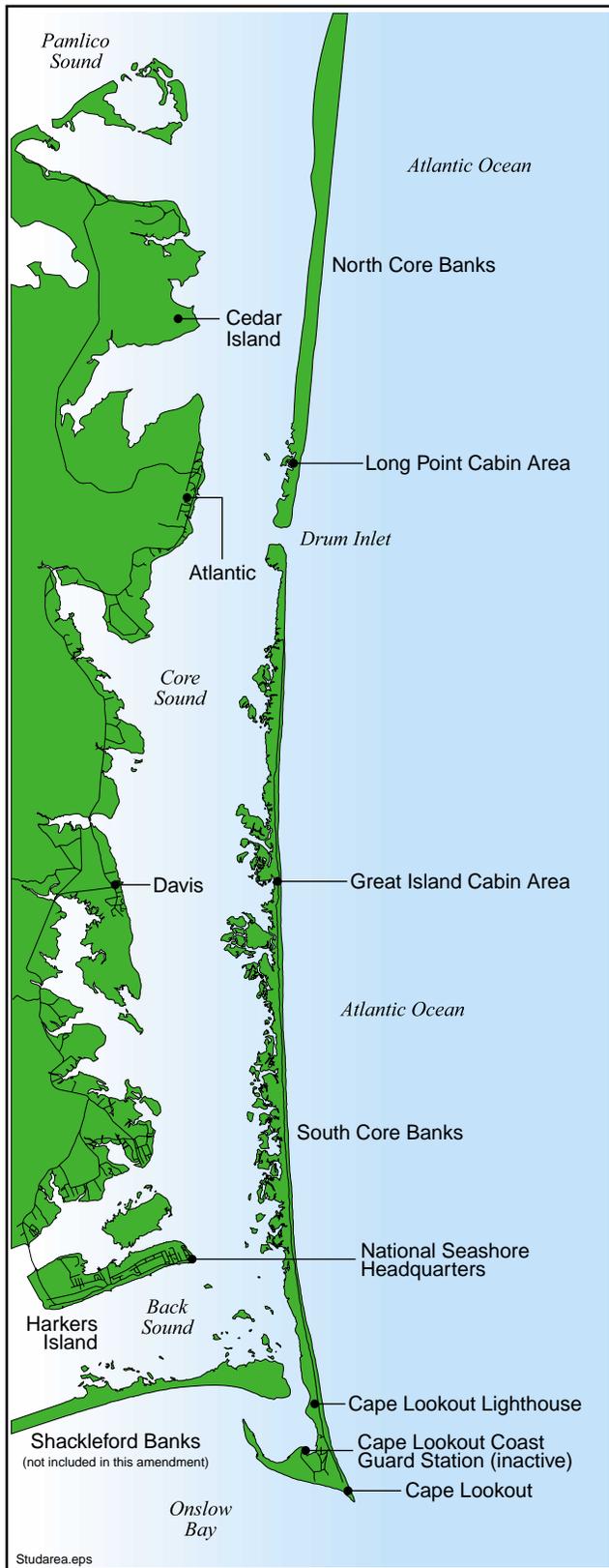
The popularity of the Core Banks as a surf fishing destination precedes establishment of the national seashore by many generations. Hundreds of fishing enthusiasts return each year to fish more than 50 miles of uninterrupted shoreline. Heavy surf fishing activity traditionally occurs during the spring and fall months. Fishermen staying in their own vehicles or in cabins at Great Island and Long Point follow fish migrating along the length of the Core Banks.

Prior to the establishment of the national seashore, clusters of fishing shacks existed and vehicles were driven extensively over the islands. Typically, vehicles that broke down on the islands were abandoned in place. At the time the national seashore was established, over 2,500 abandoned vehicles cluttered the island landscapes. NPS sponsored cleanup efforts have removed nearly all abandoned vehicles over the past several years. The few abandoned vehicles that remain are buried under drifts of sand and visually unobtrusive.

Before the park was established, fishermen constructed more than 400 makeshift cabins and shelters on the barrier islands. Most of these structures were intended to serve only as seasonal fishing shelters and were of questionable structural integrity and safety. Since the creation of the national seashore, all but 25 of the original 400 structures were removed. The 25 remaining cabins are located in a 163-acre area at Great Island on the South Core Banks and, while representing the best of the original cabins structures, are considered of substandard quality by NPS.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARK

Public Law 89-366 (the Act of March 10, 1966) authorized the establishment of Cape Lookout National Seashore "to preserve for public use and enjoyment an area in the State of



Area Map for General Management Plan Amendment

North Carolina possessing outstanding natural and recreation values.” This enabling legislation defined the national seashore to include the outer Banks of Carteret County, North Carolina, between Ocracoke Inlet and Beaufort Inlet, plus adjoining marshlands and waters. A 1974-amendment to Public Law 89-366 authorized the establishment of an administrative site on Harkers Island and NPS rehabilitated the old motel into a headquarters and visitor center at its present location in 1993.

The national seashore includes within its boundaries: (1) the administrative site on the east end of Harkers Island; (2) Shackleford Banks; (3) the Core Banks divided into northern and southern barrier islands by Drum Inlet; (4) scores of small islands; and (5) waters including Core Sound, Back Sound, Pamlico Sound, and the Atlantic Ocean.

MISSION GOALS

Each unit of the National Park System develops mission goals based on those of the National Park Service. The national seashore’s goals enable the staff to focus its activities and resources. Under the general category of “Preserve Park Resources,” the national seashore has developed the following mission goals:

Natural and cultural resources and associated values are protected, restored, and maintained in good condition and managed within their broader ecosystem and cultural context. This goal includes natural and cultural resources at the national seashore. Long-term goals relate to protecting, restoring and maintaining natural areas, threatened and endangered species, archeological sites, historic structures and objects.

Cape Lookout National Seashore contributes to knowledge about natural and cultural resources and associated values; management decisions about resources and visitors are based on adequate scholarly and scientific information. Park managers must be able to use scholarly and scientific information to ensure that decisions that are made will not adversely affect the national seashore’s resources.

Under the general category of “Provide for Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience,” the national seashore has developed the following mission goals:

Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with the availability, accessibility, diversity, and quality of Cape Lookout’s facilities, services, and appropriate recreational opportunities. Visitors must be able to enjoy and experience Cape Lookout National Seashore safely. Accessibility for special popula-

tions must be provided, where appropriate. Diversity and quality of the national seashore's facilities, services and recreational opportunities must be considered for all visitors without being harmful to park resources or inconsistent with the national seashore's purpose and philosophy.

Park visitors and the general public understand and appreciate the preservation of Cape Lookout National Seashore and its resources for this and future generations. The national seashore's visitor's experience is enhanced from a better understanding of the purpose of the seashore and appreciation of what makes the park special. In addition, park neighbors in surrounding communities understand and appreciate the preservation of the national seashore's resources for this and future generations.



Chapter Two

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

This general management plan amendment examines a range of alternative actions intended to improve overnight accommodation and transportation services for persons visiting North Core Banks (excluding the Portsmouth Island area) and South Core Banks. The purpose of the amendment is to select and recommend for implementation a preferred alternative action that most improves visitor services while continuing to preserve and protect the seashore's natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

The focus of this amendment will only address potential changes to the current general management plan relevant to overnight accommodations and transportation services at the areas previously noted. Generally, NPS prepares general management plans for units of the National Park System upon establishment and then every 15 to 20 years or sooner if warranted. NPS expects to develop a new general management plan for Cape Lookout National Seashore within 5 to 7 years.

NEED FOR A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

For the past 16 years, NPS has managed Cape Lookout National Seashore according to recommendations made in the 1982 general management plan (1982 GMP). This plan, which was subject to extensive public review and comment at the time of its preparation, outlines actions to address natural and cultural resource protection and recreational use of the seashore. NPS recognizes that the 1982 GMP is nearing the end of its projected life span. While weaknesses in the 1982 GMP have developed over time, the basic concepts of the document are sufficient to guide the management of the park until a new general management plan is completed.

While conditions within the boundary of the national seashore have changed little since the preparation of the 1982 GMP, external influences such as population growth, development trends in neighboring communities, increased visitation to the park, local and regional economic trends, and changes in NPS policy affecting park concession contracts

have significantly influenced how overnight accommodations and transportation services are provided at the park. Given the importance of these services to the park's mission and the need to be responsive to the concerns of its visitors and concessioners, NPS has decided to address these issues by amending the existing GMP rather than waiting until it prepares a new GMP.

Visitor Use Patterns

Visitation to the national seashore has risen noticeably since the park was established. In 1976, approximately 27,000 people visited the park. In 1986, over 100,000 visitors were counted. By 1996, the number of visitors to the national seashore climbed to 380,000. NPS attributes a large percentage of this increase to day-use activities in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Most day-use visitation occurs during the summer months. On particularly busy summer weekends, park staff has observed over one hundred boats anchored in the sound near the lighthouse.

Summer occupancy of cabins has risen nearly 25 percent over the past three years at the Long Point location, while the numbers at the Great Island location have remained fairly constant. The increase in occupancy at Long Point may be attributed to the upgraded facilities. Although Long Point cabins are in no way "deluxe," they do appeal to a wider variety of park visitors who are not willing to stay in less accommodating cabins at Great Island.

Concession Operations

The 1982 GMP authorized a concession operation to provide passenger ferry service from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. NPS issued a concession permit to operate a ferry from the Harkers Island headquarters in 1978. In 1990, that concession permit was not renewed and several small ferry companies were issued Incidental Business Permits to provide interim small boat service to the lighthouse area.

The 1982 GMP also authorized a concession operation to service the Great Island area (located midway on the South Core Banks) and the Long Point area (located on the North

Core Banks) with passenger and vehicle ferry service and overnight accommodations. At the present time, two independent concessioners transport visitors and vehicles to these areas and manage and maintain cabin facilities at each site.

Concession permits/contracts for ferry and cabin operations at Great Island and Long Point expired in 1990. NPS policy regarding long-term concession contracts underwent an extensive review and updating process from 1991 through 1998. During this period of review, all long-term concessioner permits/contracts at Cape Lookout National Seashore were renewed annually or biannually in anticipation of the revised regulations. Now that new NPS policy governing long-term contracts has been issued, Cape Lookout National Seashore would like to negotiate new long-term concession contracts for the ferry and cabin operations. NPS believes that a long-term contract would improve visitor services by enabling concessioners to make needed capital investments in their accommodation and transportation operations and still have a reasonable opportunity to profit.

Description of Long Point facilities

On the North Core Banks, NPS constructed 6 new duplexes containing 12 units in 1995 with funds obtained as a result of a devastating storm. These new cabins supplement four octagonal buildings constructed in the mid-1980s. Additional support facilities have been constructed or refurbished over the years. These facilities include (1) ferryboat docks, shelters, and orientation areas; (2) enclosed camping shelters; and (3) comfort stations. The 1982 GMP authorized the construction of 20 enclosed camping shelters at Long Point, which were never built.

One parking area accommodating approximately 60 vehicles is located adjacent to the cabin area and is full for most of the year. Fishermen often leave their vehicles or campers on the island from April to December.

Description of Great Island facilities

On the South Core Banks, NPS removed all but 25 of the makeshift cabins. Additional support facilities have been constructed or refurbished over the years. These facilities include (1) ferryboat docks, shelters, and orientation areas; (2) enclosed camping shelters; and (3) comfort stations. The 1982 GMP authorized the construction of 20 enclosed camping shelters at Great Island, which were never built.

One parking area accommodating approximately 60 vehicles is located adjacent to the cabin area and is full for most of the year. Fishermen often leave their vehicles or campers on the island from April to December.

Description of Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area facilities

Two parking areas accommodating approximately 60 vehicles each are located in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. These parking areas typically receive little long-term use. Passengers arriving in the commercially operated small craft disembark at a dock just north of the lighthouse.

Endangered species

One avian species (pipin plover) and one plant species (sea beach amaranth) found at Cape Lookout National Seashore were added to the Federal list of threatened and endangered species after the 1982 GMP was completed. Thus the 1982 plan did not assess the affects of its actions on these species and their habitat nor could it recommend actions to monitor the species. As a result, the present planning process must rely on other NPS efforts to assess the affects of proposed actions on the pipin plover and seabeach amaranth. The planning process must also depend upon subsequent efforts to protect and assess affects on the loggerhead turtle.

The national seashore provides the southernmost nesting range of the pipin plover (*Charadrius melodus*). Pipin plovers nest and hatch their young on the Core Banks and are normally present from May through the end of August. They migrate through the park. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of designating critical habitat for wintering pipin plovers. The seabeach amaranth (*Amaranthus pumilus*) presence is elusive but has been found on Shackleford Banks and in open sandy areas of the Core Banks. Along with the sea loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) that inhabit the beaches from late spring through the summer months, these species enjoy special status and NPS has been exercising its legal obligation to protect them and their habitat.

Issues

Following a series of meetings with Cape Lookout National Seashore staff, concessioners, local officials, various interest groups, and the general public, NPS identified the following specific issues to be addressed by the GMP amendment.

Issue 1. Cabin Standards and Cabin Use at Great Island

- All but 25 of the 400 makeshift cabins that existed prior to establishment of the park were removed shortly after the park was created. A concessioner rents 25 of those fishing cabins at Great Island. While the cabins represent the best of the privately constructed buildings, they do not meet current state building codes, Coastal Area Management Agency Act (CAMA) guidelines, and NPS health and safety standards.
- Are these the types of accommodations that should be located in a unit of the National Park System?
- If new cabins were constructed, would the non-fishing public use them during periods when fishing is less popular and cabin occupancy rates are traditionally low?
- What is the feasibility of locating new infrastructure for the cabins (water, sewer, gas, and electricity)?
- Can cabins be constructed to take advantage of prevailing winds and minimize adverse impacts of overwash on water and sewage systems?

Issue 2. Location of Cabins

Cabins are located at the Long Point cabin area on the North Core Banks and at the Great Island cabin area on the South Core Banks.

- Are these the most appropriate locations for permanent accommodations on the Core Banks?
- Are visitors best served and resources best protected by having cabins at these two locations?
- Are there alternative locations that would serve the park visitor better while providing the required level of resource protection?

Issue 3. Location of ferry concession operations

Currently, concessioners provide ferry service for passengers and vehicles to the Core Banks from two locations: Atlantic and Davis.

- Are park visitors best served from these locations?
- Is information sufficiently visible at the present locations to inform park visitors that they are departing from NPS-sanctioned areas?
- Are there alternative places to serve as embarkation points?
- Do the present disembarkation points adequately serve the park visitor?

- Are there alternative locations that would accommodate ferries?
- Would they provide a better experience for visitors?

Issue 4. Incidental Business Permits

Presently, small craft operators, holding Incidental Business Permits, bring day-use visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area of South Core Banks.

- Should this service continue its present arrangement or should a concessioner provide this service?

Issue 5. Changing visitor use patterns

The visitor experience on the Core Banks generally consists of spring and autumn surf fishing, year-round day use in the vicinity of the lighthouse, and a growing summertime use of the cabins.

- Has the pattern of visitor use changed since the 1982 GMP?
- Do facilities on the island adequately meet the needs of the visitor?

Issue 6. Long-term parking for recreational vehicles

Many surf fishermen bring their campers and vehicles at the beginning of the spring fishing season and leave them at one of four NPS long-term parking areas until the end of the fall fishing season. NPS charges modest weekly fees for long-term parking.

- Should NPS continue to permit camper and vehicle storage?
- Does this long-term parking area adversely effect the visitor experience?

Issue 7. Conflicts between different user groups

Given the pattern and location of visitor use:

- Do conflicts occur among the various user groups?
- If cabin and dock locations on the Core Banks change, would conflicts be more likely to occur?

Issue 8. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on natural resources

- What are the effects of present and proposed use and development on natural resources (e.g., turtles

and their nesting habitat, shore birds such as the piping plover, dunes)?

- What steps can be taken to ensure adequate protection of natural resources while accommodating the needs of the visitor?

Issue 9. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on cultural resources

- What are the effects of present and proposed use and development on cultural resources (e.g., the historic zone near the lighthouse)?
- Do the existing cabins or any cultural landscapes associated with them possess potential historic significance?
- What steps can be taken to ensure adequate protection of cultural resources while accommodating the needs of the visitor?

Issue 10. Harkers Island Visitor Center

Most visitors travelling to cabin areas on North and South Core Banks do not visit the NPS visitor center on Harkers Island. NPS misses an opportunity to help visitors learn and understand more about the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the park because they have limited exposure to NPS personnel and programs.

- Can the visitor center play an increased role in telling the park story?
- Are the facilities at the visitor center adequate to serve as a parking and embarkation site for visitors going to the Core Banks?

Issue 11. Effect of proposed changes on park staff and resources

- What effect would any proposed change in visitor services and facilities have on park development, staff, and resources?