

Fire Island National Seashore

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Electronic Newsletter



What's Been Happening at the Seashore

Spring
2009

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2008 Summary / GMP Update / Outlook for 2009

The summer, fall and winter of 2008 came and went far too quickly. It's hard to believe we're on the verge of a new summer season. 2008 was a busy and productive year, both on the surface and behind the scenes, and we look forward to an even more eventful year in 2009.

2008 Summary

The summer of 2008 was a good season for Fire Island National Seashore. Being such a close destination for so many people, **park visitation increased by almost 7% in 2008.**

If our **annual visitor survey** is an accurate indication, most people coming to the park were satisfied with facilities, services and recreational opportunities in 2008. This brief questionnaire is distributed every year to a random sample of visitors in most units of the National Park System. A park's annual ratings for visitor satisfaction, visitor understanding and appreciation, and for commercial services are derived from these surveys. In 2008, Fire Island's **overall satisfaction rating** was **89%** (up from 85% in 2007), with an 84% satisfaction measure for commercial services. The highest rated component of this survey was for "assistance from park employees," with a satisfaction measure of 95%. With the improvements made over the fall and winter by our maintenance crew and park concessioners, we won't be surprised if this upward trend continues in 2009.

Some of the credit for improved scores may go to the National Park Service's **Centennial Initiative**, which enabled Fire Island National Seashore to hire 25 additional seasonal employees in 2008. The resultant increase in services for the public included weekend lifeguards at Barrett Beach, four days of canoe programs at Watch Hill every week, and expanded patrols during July and August. Additional maintenance staff was able to complete a number of facility upgrades and other improvements throughout the Seashore.

Special Programs in April 2009

[William Floyd Estate](#)

- ["Signs of Spring" Walking Tour](#) on April 11, 10 - 11:30 a.m.
- ["In Honor of Trees" Walking Tour](#) on April 26, 10 a.m. - Noon

Call 631-399-2030 for more information

[Fire Island Lighthouse](#)

- [Historic Area Lighthouse Trek](#) on April 18 at 8 a.m.
(reservations required/ \$15 fee for program/T-shirt)
- ["The Old Lamplighter"](#) slide program on April 18 at 1 p.m.
- [National Junior Ranger Day Workshop](#) on April 25, 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Call 631-661-4876 for more information

[Wilderness Visitor Center](#)

- [Discovering Fire Island Wilderness](#) guided hike on April 19 at 9 a.m.

Call 631-281-3010 for more information

Coming this May 2009

["International Migratory Bird Day"](#) walks at the William Floyd Estate on May 9 and May 17

[7th Biennial Science Conference](#) at Brookhaven National Laboratory on May 11 and 12

The park offered special interpretive programs throughout the year, culminating in the **150th Anniversary Celebration of the Fire Island Lighthouse** on November 1 and 2. Magnificent weather provided the perfect background for the weekend. Saturday's ceremony drew a great turnout for a day of special exhibits, programs, and a specially created birthday cake. This was followed by a special Junior Ranger day at the lighthouse on Sunday. What a great way to end the season!

Improvements to park facilities continued in 2008. In October the park broke ground for a new Watch Hill Ferry Terminal in Patchogue. In December, construction began on the building's foundation and associated bulkhead along the Patchogue River.

The exterior of the Manor House at the William Floyd Estate was painted and the windows and shutters were repaired. New storm windows were installed throughout the house. At the Fire Island Lighthouse, many needed repairs were made to the exterior of the Keeper's Quarters and the exterior exterior of the Lighthouse was painted.

A major staffing change this past year was the selection of a **new superintendent for Fire Island National Seashore**. In February of 2008, former superintendent Mike Reynolds was promoted to the deputy regional director position in Philadelphia, and Deputy Superintendent Sean McGuinness became the acting superintendent throughout most of year. In late September, Northeast Regional Director Dennis Reidenbach announced the selection of the park's new superintendent, Chris Soller, who was welcomed to his new office in Patchogue in mid-November, 2008.

GMP Update

Over the past year, the **General Management Plan (GMP)** team has been actively working toward a new GMP for the park. Northeast Regional Office planner Ellen Carlson and a variety of consultants have been poring over and processing information from reams of material gathered during the past two years+ of scoping meetings and planning workshops.

A component of background data that the team will use is the visitor and resident study conducted by the University of Idaho. A sample of homeowners received the resident questionnaire late last spring, and a visitor questionnaire was distributed at park facilities in late July. Results of the resident survey are nearing completion, while the visitor survey has just been posted online.

Making use of all of the input and information that has been collected to date, the GMP planning team has been working on the development of preliminary alternatives. Preparing the planning alternatives will be the focus of this year's GMP work. There will be periodic opportunities for public input throughout the alternatives development phase. An updated GMP progress chart is now posted on-line.

Sign up by May 4 for Fire Island National Seashore's Biennial Science Conference.



[2009 Science Conference](#)



[Fire Island's Natural Resources](#)

Island-based concession facilities start opening on May 8, 2009.



[Watch Hill Campground registration forms at Fire Island Concessions' web site.](#)

2009 Outlook

With National Park Week starting next week, and the park's Biennial Science Conference coming in May, the opening of park facilities and community homes is just around the corner. We look forward to another good year.

As you plan your visit to Fire Island National Seashore, you'll notice a brand new web site for Fire Island Concessions, LLC, which operates the Watch Hill and Sailors Haven marinas, stores, snack bars and the campground and restaurant at Watch Hill.

Parking and foot traffic to the Watch Hill Ferry Terminal will be diverted this summer around the construction of the new Watch Hill Ferry Terminal, but we hope to have all work done by the end of the year, in time for the Village of Patchogue's annual river parade in November.

Storm-damaged boardwalks have been repaired, and additional sections have been covered in recycled plastic lumber. New signs and wayside exhibits will be installed later this year throughout the park.

Fire Island National Seashore's Centennial Challenge project was selected for funding last year, so a set of wayside panels will be installed at Fire Island Pines and Watch Hill. Funding partners include the Friends of Watch Hill and Fire Island Pines.

A major beach nourishment project has been underway in 11 of the 17 Fire Island communities this winter. With the completion of this work, you'll see a little more sand on the shoreline. Parts of the beach will be symbolically fenced for piping plover nesting habitat, but this is a good protective measure to give beach grass a chance to establish itself and create a new dune in front of the homes.

We appreciate your continued support of Fire Island National Seashore as we welcome in a new superintendent. Thank you for your support over the past visitor season.

Enjoy your park!

• Meet the Superintendent

First of all let me introduce myself. I'm Chris Soller and was appointed Superintendent of Fire Island National Seashore in September of 2008. I began my appointment in November. I am 30+-year veteran of the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior and have held several positions during my career with the National Park Service including superintendent





[Weekday discounts at Watch Hill and Sailors Haven marinas this spring.](#)

Wilderness Visitor Center has been open all year, but other facilities open by late May.



[See what's new at the Wilderness VC.](#)

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FINS Planning Team
fire_island_gmp@nps.gov
<http://www.nps.gov/fiis>

of the Jamaica Bay Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area in 2003 and 2004, legislative specialist with the Service's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs in Washington, D.C. from 1994 to 2000, and management assistant for Fire Island National Seashore from 1983 to 1988.

I am native of Youngstown, Ohio, but have lived for the past 30 years in either Washington, D.C. or metropolitan New York. I have a Bachelor's Degree in American Studies from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and a Master's Degree in Urban and Environmental Planning from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. I have a partner of 15 years and a large extended family scattered throughout the U.S. Although I left Fire Island in an official capacity in 1988, I have maintained a connection to the Island and the Seashore ever since. I have come back for visits every summer and in 2000 took up residency in one of Fire Island's summer communities.

Fire Island and Fire Island National Seashore, including the William Floyd Estate, are very special. I have walked the Island's beaches for many years, watching the sun come up over the Atlantic Ocean or waning over the Island in the late afternoon and I am always struck by the beauty and solitude that exists here, just 60 miles from the chaos and energy of New York City. One of the exciting and challenging aspects of working at Fire Island is the diversity of the Island's and the Seashore's constituents who all have deep feelings for the Island and the park. The challenge is to harness those divergent positions and bring them together on their common ground, a love for Fire Island, and challenge them to work cooperatively to be stewards of this magnificent place.

I look forward to the upcoming visitor season and welcoming everyone back to this island paradise. We have many exciting projects ahead of us including completion of the park's new General Management Plan. This is a great park and I am very excited to back again in an official capacity. Best wishes to everyone for a great 2009 Season.

• National Park Week: April 18 - 26, 2009

Join us as we celebrate National Park Week with special programs at three sites this year:



- **April 18 - Historic Lighthouse Area Trek** at [Fire Island Lighthouse](#)
- **April 19 - Discovering Fire Island Wilderness** Guided Hike at [Wilderness Visitor Center](#)
- **April 25 - National Junior Ranger Day Workshops** at [Fire Island Lighthouse](#)
- **April 26 - "In Honor of Trees" Walking Tour** at the [William Floyd Estate](#)

[Learn More: National Park Week at Fire Island](#)