

# I. Description of the Proposal

## A. Introduction

### 1. Overview

Fire Island, a 32-mile-long barrier island paralleling the southern coast of Long Island in Suffolk County, New York (see figure 1, in packet on back cover), and situated less than 60 miles from New York City, provides a recreational resource of exceptional value. Approximately 26 miles of Fire Island are included within Fire Island National Seashore, which was authorized by Congress in 1964 to preserve certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes, and other natural features for the use and enjoyment of future generations (see the appendix for the enabling legislation). In addition to Fire Island and its nearby waters and islands, Congress added in 1965 the 612-acre William Floyd Estate, which is situated near the Long Island community of Mastic across Moriches Bay from the eastern end of Fire Island. The estate is the former home of William Floyd, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and is a historic resource of national significance. The 19,357-acre seashore is managed by the National Park Service in accordance with the management policies of the National Park System.

The Fire Island portion of the national seashore has within its authorized boundary a variety of landowners and governmental jurisdictions, including 17 private residential communities, several town-owned beaches, a highly used county park, and a long segment of county-owned beach. The communities are subject to indirect federal control, while private inholdings are subject to more direct control by the National Park Service. Robert Moses State Park on the western end of the island is not included within the national seashore. The varied landownership, land use, and development of lands within Fire Island National Seashore makes this one of the most complex units of the National Park System to manage.

The National Park Service has prepared a general management plan and environmental statement for Fire Island National Seashore in accordance with applicable policies and procedures. A draft general management plan and a draft environmental statement (DES 75-18) were subject to comprehensive review by the public, other agencies, and interested organizations. Revisions to both documents were made following these reviews. The proposal of this final environmental statement includes elements of both the proposal and alternative B (Chapter VIII) from the draft environmental statement. Additional modifications and refinements were incorporated into a second draft plan that was subject to several levels of public review and comment.

These modifications include relocation of the primary ferry terminal/headquarters site from the Republican Club in Blue Point to the Patchogue River, discontinuance of plans in the alternative for active use of the small federal bay-to-ocean strips between the western communities, changes in the land classification system to further limit permitted uses and facilities, placement of the 8-mile zone (high dune management unit) in a primitive classification zone, and a general lowering of proposed future visitation levels. While there are proposals for behind-the-dune hiking trails at some locations, the proposal for a bike trail the entire length of the island has been deleted. The concept of land-use controls as stated in alternative B of the draft statement is included in the model zoning ordinance proposal in this document. The general management plan is intended to guide management, development, interpretation, and use of the resources of this unit of the National Park System for a period of approximately 10 years, until about 1987. The environmental statement presents the environmental impacts of implementing the plan. During its effective life, the plan may be revised to reflect changing conditions. Revisions entailing potentially significant environmental impacts will be evaluated in an environmental assessment. If the assessment documents significant impact, an environmental statement indicating the nature of those impacts will be sent to involved governmental agencies and to the public for review and comment. Any future actions taken to implement the provisions of the general management plan that have not been addressed in this environmental statement will be subject to National Environmental Policy Act compliance. When more specific actions affecting National Register properties are proposed, the National Park Service will again ask for the comments and review of the New York state historic preservation officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and its implementing procedures, Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Part 800 (36 CFR 800).

The Fire Island portion of the seashore is divided into a seashore district and a development district, which differ in the degree of federal land-use control. In the largely undeveloped seashore district, which contains all federal and non-federal public recreational lands as well as scattered inholdings of both improved and unimproved private property, the Secretary of the Interior has the authority to condemn private property whenever use conflicts with the legislative intent of the establishment act. In the development district, which embraces 17 private communities scattered throughout the western half of Fire Island, the Secretary has the authority to issue certain standards, which must be incorporated into the zoning ordinances of the two Long Island municipalities and the two Fire Island villages that govern Fire Island's communities.

Developments not in conformity with these standards may be subject to condemnation. The authority to condemn and acquire private property is less constrained in the seashore district than in the development district.

There is no continuous hard-surfaced road running the length of Fire Island, and the two causeways from Long Island--one ending at a paved parking area in a state park at the extreme western end of Fire Island, and the other at a parking lot in a county park at the eastern end--provide the only means of automobile access. Vehicular circulation on Fire Island is restricted to travel along the beach and through dune crossings into communities and recreational developments. The regulation of vehicular traffic on the beach by both the towns and the National Park Service has been a long-standing source of controversy.

Most national seashore visitors who do not own or have access to private boats use ferries from the mainland to reach federal activity areas. The National Park Service has no mainland transportation staging facilities and almost no contact with visitors before they reach the island.

The seashore presently receives mostly day-use recreation, largely during the summer season; some off-season use also occurs because of the temperate climate and year-round recreational opportunities such as surf-fishing and beachcombing. Preservation of traditional uses, diversification of recreational and interpretive/educational opportunities, and determination of maximum visitation levels for federal activity areas are major concerns relating to visitor use.

## 2. Management Objectives

The National Park Service will manage Fire Island National Seashore in accordance with the legislated mandate to preserve the island's natural resources while providing diverse recreational opportunities. The following objectives will be used to guide planning, management, and operation of the national seashore:

To provide for the preservation of unspoiled beaches, dunes, and natural features for the use of future generations.

To protect and preserve natural plant and animal communities.

To manage Fire Island in ways that will enhance natural processes and mitigate the impacts of human interference with these processes.

To control visitor use in areas of prime wildlife habitat as required to maintain wildlife populations.

To maintain and/or restore all areas not required for public or administrative use to a natural condition using aesthetically appealing and environmentally compatible methods.

To identify, evaluate, and preserve cultural resources.

To maintain acceptable water quality in marinas and adjacent waters through management of visitor use.

To advise and consult with appropriate agencies concerning offshore oil drilling and production and to ensure National Environmental Policy Act compliance for any related activities that may occur within national seashore jurisdiction.

To continue to work with the U.S. Coast Guard and other involved agencies in the detection, monitoring, and cleanup of any sludge or other pollutants brought ashore by wind and wave action.

To foster public understanding and appreciation of Fire Island's natural and cultural resources.

To provide for the continued reduction of vehicle use until such use is at an absolute minimum.

To maintain and provide only those dune crossings (vehicular and pedestrian) required for the proper use and preservation of the area.

To allow for mosquito control within federally managed properties of the national seashore in times of established public health emergencies.

To provide a wide range of quality interpretation that emphasizes the natural features and processes of the seashore's lands and waters, man's relationship with his environment, and the historical and other cultural values of the area.

To coordinate environmental education with local schools so that the area can be used to its fullest advantage as a place where children from all walks of life can experience, enjoy, and

learn from a natural setting the relationships between man and the barrier beach, and his impacts on it.

To place underground all aerial utility lines.

To utilize Fire Island's resources in providing recreational facilities and opportunities that are generally unavailable elsewhere in the region while maintaining the serenity and beauty of the barrier island.

To facilitate the continuation of traditional low-density recreational activities.

To make the national seashore accessible to a cross section of the national and regional population. To encourage cooperation in the management of adjacent recreational lands to prevent unnecessary duplication of facilities and to provide the greatest diversity of recreational opportunities on Fire Island.

To promote and enhance a harmonious relationship between the exempted seashore communities and the National Park Service.

To integrate planning and management for Fire Island National Seashore into regional planning and economic considerations.

Fire Island National Seashore has been divided into management units to facilitate management and to improve operations immediately. Each unit will have specific management objectives as discussed below.

a. Fire Island Lighthouse Management Unit

This unit includes the 90-acre lighthouse tract, bay-to-ocean strips, Sexton Island, West Island, and East Island. Management objectives for this unit are as follows:

To preserve and interpret the historic resources of the lighthouse complex.

To manage natural resources within the lighthouse tract and the adjacent bay islands for interpretation, environmental education, research, and preservation.

To rehabilitate and preserve bay-to-ocean strips.

b. Sunken Forest Management Unit

This unit extends from the eastern boundary of Point O'Woods to the western boundary of Davis Park. The following objectives have been defined for the Sunken Forest unit:

To continue special protection for the old maritime holly forests of the Sunken Forest.

To manage the Sunken Forest developed area as a center for natural history interpretation and recreation, and to de-emphasize overnight use by boaters.

To assist with the preservation of the outstanding maritime forest in the community of Point O'Woods through the implementation of an agreement with the Point O'Woods Association.

To establish an environmental education center with limited overnight accommodations at the Talisman site.

To determine the feasibility of artificial tidal marsh construction within federally managed lands by building an experimental marsh adjacent to Barrett Beach.

c. Watch Hill Management Unit

The Watch Hill unit encompasses the lands from the eastern boundary of Ocean Ridge to the eastern end of the Watch Hill campground. The primary objectives for its management are:

To manage the Watch Hill developed area as a national seashore center for day-use recreation and camping.

To protect and enhance the natural environment of undeveloped lands east of the Watch Hill developed area.

To eliminate those dune crossings that can be closed without increasing behind-the-dune travel and related impacts.

To remove unnecessary dwellings and other structures upon the expiration of existing use and occupancy agreements at Bayberry Dunes.

To maintain adequate water depth for ferry and boat access to marinas.

To provide a level of camping and associated facilities (water and sanitation) that will not adversely impact the environment.

d. High Dune Management Unit

This unit extends from the eastern boundary of the Watch Hill management unit to the western boundary of Smith Point County Park. Its objectives are:

To protect the natural qualities of the high dune management unit and to provide for traditional low-density recreational uses.

To provide minimal facilities and programs for interpreting the outstanding natural resources of this area.

To maintain primitive qualities of this unit so as not to preclude potential wilderness classification.

To remove man-made structures within the management unit and to restore these sites.

To manage the unit as a primitive area.

e. Moriches Area

This section of the barrier island, which extends from the eastern end of Smith Point County Park to Moriches Inlet, is the property of Suffolk County Department of Parks and Recreation. The National Park Service has the following objectives:

To share ideas and philosophies with Suffolk County regarding the management of this section of the barrier island.

To manage these lands as a unit of the national seashore should Suffolk County decide in the future to donate these lands to the National Park Service.

f. William Floyd Management Unit

This unit includes the 612-acre William Floyd Estate. The following objectives for its management have been established:

To interpret the history and to preserve the historical resources of the estate as a continuum of the William Floyd family.

To maintain the features of the existing landscape and current land-use practices, and to stabilize existing structures until use/occupancy agreements expire and future public uses are determined.

g. Exempted Communities

The following objective relates to the 17 exempted communities located within the boundary of the national seashore:

To establish direct federal involvement with local governmental jurisdictions in a cooperative effort to provide appropriate land uses within the exempted communities of the national seashore.

B. Land Classification

General management planning requires sound classification for lands in a National Park Service area. This is necessary to insure that public facility development is commensurate with the use capabilities of the basic resources and in accord with the legislative intent of Congress for the area. Thus, land classification provides a general framework for resource management, visitor use, and development. The lands of Fire Island will be classified into four major use zones as indicated below. (See figure 2.)

Class I--Natural Zone

I A--Environmental Protection/Primitive Zone (1,860 acres). Lands and waters possessing particular value as wildlife habitat and/or research areas with outstanding physical and biological characteristics.

Uses: Protection of valuable habitats, outstanding ecological features, and other environmental values.

Permitted Facilities: Sand trails, elevated pedestrian dune crossings (2 and 3 feet high), and boardwalks (limited to 5 feet in width) in certain locations where future visitor use would result in damage to natural features.

Recreational Activities: Hiking, surf-fishing, hunting (where permitted by law), and limited natural history interpretation.