

# INTERPRETATION

## INTERPRETIVE CONCEPT

Fire Island's interpretive concept is centered around sand, wind, the smell of salt spray, the sound of surf hammering the beach, gulls screeching, bright sunshine – in essence, the whole of the physical resources. The concept is also concerned with constant change – however minute – with dramatic beauty, and with an abundance of life-forms surrounded by diverse evidences of human endeavors. Interpretive objectives, while obviously emphasizing the natural environment, will also be concerned with recreational endeavors, the history of man's use of the barrier island, and the effects of the island on man's activities.

Life, beauty, change – all will be interwoven using a variety of interpretive programs. A number of guided and self-guided programs will be available to interested visitors. Also, evening programs, guided interpretive trips, and several environmental educational activities will be available at various activity centers.

### **Natural History Interpretation**

Fire Island has a variety of natural and physical resources. Ecological processes and life patterns will be emphasized in the seashore's interpretive programs. The ecology of aquatic life-forms will be interpreted through displays, interpretive walks, and self-guided activities. Sunken Forest will continue as the focal point for interpretation of terrestrial vegetation, barrier-island ecology, effects of salt spray on the island's vegetation, and other characteristics of the maritime forest community. Other key natural history interpretive themes will include stages of ecological succession of barrier beach vegetation, and the importance of barrier beach systems as well as the effects of human manipulation of these systems.

### **Historical Interpretation**

Fire Island's maritime history precedes colonization of Long Island. Indians hunted and fished in the vicinity long before Colonial settlements were established. The economy and life patterns of residents have centered around Great South Bay and Fire Island since the area was first settled. Interpretation of the island's maritime history, including the old whaling industry, the U.S. Life Saving Service era, habitation of the island, shipwrecks, and the local fishing industry, will be located at the lighthouse complex.

Other important aspects of Fire Island's maritime history to be included in the interpretive program will be the history of waterfowl hunting in Great South Bay, the shellfishing industry, and the hotel/resort era of the island. A maritime museum will be located in the lighthouse keeper's quarters adjacent to the lighthouse. The 612-acre William Floyd Estate, originally owned by one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, is a major historic resource of the Long Island area. Following the expiration of lease/occupancy agreements and appropriate surveys, the site will be used for interpreting the history of the Revolutionary period, Long Island's estate and plantation economy, and the history of Long Island settlement.

### **Recreational Interpretation**

Fire Island's interpretive program will also focus on the pursuit of leisure activities – the multifaceted phenomenon of recreation. Recreational clamming, surf-fishing, sailing, and boating of all types will be interpreted. Aspects of safety will be included along with instructional programs. Beachcombing, a very popular leisure activity at Fire Island, will be combined with other natural history aspects of the interpretive program.

## **INTERPRETIVE AREAS**

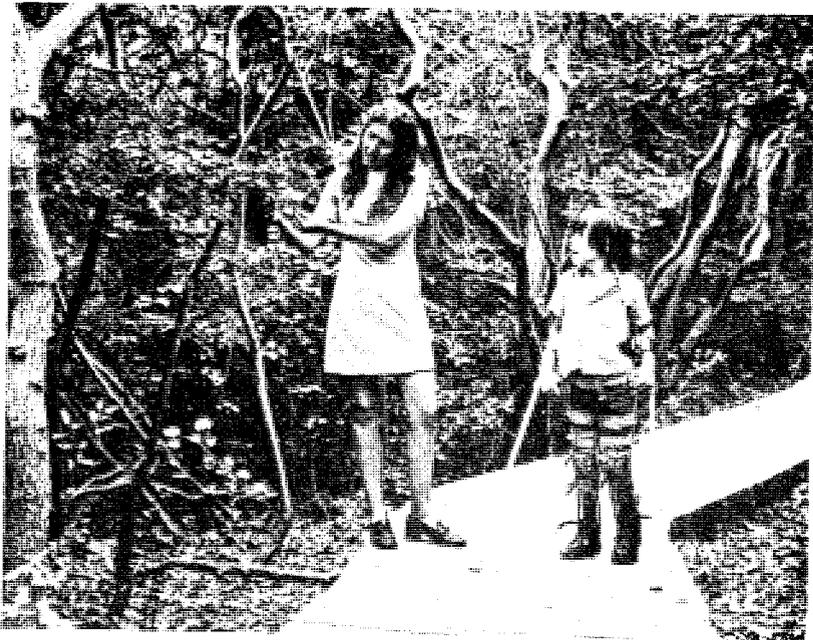
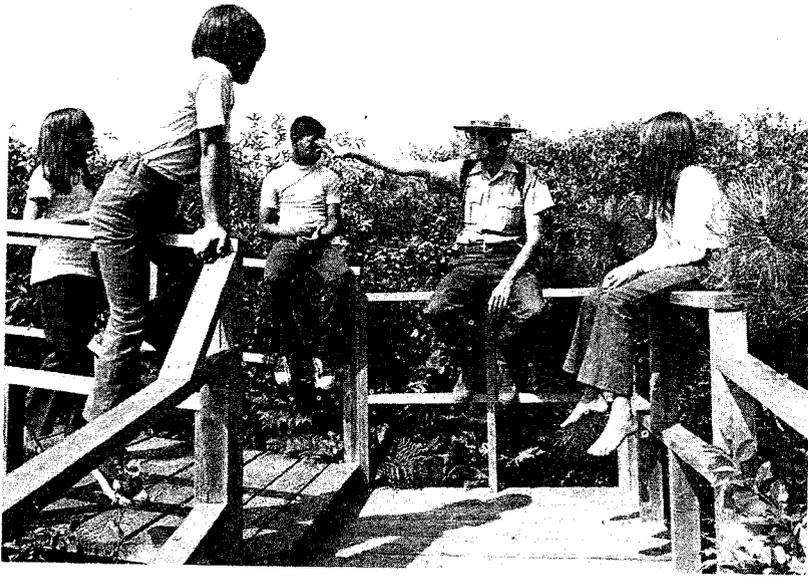
### **Fire Island Lighthouse Area**

The lighthouse tract (90 acres) will be used to emphasize the historic, cultural, and natural resources of the island. The former quarters of the lighthouse keeper will be used as a maritime museum and interpretive center. Interpretation of the maritime history of the island will make use of exhibits, drawings, and supergraphics. Themes for interpretive programs will include the early whaling industry, the history of Coast Guard lifesaving station activities in the Fire Island vicinity, and the importance of the lighthouse as a navigational aid.

The lighthouse will be made available for limited, conducted interpretive tours. Visitation to the lighthouse will be limited to a maximum of 16 individuals per hour.

Natural history interpretation at the lighthouse will be provided by interpretive signs and displays along the proposed interpretive trail west of the lighthouse.

Major facilities will consist of the lighthouse, the lighthouse keeper's quarters, and the U.S. Coast Guard Annex complex, which will serve as a day-use environmental education center. The old lighthouse will be stabilized and used for limited



Interpretive activities at Fire Island National Seashore



interpretive purposes. Restoration will be undertaken as funds are made available. A 1-mile trail is proposed for interpreting the natural environment and geomorphology of the area.

#### **Sunken Forest Area**

Fire Island National Seashore has abundant natural resources, but Sunken Forest is unique. Interpretation at the maritime forest will continue to acquaint visitors with aquatic life-forms, formation of the maritime forest, vegetative types, and the relationship of vegetation to maintenance of the barrier island. The importance of tidal marshes as breeding habitat for aquatic life-forms and waterfowl will also be interpreted. An information kiosk will be established adjacent to the ferry terminal in Sayville.

Opportunities exist in this area for recreational interpretation of the effects on marine environments of using motorboats and the advantages of sailboats. Also recreational clamming, surf-fishing, and seining are possible interpretive subjects.

The existing 2-mile interpretive trail will be continued. The interpretive center will be enlarged, and fixed metalphoto exhibits will be used to aid in the interpretation of the area. The amphitheater will also continue to be used for group orientation and interpretive purposes. Environmental education and associated lodging at Sunken Forest will be discontinued following establishment of the environmental education complex at the Talisman area.

#### **Talisman Area**

The Talisman area is proposed as the location for an environmental education center concentrating on the natural history of Fire Island. Interpretive emphasis will be placed on the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, the importance of vegetation in the ecological chain, stabilization of the dunes, and the effects of exotics on the island. Land uses, their appropriateness, and their effects on the ecology of the island will be studied as well as the effects of the numerous extratropical storms and hurricanes that have struck the island. Other important interpretive concepts at Talisman will include information on the geomorphology of the barrier island, effects of erosion, and the continued accretion of land and movement of the island westward. Information on commercial fishing and the clamming industry in the surrounding area and the effects of pollution on beach activities and these industries will be provided.

The proposed environmental education center, with lodging up to 40 pillows, will require a new structure.

### **Watch Hill Area**

The Watch Hill area programs will offer interpretation in the study of ocean and bay environments, vegetation of the island, dune and beach dynamics, importance of tidal marshes as breeding habitats, and the wildlife of the island.

Recreational interpretation consisting of sailing, motorboating, related impacts on the marine environment, water safety, and uses of the marina will be initiated at Watch Hill. Beach and bay activities such as beachcombing, lifesaving techniques, illustrations of recreational clamming, surf-fishing, and seining are to be included in the program for recreational interpretation. Fixed interpretive facilities at Watch Hill consist of a small interpretive center located in the ranger station. This function will be continued with occasionally modified exhibits to afford visitors additional interpretive opportunities. The small manned interpretive kiosk located on the boardwalk will be used to provide information on the ecology of the island and interpretive services. The existing 0.3-mile self-guiding interpretive trail will be retained and a few metalphoto plaques may be installed for visitor information. An information kiosk will also be located at the Patchogue ferry terminal.

### **Old Inlet Area**

The Old Inlet area will be maintained in its natural state, and natural history interpretation of the high dune area will be the primary objective. The geomorphology of the Old Inlet will also be interpreted. A few small metalphoto plaques will be located along the existing boardwalk for interpretive purposes.

### **Smith Point West Area**

Smith Point West is an ideal location for an interpretive facility to provide natural history interpretation of the eastern segment of Fire Island. Emphasis will be on the ecology of the area, and the primary objective is to interpret the high dune area in order to inform visitors about the formation of the dune area, vegetation, wildlife, and the fragile nature of the resource.

The area is a good location for interpreting beach and bay recreational activities (consisting of beachcombing, surf-fishing, shellfishing, and water safety) by providing illustrations of these activities and appropriate instructions. Also, visitors should be given safety tips for recreational hiking behind the dunes along the Burma Road sand trail. Occasionally, guided interpretive trips will be conducted in the high dune management unit.

Fixed facilities will be limited in this area because of the established Smith Point County Park adjacent to Smith Point West. This plan proposes to continue an interpretive facility with some expansion to provide visitors to the eastern end of Fire Island with interpretive exhibits explaining the island's geomorphology,

aquatic life-forms, terrestrial wildlife, ecology of the island, and features of the high dune area. The existing nature trail will be upgraded with a boardwalk and a few metalphoto interpretive plaques. Primary interpretive themes will be the barrier beach dynamics, erosion, upland vegetation, and marsh ecology.

#### **William Floyd Estate**

Interpretation at the William Floyd Estate will focus on the historical importance of William Floyd (one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence), the importance of the estate to Long Island history as well as to American Revolutionary history, and the natural history of the estate grounds. The Floyd Estate is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Park Service will provide tours of the manor house and outbuildings by reservation to groups with a demonstrated interest in history or historical research. Tours may also include the estate grounds presently owned by the National Park Service with emphasis on such features as the cemetery grounds. School groups and natural history groups will be encouraged to use the estate grounds as an environmental study area.

Appropriate interpretive exhibits will be provided for outbuildings, and the estate cemetery and grounds. There will also be an automated audiovisual program for visitors to the manor house.

Immediate curatorial services will be undertaken for the care and protection of furnishings and artifacts. Items will be cataloged, and necessary preservation treatment and appropriate storage will be provided. Short-term park efforts will also concentrate on the identification and location of items that relate to the history of the estate and are suitable for display.

The National Park Service, with assistance from cooperative associations, will make available to visitors appropriate publications concerning William Floyd, the estate and Long Island history, American Revolutionary history, and the natural history of the estate grounds.

#### **Headquarters Complex/Mainland Terminal**

The proposed headquarters complex and mainland ferry terminal area, to be established at the head of the Patchogue River, will provide visitors with initial interpretation of Fire Island. This plan proposes minimum interpretation with emphasis on visitor orientation and information. Interpretation of the clamming industry and other Great South Bay activities will be located at the Patchogue River site.