

Along this Dynamic Seascape,

a chain of island strongholds guards against threats from the Gulf of Mexico. Whether facing attacking ships or hurricanes, the military fortifications and barrier islands of Gulf Islands National Seashore have protected these harbors and the mainland through many storms.



Using boardwalks preserves vegetation that protects the dunes.

Sound

Maritime Forest

Wetland

Islands on the Move

As you explore the barrier islands, can you spot how the landscape changes all around you? Sometimes you will see a gradual edge between two ECOSYSTEMS. Other times, you can step directly from one ecosystem to the next.

Each boundary brings a great variety of plants and animals that are adapted to these ever-changing environments. Note how some species establish themselves across habitat boundaries while others truly live on the edge.

Sand Dunes

Gulf

Warm saltwater areas, shallow and deep, house species, big and small.

Barrier Island

Water and wind shape and move the islands, changing habitats.

Sound

In waterways between the barrier islands and the mainland, saltwater mixes with freshwater.

Estuary

Sediment, saltwater tides, and freshwater streams meet and provide a nursery habitat.

Bayou

Some species live in slow-moving, lowland streams and freshwater marshes of river watersheds.

Coastal Communities

A range of ecosystems and HABITATS develop where the Gulf's salt water and mainland's fresh water mix. Over 400 fish species, 300 bird species, and a dozen federally listed threatened and endangered species make the park their home. Water makes up over 82 percent of the area the park manages and is a key factor in where these species live.



Bottle-nosed dolphin

Sea oats
Yaupon holly

Loggerhead turtles hatching
Snow plover
 Perdido Key beach mouse
 Ghost crab

Black skimmer

American oystercatcher

Red-winged blackbird

Osprey adult with juveniles

Great blue heron

Diamondback terrapin

Alligator

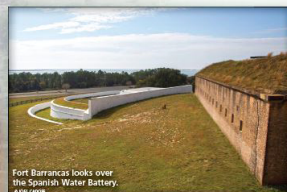
Saw palmetto

Slash pine

Live oak

Seagrass

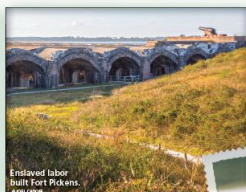
Black needlerush



Fort Barrancas looks over the Spanish Water Battery.

Fort Barrancas

PENSACOLA, FLORIDA
With Advanced Redoubt and the Spanish Water Battery, Fort Barrancas protected the channel and defended the landward approach to the Pensacola Navy Yard.



Enslaved labor built Fort Pickens.

Fort Pickens

SANTÁ ROSA ISLAND, FLORIDA
The park's largest fort, Fort Pickens has been partially restored and reveals how its construction has developed over time.

Fort McRee

PERDIDO KEY, FLORIDA
Federal forces almost destroyed Confederate-occupied Fort McRee in 1861-62, departing Confederates burned the rest. The fort's remnants are no longer visible.



Confederate soldiers at Fort McRee

Fort Massachusetts

SHIP ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI
Aimed secessionists seized Ship Island in 1861; they later exchanged fire with the USS Massachusetts. When the Union recaptured the island, the fort's construction resumed and was completed in 1866.



Battery Worth

Watching the Waters

Among natural beauty and recreational opportunities you will find numerous COASTAL FORTIFICATIONS. The park's collection, like its Third System masonry forts, represents over 200 years of innovation in military design, materials, weapons, and strategy.



Defending the Shore

The THIRD SYSTEM of sea-coast defense aimed to fortify major US harbors after the War of 1812. Pensacola Bay was chosen as the site for a navy yard, a depot, mainland and island forts, a naval timber reserve, and more.

The idea was a response to changing warfare technology and strategy—which was also why it was abandoned decades later. Of nearly 200 forts recommended nationwide, only 42 were built. Today, the park preserves five sites.