



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

May 26, 2006

L7617 (WEES)

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Northeast Region

From: Superintendent

Subject: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Statement of Findings (SOF)
Floodplains and Wetlands, Fire Island National Seashore New West End Entrance
Station

BACKGROUND

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents the decision of the National Park Service (NPS) to develop an appropriate entrance for vehicles into the Fire Island National Seashore (FIIS) from the west and the determination that no significant impacts on the human environment are associated with that decision.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses a project that originally involved the construction of a new west end station and entry gate as represented in the EA under "Alternative B – Modified." "Alternative B" has been modified in this FONSI to address comments received at the public meeting held on January 24, 2006 and comments received during the open comment period through February 7, 2006. The new "Alternative B – Modified" represents a simplified plan involving the replacement of the existing entrance gate at its current location, the placement of a 600± square foot pavilion in the approximate location of the originally proposed building, and the provision of a drop-off area and compost toilets. The modifications to "Alternative B" are considered positive changes that are responsive to concerns about visual impact from the hawk watch platform and potential traffic impacts to the transition area between Robert Moses State Park (RMSP) road (also sometimes called Ocean Boulevard) and Burma Road (the Burma Road is the gravel road that begins at the end of the RMSP road).

The EA was prepared in conformance with the NPS implementation requirements for the National Environmental Protection Act (Public Law 91-190 42 USC 4321-4347 January 1, 1990) and updates.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The proposed New West End Entrance Station represents an important access point for visitors and for and for certain permitted vehicle users. The Park currently attracts over 4 million recreational visits per year with the majority of these visitors traveling to Fire Island via ferry or park in Parking Field 5 at RMSP. In recent years, the west end entrance, which services visitors from Parking Field 5, has been experiencing access and safety problems due to an increase in visitors and changing needs of residents of Fire Island. The problems are exacerbated by the fact that there is no clear visual presence at the boundary between RMSP and FIIS. This presents confusion about NPS rules and a lost opportunity to expose visitors to interpretive information about FIIS and its natural environment. Equipped with better information, visitors will have the opportunity to become effective environmental ambassadors for FIIS.

Specifically the Project addresses the following issues:

- The need to provide a vehicle checkpoint station which safely controls access to FIIS lands. The most significant safety problem is the lack of a safe turn-around area. Curiosity seekers drive approximately one-half mile down to the existing checkpoint and then must back up to return to the road back to RMSP. Also, the permit entry system is outdated and inefficient.
- The need to protect natural resources from illegal off-road driving.
- The need to provide a safe drop-off point for pedestrians.
- The need to provide additional restroom facilities.
- The need to provide an improved initial point of information and contact for visitors and residents.
- The need to show a physical and visual boundary of where the Park begins.
- Work cooperatively with Robert Moses State Park and the Friends of Fire Island Lighthouse in managing the boundary area of the West End.

A new entry gate will relieve a long-standing problem of unauthorized public vehicular access at the western entrance and a more efficient entry system. Secondly, new signage denoting entry into the Park will better identify the FIIS itself. Thirdly, the project will provide an open-air interpretive area, provide additional needed restroom facilities, and make the entry itself safer for vehicles and pedestrians.

ALTERNATIVE SELECTION - Alternative B Modified as described and discussed below is hereby selected for implementation

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND ANALYZED

Alternative A – No Action Alternative

As described in the EA, the No Action Alternative assumes no change in the gate entry system. The present problems with traffic and gate operation will continue and accelerate with anticipated increases in traffic levels in and around the site due to annual increases in visitor levels. The existing gate entry system cannot safely accommodate new levels of traffic nor ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists along Burma Road

Alternative B – (Initially Preferred Alternative)

As described in the EA, Alternative B represents the Project’s best-suited site based upon safe and efficient vehicle access, the public need for additional restrooms, and connections to existing pedestrian trails. This alternative will have the least impact on environmental resources on the alternatives considered in the EA. Alternative B locates a new electronic two-way keypad entry/exit gate near where the entrance road from and exit roads out of Robert Moses Causeway meet. It also proposes the location for a building, approximately 1,000 square feet, to be constructed at the northwestern corner of the Entrance Triangle.

The building was not intended as a “visitor center”, therefore, parking is limited to eight spaces for staff and incidental transients applying for or obtaining transportation permit. To provide a safe drop-off zone for pedestrians on their way to Park beaches and private residences on Fire Island, an additional parking area will be made available outside the new parking lot. The parking lot and drop-off area will be accessed by the existing entry road and loop back out onto the existing exit road. The remaining section of the entry road leading into Burma Road will be closed to traffic making it safer for pedestrians walking to the various pathways. Walkway connections will be provided from the new building to existing footpaths leading to the Parking Field 5 and to the Fire Island Lighthouse.

The existing office building adjacent to the existing entry gate will remain and continue to be utilized as office space for Park staff. The existing entry gate will be dismantled.

The Preferred Alternative could result in the following positive impacts for the public and for the Park:

- Placement of the new building at the northwest corner of Entrance Triangle will preserve views of the Fire Island Lighthouse.
- Shortening the existing separated entry and exit roads and connecting them to one another will improve vehicle safety while reducing the overall pavement area.
- A consolidated entry/exit gate with a remote entry keypad and information device provides improved access and efficient NPS staff monitoring.
- Placement of the New West End Entrance Station building and improved area signage will strengthen the point of arrival to the Park.

- Appropriate parking for the visitor and NPS staff, including wheel chair accessible parking, will be provided.
- A safe drop-off area for pedestrians will be provided.
- Additional restrooms will meet the needs of pedestrians coming to and from Parking Field 5 into the Park eliminating an under capacity of restroom facilities.
- Pedestrian connections to existing paths and boardwalks are provided making the area safer and more attractive.
- Incorporating native plant materials into the design of the New West End Entrance Station will help meld the building into the site.
- Placement of the new building preserves the viewshed from the raptor-viewing platform as well as the general flight patterns of hawks in this area.
- Placement of the building allows for a gravity flow sewer to a new leach field.
- Park staff contact and availability.
- Additional office space for Field Rangers.

Alternative B – Modified (Selected Alternative)

This Alternative was not described in the EA, but has evolved based on public comments. Modified Alternative B includes a minor boundary revision (0.82 acres) via easement from the State of New York to the National Park Service (this donation has been agreed upon by the State and by the NPS-finalization of the boundary revision is in process at the time of this writing). Alternative B was modified to reduce concerns regarding visual impact and potential traffic issues. The building, as proposed in Alternative B – (Initially Preferred Alternative), has been reduced from a ranger station to a visitor’s pavilion of approximately 600 square feet. The pavilion will be constructed in the same location as the original building and will have the capacity to display interpretive signage about FIIS including a guide to its flora and fauna. A set of compost toilets with landscaping will be placed in the northeast corner of the Entrance Triangle. Other improvements in the site plan which identify the site as FIIS is a speed bump, flagpole and sign. (See Appendix A for Site Plan Overview and Civil Site Plan drawings)

Transportation and access improvements include the placement of a guardrail along the Ocean Boulevard outside curve where it meets the Entrance Triangle. A temporary paved parking area with three (3) parking spaces is planned for vehicles dropping off beach goers. A parking area constructed of a pervious surface will accommodate eight (8) vehicles will be located adjacent to the pavilion. The road configuration will allow cars to drop off passengers and continue on through and out the park going west without interfering with traffic coming into and going out of the park.

The vehicle gate will remain in its present location just east of the Lighthouse on Burma Road. The existing gate will be replaced with a new electronic two-way keypad entry/exit gate. No other improvements are planned for this area.

Alternative C

As described in the EA, Alternative C conceptualizes a building in the northeastern corner of the Entrance Triangle. Parking for four vehicles is provided on the east side of the building. Alternative C did not fully meet the project objectives. This alternative did not address the concerns of RMSP management that there be a safe drop-off zone for pedestrians on their way to the beaches and private residences inside the Park.

Alternative D

As described in the EA, Alternative D places a building inside the Entrance Triangle at its most southeastern end, closing off the present entry to Burma Road making it a two-way road at the beginning of the westerly portion of Robert Moses Causeway running in an easterly direction into Burma Road. This creates an efficient and safe pedestrian flow and disturbs no vegetated lands. A new entry road to the building creates indirect access for cars, lessening the chance of parking for unintended vehicles.

As with Alternative C, Alternative D did not fully meet project objectives. There is no designated drop-off zone for pedestrians in the layout. Another potentially significant factor is the building's relationship to the raptor-viewing platform. Alternative D places the building in the primary line of site of bird watchers at the raptor-viewing platform. Another important factor is the fact that sanitary waste would have to be pumped to the uppermost area of the Entrance Triangle. In addition, the building may have a negative impact on viewshed of the historic Fire Island Lighthouse.

Alternatives Considered And Rejected

As described in the EA, Alternative sites on federal land were considered but rejected. These sites included placing the entrance at various locations between the existing location and the Entrance Triangle. These sites ultimately did not meet the criteria for an improved point of access. The purposes of the project require placing the proposed entrance station at or near the Park boundary. Placing the entrance station on park lands along the park boundary would cause substantial impacts to undisturbed areas of high value, including wetlands and dunes. The only sites near the park boundary that would avoid these undisturbed areas are on state land.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The NPS is required to identify the environmentally preferred alternative(s) for any of its proposed plans. That alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy expressed in NEPA (Section 101 (b)). This would be the alternative that: (1) best fulfills the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; (2) ensures for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; (3) attains the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences; (4) preserves important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, and environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice; (5) achieves a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living

and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and (6) enhances the quality of renewable resources and approaches the maximum attainable recycling of non-renewable resources.

The NPS has considered the alternatives in this analysis in accordance with NEPA, and has determined that Alternative B- Modified, as presented in this FONSI, is the environmentally preferred alternative based upon its furtherance of the following National Environmental Policy Act goals as evaluated below. Alternative B- Modified is the environmentally preferred alternative that "causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources" (DOI, 2001a).

Alternative B- Modified meets requirements 1,2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 as stated above. The following discussion is basic to the selected Alternative B-Modified, to be implemented as the new West End Entrance Station.

NEPA Section 101 Requirement 1. *"Fulfill[ing] the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations."*

The Selected Alternative supports long needed improvements at the West End Entrance by providing a newly located and improved entry into FIIS while minimizing impacts to the natural environment. These improvements will be made possible by adjusting the present boundary of the National Seashore around the easement granted from the State of New York, which includes the Entrance Triangle and road area around it. The easement will make it possible for FIIS to eliminate visitor confusion by providing clear signage and a visual presence at the end of Ocean Parkway (Causeway). The new access area will also expose new and returning FIIS visitors and residents to new signage, interpretive information, and restroom amenities. Demand continues to increase at the west entrance and the Selected Alternative is responsive to both present and projected future demand.

Alternative A cannot meet Requirement 1 because it cannot efficiently or effectively accommodate the present nor projected future number of visitors at the existing entrance station. Alternatives B, C and D can meet Requirement 1 but not without a greater level of environmental impact than the Selected Alternative.

NEPA Section 101 Requirement 2. *"Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings."*

The Selected Alternative will minimize adverse effects on scenic and natural resources during both the construction and operational phases of the project. The Selected Alternative will greatly enhance visitor and resident access for both vehicles and pedestrians. The new access will provide minimal construction of manmade structures to meet the needs of visitors and residents while maintaining the quality of data gathering and experience from the Hawk Watch Platform. The Selected Alternative will also maintain all existing views of the historic Fire Island Lighthouse.

Alternative A cannot meet Requirement 2 because it can no longer safely or effectively accommodate the present nor projected future number of visitors at the existing entrance station. Alternatives B, C and D cannot meet Requirement 2 because they would result in greater impacts to the aesthetic environment due to the size of building originally conceived for the site. In addition, the placement of the new electronic gate in the vicinity of the Entrance Triangle has the capacity to compromise pedestrian safety as well as create a higher level of traffic backup onto Ocean Parkway.

NEPA Section 101 Requirement 3. *“Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.”*

The Selected Alternative avoids all environmentally sensitive areas by concentrating all improvements in an existing manmade fill area known as the Entrance Triangle. This area represents a transition zone between the Robert Moses State Park and Fire Island National Seashore. As such, it is historically a well-traveled area for pedestrians and vehicles.

Alternative A cannot meet Requirement 3 because it creates an undue and unnecessary impact risk to the safety of pedestrians and vehicles both in the Entrance Triangle and along Burma Road. Alternatives B, C and D cannot meet Requirement 3 because it could potentially result in greater impacts to the safety of pedestrians and vehicles in the Entrance Triangle.

NEPA Section 101 Requirement 4. *“Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, and environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.”*

The Selected Alternative will minimize impacts to the Hawk Watch Platform by eliminating the originally planned building and replacing it with an open 600 square foot pavilion with a height not to exceed 10 feet. The Alternative B- Modified retains the open space character of the setting while selecting only the absolutely necessary project elements that would satisfy the project’s goals. The selected Alternative also provides; a long needed safe drop-off zone for pedestrians on their way to Park beaches and private residences on Fire Island, as well as several additional restrooms. FIIS provides recreation and other resources for a diversity of visitor uses. The selected Alternative is very responsive to the greatest number of needs and desires expressed from the residents and visitors.

Alternative A cannot meet Requirement 4 because it can no longer safely or effectively accommodate the present nor projected future number of visitors at the existing entrance station. Although Alternatives B, C and D can meet Requirement 4, none of them is as responsive as the Selected Alternative.

NEPA Section 101 Requirement 5. *“Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life’s amenities.”*

The Selected Alternative will ensure safe and efficient access into FIIS from the west while reducing the potential for future impacts to environmentally sensitive areas. This will achieve a balance between the effects of population and resource use while permitting a high standard of living with an ample share of life’s amenities for both residents and visitors.

Alternative A would not meet Requirement 5 because it can no longer balance population and resource use due to increased usage of the existing western access to FIIS. Alternatives B, C and D can meet Requirement 5, however, the originally planned building would have a potentially negative impact on the Hawk Watch and the Entrance Gate location on traffic in the Entrance Triangle and Ocean Parkway.

NEPA Section 101 Requirement 6. *“Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of non-renewable resources.”*

The Selected Alternative will be implemented with minimal impacts to the environment. Construction will be timed to correspond with low vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Restrooms will be low impact, and low maintenance compost toilets.

WHY THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT

Under NPS policy, the alternative analyzed that would be most beneficial for the environment and/or have the least adverse impacts should be identified. Of the alternatives analyzed, the Selected Alternative B – Modified, is the environmentally preferred alternative. The following confirming statements review impact considerations, and highlight key safeguards for implementing Alternative B -Modified.

Geological Resources

The construction of underground utilities may temporarily disturb soils along Burma Road and into the site. The site itself primarily consists of sand and fill materials. Impacts are considered short-term and reversible.

Wetlands

There are no wetlands in the immediate vicinity of the Selected Alternative therefore no impacts are anticipated. Since there are no wetlands within or near the project site, hence not and there Wetland Statement of Findings has been prepared.

Threatened or Endangered Species

Since there are no threatened or endangered species on the project site, no anticipated increases in visitor use, and no changing visitor access to the beach the NPS has determined there are no anticipated direct or indirect impacts to these resources. Traffic and pedestrian patterns will not change significantly, therefore, there are no anticipated primary or secondary impacts on piping plovers.

Air Quality, Traffic and Noise

The Selected Alternative will relieve existing vehicle lines at the western gateway by installing signage, guardrails and bollards at the the end of RMSP road. Good signage will enable those who go into the Park efficient means to do so and effectively direct curiosity seekers out of the area and back out onto RMSP road. This alternative also provides positive traffic benefits by creating a temporary parking area for pedestrians being dropped-off or picked up in this entry location. By providing this benefit, the existing issue of unauthorized drop-off parking at the eastern end of the RMSP road should eliminated.

Water Quality and Quantity

There are no water bodies or wetlands in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project site therefore no impacts are anticipated. Impacts to the existing potable water supply system at the will be minimal since the source is artesian. Compost toilets and water faucets that are operational on demand will be installed to minimize water usage.

Land Use

The Selected Alternative will add a pavilion , toilets and pave a small area in the drop off zone in the Entrance Triangle resulting in minimal loss of open space. The parking area at the pavilion will be constructed of pervious materials to limit storm water runoff. Land use in this area will be improved by providing needed public restrooms, office space and a temporary parking area for drop-off traffic.

Socioeconomics

Improvements associated with the Selected Alternative will provide greater visibility for the Park and, over time, attract additional visitors to the Park. The improved visibility will enhance the image of the Park. The impact is envisioned as infinitely positive since visitors will be empowered to do their part to protect and preserve the Park's important natural and historic resources.

Recreation

The Selected Alternative will enhance access and convenience to restrooms without creating significant area for septic fields. The project provides for safe pedestrian crossings tying into the network of paths to the beaches, Fire Island Lighthouse, and RMSP.

Visitor Experience

With the selected Alternative's pavilion, there will be a positive effect on the visitor experience because pedestrian visitors will be informed about Park resources as well as rules for traveling within the Park. This will give Park staff more time to devote to other essential Park management duties.

Visitor Interpretive Information

This alternative would result in a significant improvement in the ability of Park staff to provide public access with additional information about Park interpretive programs. These programs are important for public exposure to information about natural resource conservation and preservation. The Park believes that a well-informed public results in more public cooperation and less enforcement action leaving more time to devote to other important Park objectives. The ability of the NPS to provide a strong and positive message through a "gateway" presence and

well-designed signage will aid in public compliance and cooperation regarding the rules and regulations of the Park.

Urban Quality

Although Fire Island itself has many wild natural areas, it is also an urbanized area from the standpoint that it can and does accommodate millions of people by car, ferries and as pedestrians to the wide expanses of beaches and other public areas every year. The lands along RMSP road contain extensive parking lots and buildings interspersed with natural areas. An open public arena is located near the mainland bridge intersection with RMSP road. The New West End Entrance Station will be located at the east end of the RMSP road corridor and will be small in comparison to other structures at Parking Field 5 of RMSP, and compatible with the existing raptor-viewing platform. The Fire Island West End Entrance pavilion is, therefore, consistent and will not have a significant impact on the existing urban quality of the area.

Traffic, Parking and Pedestrian Access

The Selected Alternative will provide very limited public parking. The intention of the small parking lot at the new entry station is for administrative use and a vehicle or vehicles coming in to pick up driving permits. Signage will preclude most other vehicles from entering this space. The pavilion will be designed primarily to respond to the needs of the pedestrian public which pass in great numbers on their way to the beaches and private lands within the Park. A drop-off temporary parking lot will be provided adjacent to the building's parking lot to relieve the existing problem at the end of RMSP road. Long-term and day use parking will continue to only be allowed in RMSP parking lots. These resources will not be significantly impacted because the parking to be provided at the Project Site is for administrative use only.

Universal Accessibility

The Selected Alternative will make all public areas, including restrooms and parking areas, comply with Federal ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities. Walkways leading to and from the buildings will be designed with crosswalks where necessary and will conveniently connect to pathways into and out of the building and parking area associated with the drop off zone.

Utilities

Potable water will be piped to the Project Site from the Annex from an existing source with plenty of capacity. Compost toilets will be utilized. The ability to provide these utilities to the site will give pedestrians an additional restroom source between Parking Field 5 and the Annex, a distance of approximately 1.5 miles. This will take some pressure off the Annex restrooms. The utilities improvement is, therefore, a positive public benefit.

Access to Public and Private Lands

The Selected Alternative will provide positive public benefits for accessibility. It will provide much improved access into the Park for both vehicles and pedestrians. It will inform the pedestrian public of the park resources and the rules within the Park. This alternative will also provide connections to existing RMSP and NPS walkways, which results in safer pedestrian access to and from the waterfront, and protects the sensitive vegetation in the dune and wetland areas.

Public Safety

The Selected Alternative will generate positive benefits for public health in that it will relieve non-essential vehicles from traveling on Burma Road thereby eliminating a long-standing safety problem with vehicles trying to turn around once they realize they cannot get through the gate. The project will also provide additional restroom facilities, a temporary parking area for drop-offs and pick-ups, and paths from existing walkways to separate the traffic from pedestrians. These actions will, therefore, have positive benefits on overall public health and safety.

Historic and Cultural Resources

There are no anticipated impacts since the Phase I archeological investigation did not yield any discernable prehistoric or historic sites or features potentially eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. No further investigation was recommended. Section 106 Review is being conducted by NYSOPRHP. A letter of “No Effect” from NYSOPRHP has been received.

Visual Resources

The Selected Alternative provides the highest public visibility and, therefore, the highest benefit due to the potential of more people being exposed to the building. This alternative does not impede the viewshed to the Fire Island Lighthouse, an important historic and visual landmark for visitors. The Selected Alternative mitigates any issues with visual interference with the Hawk Watch Platform that were associated with Alternatives B, C and D.

Potential for Flooding

Although the pavilion site is in the 100-year floodplain, the site is located at the highest point of elevation in the vicinity of the FIIS western boundary and has no recent history of flooding. A Statement of Findings for Floodplains was prepared for the project. (See Appendix C) The Statement provides that the natural floodplain values would be protected and potentially hazardous conditions associated with flood events would be minimized. The statement illustrates that the proposed action is consistent with the policies and procedures of NPS Floodplain Management Guidelines, Director’s Order #77-2.

Table 6-1 below, “Summary of Potential Impacts,” illustrates the levels of impacts and identifies positive impacts between the individual alternatives. Clearly, Alternative B- -Modified, as the Selected Alternative, offers the greatest benefit with the least environmental effect.

**TABLE 6-1
SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS**

Type of Impact	Alternative A (No Action)	Alternative B (Preferred)	Alternative B Modified (Selected)	Alternative C	Alternative D
Wetlands	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact
Sand Dunes	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact
Plant Communities	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact
Piping Plover	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact
Visual Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Major Impact
Archaeology	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact
Historic Buildings	Negligible Impact	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Major Impact
Visitor Experience	Moderate Impact	Positive Impact	Minor Impact	Positive Impact	Positive Impact
Raptor Watch Platform	Negligible Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Major Impact
Land Use	Moderate Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Minor Impact	Moderate Impact
Parking and Access	Major Impact	Positive Impact	Minor Impact	Moderate Impact	Moderate Impact

IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES

Impairment is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible manager, would cause permanent and/or major harm to the integrity of park resources or values, including opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values. NPS policy and rules prohibit consideration of improvement plans or projects that would permanently impair by having major harmful effects to primary resource values.

Although the activities under the selected alternative have some negative impacts, they will also have numerous positive effects to park resources. These beneficial effects include:

- Upgrading the existing gated entry system to provide an efficient electronic gate system.
- Provide a new entrance that allows for a safe turn-around or exit area for vehicles that do not have a permit to enter the park.
- Provide a safe drop-off point for pedestrians.
- Provide additional public restroom facilities.
- Provide an additional area for limited interpretive programs and for the driving permit education program.
- Provide for cooperative management with the various communities and partners in the Seashore

The National Park Service believes that the Selected Alternative would not cause impairment to Park resource values. The project is consistent with relevant federal laws and the Park's current General Management Plan. Construction of an adequate secured vehicle entry system for residents, service providers, visitors and Park personnel is a long-standing goal.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was placed on formal public review for 30 days beginning on December 6, 2005 and was distributed to a variety of agencies and organizations, including those listed under Section 14.0 Coordination and Consultation of the EA. In addition, the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society met with the Park and their consultants on February 2006 for a site visit and project presentation. Also in February, the Park and their consultants met separately with representatives from New York State Office of Parks and RMSP for a site visit and to discuss project.

A Public Meeting was advertised and conducted on January 24, 2006 at the Town of Islip Auditorium. Approximately 50 people attended. The public comment period was held open for 15 days following the meeting and a total of 33 letters were received during that period. (see Appendix B)

CONSULTANT AND COORDINATION

The conceptualization and development of the New West End Entrance Station occurred over several years and involved many NPS Park staff, other governmental officials, and consultants. The agencies listed below were contacted and/or consulted during preparation of this EA:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cortland, NY Field Office; Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires the National Park Service to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out does not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or critical habitat. The Service has been consulted concerning the presence of listed species and critical habitat.

The New York State Environmental Conservation Law contains definitions for NYS Threatened, Endangered, Special Concern Species, and Protected Species. Native plant life is further protected under 6 NYCRR Part 193.3, which defines the number of plants to be found on sites on the United States Geologic Survey (USGS) 7 1/2 minute series maps, or listed Federally. It also defines the term "colony" for plant species. NYS Department of Environmental Conservation administers the state's non-game and endangered (animal and plant) species program. The department has been consulted concerning endangered or threatened species and critical habitats.

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Historic Preservation Field Services Office, Peebles Island, NY; - Section 106 of the act requires that government agencies take into account the effects of their actions on historic properties. The NYSHPO was consulted on the plan. All potential shoreside cultural sites were evaluated for the potential eligibility of structures or sites for the National Register of Historic Places (Section 110). No activities in the Selected Alternative will have an impact on cultural structures or sites.

NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service, Habitat Conservation Division, Highlands, NJ. - No activities in the Selected Alternative will have an impact on Essential Fish Habitat areas or Marine T&E Species.

The assessment was also an informational or base reference to specific requests for action concurrences under the National Historic Preservation Act, and Coastal Zone Management Act as indicated in the Section 12 of the EA. All comments received on the assessment were carefully reviewed. A Consistency Determination has been prepared and completed for the project

The staff of NPS Northeast Regional Director reviewed the environmental assessment and approved its distribution for public comment. A news release was sent to Long Island media contacts announcing the availability of this environmental assessment. Copies of the environmental assessment and letters asking for review and comment were sent to relevant Federal, State, and local officials, local libraries, and a list of organizations that have expressed a strong interest in issues affecting Fire Island National Seashore.

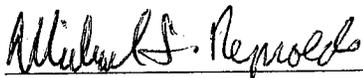
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Following review of the EA, and based on that phase of NEPA compliance, this Finding of No Significant Impact /Decision Document (FONSI) has been prepared to complete the NEPA compliance process.

Based on conservation planning and the environmental impact analysis documented in the EA and this FONSI, with due consideration of the nature of the public comment and consults with other agencies, and given the capability of the mitigation measures to avoid, reduce, or eliminate impacts, the NPS has determined that the Selected Alternative will not constitute a federal action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). The Selected Alternative will not have a significant effect on the quality on the human environment or on FIIS cultural resources, or natural resources, including threatened or endangered species. There are no unmitigated adverse impacts on public safety, sites or districts listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the Selected Alternative will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

It has been determined that the implementation of the Selected Alternative, as described, will not constitute a major federal action that would have significant impact upon the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

RECOMMENDED:



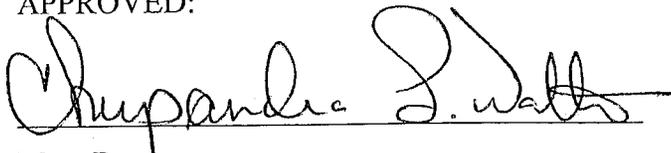
Michael T. Reynolds

Superintendent, Fire Island National Seashore



Date

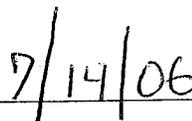
APPROVED:



Mary Bomar

Regional Director

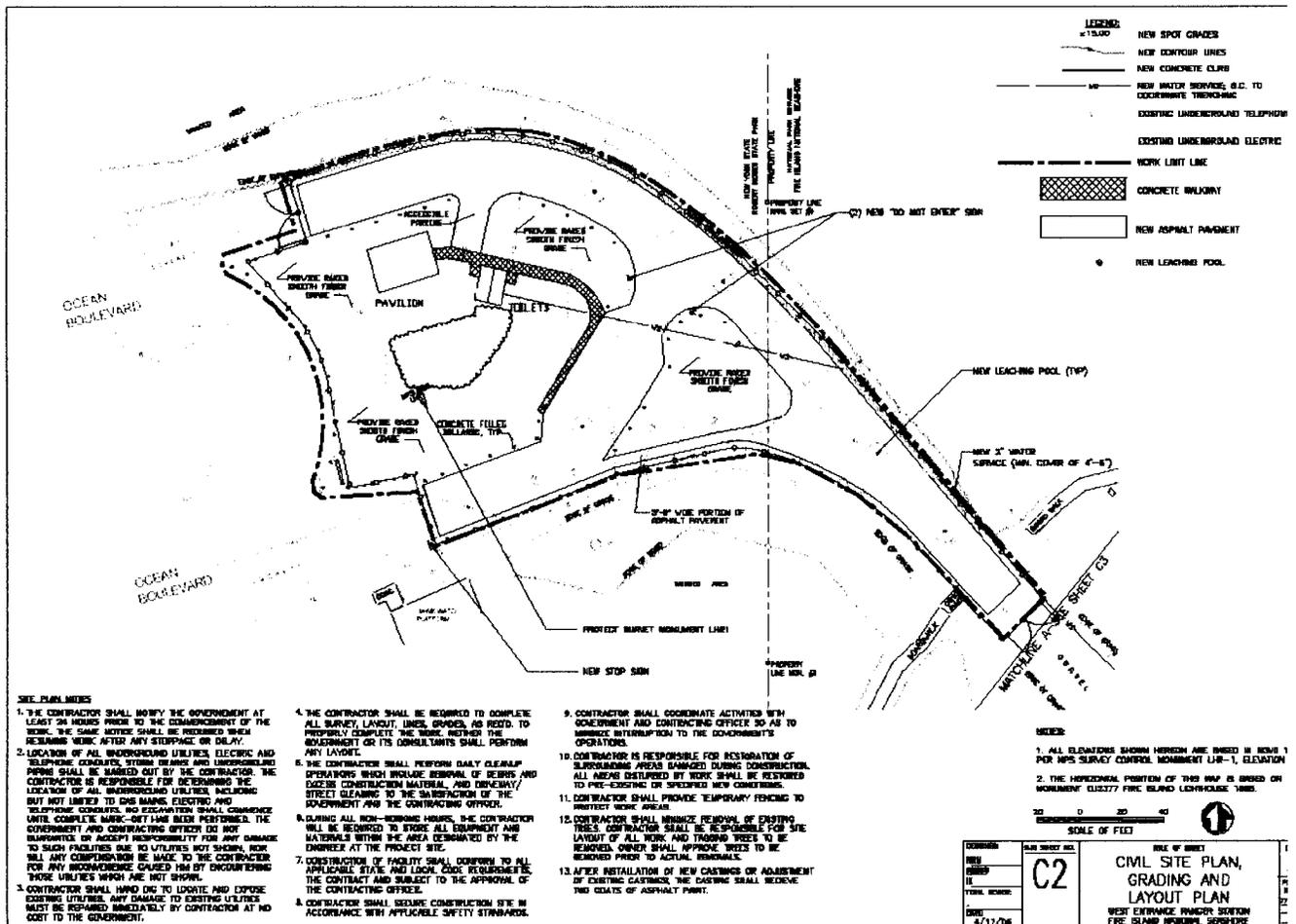
National Park Service



Date

Appendix A

Civil Site Plan and Grading and Layout



Appendix B

PUBLIC COMMENTS & RESPONSES

Summary of Comments Received

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NEW WEST END ENTRANCE STATION

TOWN OF ISLIP, SUFFOLK COUNTY, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK

A press release for EA was sent out on December 6, 2005 and was made available on the Fire Island National Seashore website for public review. A public information meeting was held on January 24, 2006 and written comments were received at the meeting and accepted during the open comment period extended through February 7, 2006.

Six comments were supportive of the Entrance Station, seven comments were opposed to a building at the entrance, and seven comments did not directly indicate a conviction of support or opposition. In direct response to the public's issues and concerns raised in the comments, the project was revised. As a result, all of the substantial issues and concerns have been mitigated by this change.

The new "Alternative B – Modified" represents a simplified plan involving the replacement of the existing entrance gate at its current location, the placement of a 600± square foot pavilion in the approximate location of the originally proposed building, and the provision of a drop-off area and compost toilets. The modifications to "Alternative B" are considered positive changes that are responsive to concerns about visual impact from the hawk watch platform and potential traffic impacts to the transition area between Ocean Boulevard and Burma Road.

Name	Address	Comment Summary	Rcv'd
US Fish and Wildlife Service	USFWS New York Field Office 3817 Luker Road Corland, NY 13045	NPS needs to consult with the Service to insure that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of T&E species. NPS should consider the use of techniques designed to limit the likelihood of bird collisions into windows. Construction activities should be restricted from Sept 1- Nov 15.	2-Feb-06
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation	The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Agency Building1 Albany NY 12238	see letter as attached in the EA	6-Feb-06
(omitted from on-line copy)	(omitted from on-line copy)	The FINSAB supports FINS efforts to conserve, preserve, and provide enhanced accessibility for the public to Fire Island. Encouraging the Park to construct new entrance on the East End as well.	30-Dec-05
		Feels the building would negatively impact the viewing and data collection of hawks. Believes FINS could design an Entrance without a building	24-Jan-06
		The Society provided a list of users and visitors that would need access to the park, therefore would need a keycode.	23-Jan-06
		Sites the lack of success of a building and parking lot at this location in the past. Feels the flow of cars will create an unsafe bottle neck, by attracting cars that can not enter or park at the entrance. Feels the bath rooms will cause a major safety issue.	24- Jan-06
		Likes the location of the present gate to slow down traffic before entering Kismet. Suggests the entrance road be improved and made handicapped accessible.	24- Jan-06
		Supports building a professional entrance to the seashore to indicate to visitors they are entering a National Park.	24- Jan-06

		Is concerned with the excessive allocation of permitted (or lack of enforcement of non permitted) driving of commercial vehicles (especially oversized) in "roadless" Fire Island.	24- Jan-06
		Limit the parking area to 10 minute parking. No bike racks at the new Facility.	24- Jan-06
		Limit the parking area to 10 minute parking. No bike racks at the new Facility.	24- Jan-06
		Strongly oppose the construction of a building, believes a building would negatively impact the scenic value of the resource. Believes an info kiosk and security gate would be sufficient. NPS should be discouraging further development of the Seashore.	24- Jan-06
		Opposes the construction of the building. Feels the building would negatively impact the existing research project (counting and collection of hawk data). Believes that the Park can meet its goal of vehicle control without a building.	23- Jan-06
		The proposed structure is an useful addition to our National Park.	24- Jan-06
		New facility must be equipped with garbage pails; lighting needed along burma road; and signage needed from RMSP field 5	24- Jan-06
		Agrees that Alt B (the preferred alternative) is a sensible way to meet the needs of beach users, and urges the Seashore to keep the East Entrance to the beach open for vehicles.	20- Jan-06
		Opposes the construction of a building that would negatively impact the hawkwatch that occurs each autumn at Fire Island. And respectfully request that the Park consider the Drew Panko low impact vehicular control plan instead of a building.	24- Jan-06
		Feels the building would negatively impact the viewing and data collection of hawks	30- Jan-06

		Concerned that the Fed Govt is shoring up the ends of the island and this will weaken the middle of the island. Believes NPS should do more outreach to lead the less organized communities.	24- Jan-06
		Does not feel there is justification for building a new entrance station. Feels the new building will obscure the lighthouse visual. The building will impair the raptor viewing. Constructing more restrooms is redundant and unnecessary.	29- Jan-06
		Does not believe that traffic flow warrants this facility upgrade. Believes bathroom facilities would encourage an undesirable element. Believes the building will interfere with the hawk watch.	26- Jan-06
		Believes that the new building and parking area as configured in Alt B will attract vehicles and pedestrians in an unsafe combination. The ped. drop off area should be moved away from vehicle access road.	29- Jan-06
		Suggests the vehicle access pathway could be improved for better safety of drivers and pedestrians. Does not think that larger vehicles (ie busses) can make the turn onto Burma Road as outlined in Alt B.	27- Jan-06
		Concerned about the ultimate height and location of the building and the effect the building will have on Raptor observers sight lines. Concerned that the increase in activity and vehicles at this building might have an impact on the flight patterns of the hawks.	31- Jan-06
		Feels the building would negatively impact the ongoing study of hawks on Long Island (viewing and data collection of hawks). Suggests a vehicular traffic control plan without a building.	12- Jan-06

		Would prefer no building was built; however, if a building were to be built he suggests a low flat-topped building that would not impede the hawk viewing. He suggest the proposed Alt A will create a greater traffic flow problem.	31- Jan-06
		Gave suggestions on how to solve issues that would be solved by Alt B without constructing a building.	31- Jan-06
		Seeking assurance that if the new entrance station building does not work as predicted that FINS will remove the structure and restore the area and the "viewshed" to its prestructure state.	31- Jan-06
		Have supplied data from the 2001 Hawk Migration Journal of the North East Hawk Watch association as evidence of their important study. They request FINS solve the traffic flow problems without constructing a building.	29- Jan-06
		Thinks the plan to move the gate from the lighthouse area to the NYS Park boundary makes good sense	30- Jan-06

APPENDIX C

STATEMENT OF FINDINGS FOR FLOODPLAINS

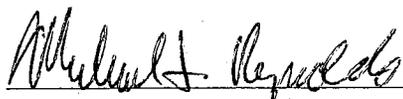
Statement of Findings for Floodplains

Developed with the Environmental Assessment for the New West End Entrance Station

Fire Island National Seashore

Islip, New York

RECOMMENDED:



5/26/06

Superintendent, Fire Island National Park

Date

CERTIFICATION OF TECHNICAL ADEQUACY AND SERVICEWIDE CONSISTENCY:

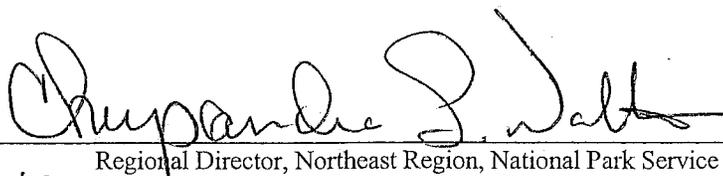


5-23-2006

Chief, Water Resources Division, National Park Service

Date

APPROVED:


for
Regional Director, Northeast Region, National Park Service

7/13/06
Date

Statement of Findings for Floodplains

Developed with the Environmental Assessment for the New West End Entrance Station

Fire Island National Seashore

Islip, New York

A. Introduction

The Fire Island National Park (FIIS) has prepared and made available a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed New West End Entrance Station in Fire Island National Park (Park) on Long Island in New York State. Executive Orders 11988 (Floodplain Management) requires that NPS and other federal agencies to evaluate the likely impact of actions in floodplains. NPS Directive's Order 77-2 Floodplain Management provide NPS policies and procedures complying with E.O. 11988. This Statement of Findings (SOF) documents compliance with NPS floodplain management procedures.

Description of Proposed Action

The Selected Alternative described in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and put forth here based on public comments. Alternative B was modified to reduce concerns regarding visual impact and potential traffic issues. The building, in Alternative B - Modified has been reduced from a ranger station to a visitor's pavilion. The pavilion will be constructed in the same location as the original building and will be able to display interpretive signage about FIIS including a guide to its flora and fauna. A set of compost toilets with landscaping will be placed in the northeast corner of the Entrance Triangle. Other improvements in the site plan which identify the site as FIIS is a speed bump, flagpole and sign.

Transportation and access improvements include the placement of a guardrail along the Ocean Parkway outside curve where it meets the Entrance Triangle. A temporary paved parking area with three (3) parking spaces is planned for vehicles dropping off beach goers. A parking area constructed of a pervious surface will accommodate eight (8) vehicles will be located adjacent to the pavilion. The road configuration will allow cars to drop off passengers and continue on through and out the park going west without interfering with traffic coming into and going out of the park. See Appendix A of the FONSI for the layout of all planned improvements.

The vehicle gate will remain in its present location just east of the Lighthouse on Burma Road. The existing gate will be replaced with a new electronic two-way keypad entry/exit gate. No other improvements are planned for this area.

Site Location

The Project Site is approximately 50 miles east of New York City. It is accessed by car via Montauk Highway, Sunrise Highway and the Long Island Expressway. The Sagtikos State Parkway leads into the Robert Moses Boulevard, which terminates at FIIS western boundary. The site is also linked to New York City via the Long Island Railroad. The Park is flanked by RMSP on the west, and Smith Point County Park on the east. Private lands include the seventeen small hamlet communities interspersed throughout the length of Fire Island National Seashore.

Site Floodplains

Elevations in the immediate vicinity of the project area are from 16-22 feet above sea level. Floodplain maps prepared by FEMA indicate that the majority of the site is located in the Zone VE, meaning it is an area that is typically inundated by 100-year flood events that are effected and exacerbated by wave action. The area located at the top of Entrance Triangle is indicated as being in Zone AE, meaning it is an area that is typically inundated by 100-year flood events. B Flood Elevations (BFE's) have been determined for the entire project area.

Coastal flooding does occur on Fire Island. Historically, the most wide spread damage from flooding occurred as a result of the 1938 Hurricane. The most significant storm in recent years to affect Fire Island was the December 1992 nor'easter. The Town of Islip has taken special measures to address flooding and erosion on Fire Island and regularly reviews building permits for conformance with flood regulations.

Although the building site is in the 100-year floodplain, the site is located at the highest point of elevation in the vicinity of the Park's western boundary and has no recent history of flooding.

B. Justification for Use of the Floodplain

Location Justification

There are a number of existing problems and issues that will be addressed and resolved by the proposed Project:

- The need to provide a vehicle checkpoint station which safely controls access to Park lands. The most significant problem is the lack of a safe turn-around area. Curiosity seekers drive approximately one-half mile down to the existing checkpoint and then must back up to return to the road back to Robert Moses State Park (RMSP). Also, the permit entry system is outdated and inefficient. Should the Reg-Neg process result in more stringent vehicle access requirements, an efficient entry gate will become an even more important traffic control factor.
- The need to protect natural resources from vehicles driving off-road.
- The need to provide a safe drop-off point for pedestrians.
- The need to provide additional restroom facilities.

- The need to provide an improved initial point of information contact for the visitor.
- The need to show a physical and visual boundary of where the Park begins.

Investigation of Alternative Sites

In the EA, three alternatives were considered for the placement of the new visitor contact station and entry gate. The selected alternative best balances the protection of natural resources, historic viewsheds, and site lines of the existing raptor-viewing platform with the need for improved public visibility, secure, safe vehicle access to Park lands, safe efficient ingress/egress from RMSP to the Park, and retention of good vehicle circulation for vehicles leaving RMSP.

Alternative A, the “no action” alternative assumes that the present gate facility remains at its existing location. The location of the existing facility is shown as Figure 2-3 in the EA. No change in the gate entry system means that the present problems with traffic and gate operation will continue and accelerate with anticipated increases in traffic levels in and around the site due to annual increases in visitor levels. The existing gate entry system cannot safely accommodate new levels of traffic nor ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists along Burma Road. There are no flooding or wetlands issues present at this location.

Alternative B, the original preferred alternative in the EA was comprised of a single new National Park Service (NPS) visitors contact station and new keypad entry gate system on property currently owned by New York State adjacent to the Park. The lands where the proposed Project Site is located between the Park Lighthouse Tract and Parking Field 5 of RMSP at the eastern loop of the Robert Moses Boulevard.

The project was designed to consist of a new building not to exceed 2,000 square feet that provide needed office space for Park personnel, an information contact station for Park visitors, and public restrooms. A total of eight (8) parking spaces were designed to be available at the site. Four reserved for staff use and four for public use, including one wheelchair accessible. The building’s public purpose was envisioned as an incidental use for people to purchase or check on driving permits. Public restroom use is targeted for pedestrians traveling to and from the Park beaches. Pedestrian connections have been incorporated to existing walkways from the beach and from RMSP Parking Field 5 (parking area). Residents and visitors access the Park year-round utilizing Parking Field 5. There are no wetlands located in the immediate vicinity of the Project Site.

The site is located in the Town of Islip on Fire Island just off the south shore of Long Island. The site is specifically located on the Fire Island Lighthouse Tract portion of the Fire Island National Seashore lands, adjacent to and just east of the Robert Moses State Park. The present West End Entrance Station is the primary entry point to both public and private lands in the Park and is located approximately one-quarter mile east of the proposed location.

Alternatives C and D, conceptualize the building in several other areas of the Entrance Triangle with various parking configurations. Parking and the lack of a safe drop-off zone for pedestrians on their way to the beaches and private residences inside the Park kept these alternatives from being selected. There were no wetland or flooding issues relating to either of these alternatives.

Alternative sites on federal land were considered but rejected. The purposes of the project require placing the proposed entrance station at or near the Park boundary, which is entirely in the floodplain. Placing the entrance station on park lands along the park boundary would require substantial impacts to undisturbed areas of high value, including wetlands and dunes. The only sites near the park boundary that would avoid these undisturbed areas are on state land.

Under NPS policy, the alternative analyzed that would be most beneficial for the environment or have the least adverse impacts has been identified as Alternative B - Modified . This Selected Alternative is also the environmentally preferred alternative. In the FONSI, Table 6-1, "Summary of Potential Impacts," illustrates the levels of impacts and identifies positive impacts between the individual alternatives. Clearly, the Selected Alternative offers the greatest benefit with the least environmental effect.

C. Description of Site-Specific Flood Risk

Flood Recurrence

Coastal flooding occurs on Fire Island. Historically, the most wide spread damage from flooding occurred as a result of the 1938 Hurricane. No information about flooding at the Project Site is available from records. The most significant storm in recent years to affect Fire Island was the December 1992 nor'easter. According to NPS staff, flooding did not then nor did it ever impact the Entrance Triangle site. This area was built up with fill to accommodate the turnaround of the Causeway and is high enough to avoid even the worst flood events.

Hydraulics

Time required for Flooding

The Project Site represents an area with one of the highest elevations on Fire Island. There would be ample time to prepare for a flood event.

Opportunity for Evacuation

In the event of flooding, the Project Site has direct access to Ocean Boulevard, the Robert Moses Parkway and the mainland of Long Island. This is the main exit off Fire Island. FIIS staff coordinate with Suffolk County Emergency Management Office for all evacuation needs for the park.

Geomorphic Considerations

There are no significant geomorphic considerations since this flood zone is located well away from Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.

D. Description and Explanation of Flood Mitigation Plans

Flood Mitigation Plans

The project was sited to take advantage of the highest available elevations to minimize any future problems with flooding. The proposed pavilion will be constructed according to local, state and federal regulations for structures to be located in 100-year floodplains.

The project is also sited away from low-lying vegetation that is occasionally under water, depending on the season. Careful consideration was given to keeping the pavilion sited in the existing disturbed area thereby preserving all nearby native vegetation. Best management practices will be initiated during the construction of the structures and site work. Stormwater will be managed on-site.

Consistency and Compliance

Executive Orders 11988 and 11990, Floodplain Management and Wetland Protection

These executive orders direct NPS to avoid, to the extent possible, the long and short-term adverse impacts associated with modifying or occupying floodplains and wetlands. They also require NPS to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplains or wetland development whenever there is a practical alternative. The statement of findings for floodplains has been completed. A Statement of Findings for Wetlands was determined to be not required.

E. Summary

With the above mitigation measures in place, NPS determines that the natural floodplain values would be protected and potentially hazardous conditions associated with flood events would be minimized. The NPS finds that this proposed action is consistent with the policies and procedures of NPS Director's Order #77-2: Floodplain Management.

References

Fire Island National Seashore, Environmental Assessment for Endangered Species Habitat Management, 2003. National Park Service. 39 pp.

Fire Island National Seashore, General Management Plan, 1978. National Park Service. 147 pp.

Freshwater Wetlands Delineation and Inventory of Wetland Herpetological Species on Fire Island National Seashore, 1997, Caldecutt, William J. 5 pp.

Restoration and Protection of Fire Island, 1938. Long Island State Park Commission.