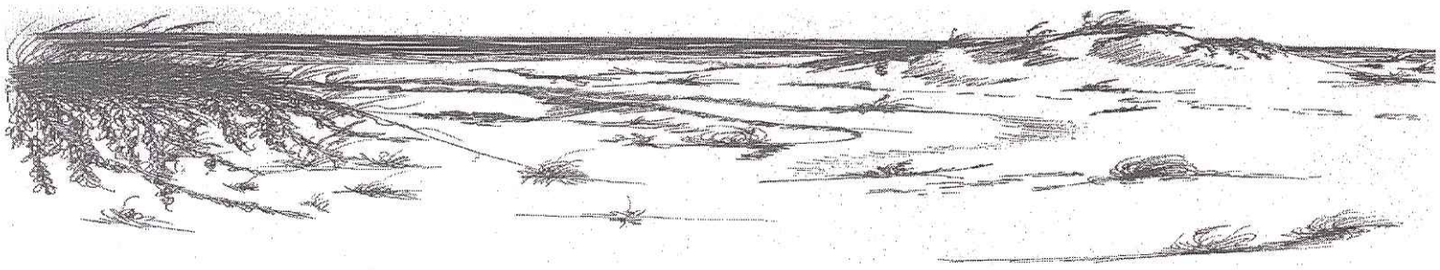
Santa Rosa

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Gulf Islands National Seashore
Florida District



Santa Rosa, part of Gulf Islands National Seashore, is a fragile barrier island made up largely of fine quartz sand held together by plants adapted to this harsh environment. It provides habitat for many shore birds, small animals and nesting sea turtles. The grass beds of the sound are the nursery ground of 95% of all commerically harvested marine species. Wind and wave actions are the dynamic forces that constantly reshape the island. Help us protect this very special scenic place.

Know Before You Go

Facilities at Opal Beach are open daily from 8:00 a.m. to sunset. An entrance fee is charged for visitors to Opal Beach from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. Fees are good for seven days at all park areas or you may purchase an annual park pass. Visitors to Opal Beach, Sound Side (Lot 6), should leave entrance passes on dashboards, except for bicyclists and motorcyclists who should present permits when contacted.

Glass containers are not allowed on the beaches.

Hiking

A section of the National Florida Scenic Trail traverses the entire length of the Santa Rosa Area. Experience nature by hiking on the beach or beach combing.

It is a seven mile hike from the west end to the east end. Visitors can enjoy bird watching, shell collecting or photography. All plants, animals and shells with marine life in them are protected.

Swimming

A section on the gulf side is reserved for swimmers. Lifeguards are on duty from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. Strong rip currents can occur.

Be safe and don't swim alone.

Picnic Shelters

Picnic shelters are at Opal Beach. Pavilion Clusters B and C and F are available for general use on a first-come, first- served basis at Parking Lots 3, 4, and 6. Cluster E and parking Lot 5 are usually closed except during busy weekends and special events. Bring your own grill and dispose of charcoal in provided containers.

Clusters A and D may be reserved by calling 850-934-2622. Electricity might be available at Clusters A and D. Visitors who reserve those pavilions are allowed to use their own generators.

Private Boaters

Plan your boat trip carefully and be sure you have adequate fuel and supplies. Rangers cannot give or sell gas to private boaters nor can they tow disabled boats back to the mainland. Boats must anchor at least 500 feet outside the designated swim beach on the gulf side. Know state and federal regulations for the operation of watercraft.

Personal Watercraft (PWC)

As of May 2006, PWC are permitted within the seashore boundary with the exception of the lagoons of Perdido Key within Big Lagoon. PWC may not be operated within 200 feet of non-motorized vessels and people in the water. PWC may not be operated at greater than flat wake speed

Fishing

Florida state fishing regulations apply at Gulf Islands NS. When fishing from the beach, a saltwater fishing license is required and is available at most bait and tackle shops. For information call 1-888-347-4356 or go online at http://marinefisheries.org. Please practice "catch and release" and discard old fishing line in recycling bins. Do not fish within the flagged swim beach when lifeguards are on duty.

Sea Life

Use caution to avoid jellyfish and stingrays. Shuffle your feet while wading in the water to scare stingrays away. If a jellyfish stings you, apply vinegar to the irritated skin. Sharks inhabit these waters. Be alert especially in the morning and evening.

Never swim alone and avoid wearing shiny jewelry.

Cycling

Bicycles are allowed on the designated bike lane. Children, 16 and younger, must use a bike helmet. Skateboards, roller-skates and in-line skates are prohibited.

Pets

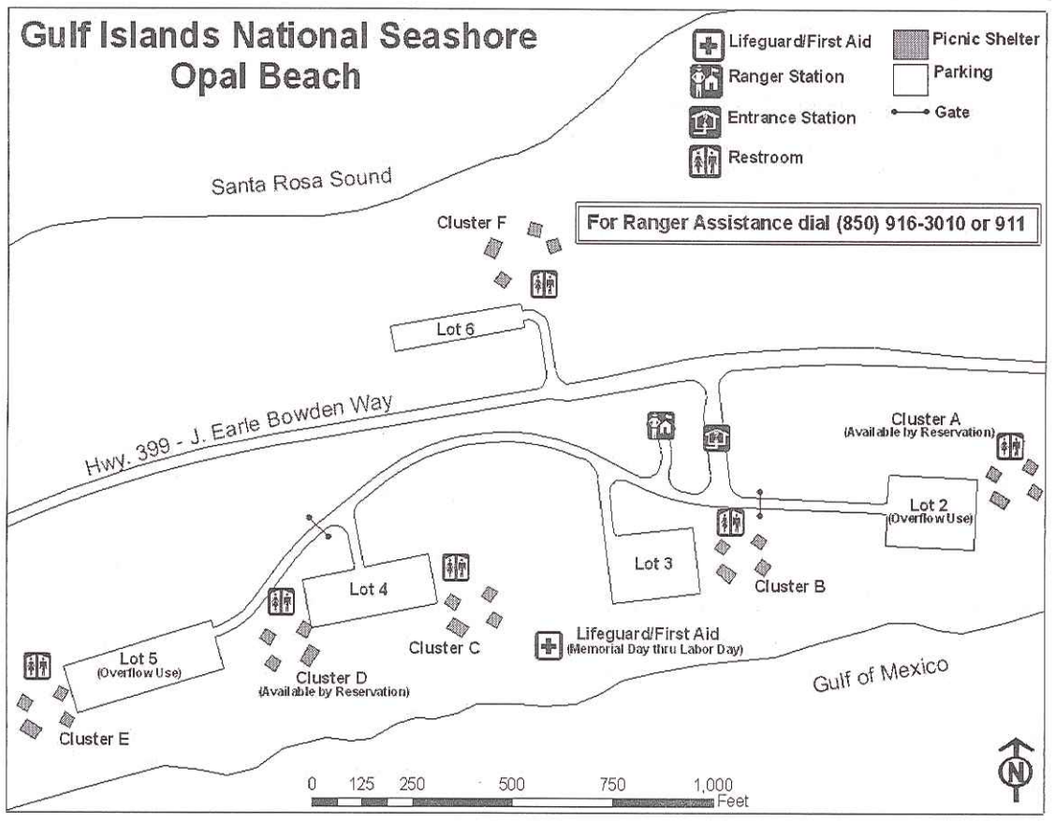
Pets are prohibited on public beaches both within and outside the park. Elsewhere, pets must be kept on a six foot leash at all times. Please do not leave pets in cars during summer months. Inside car temperatures can reach 160 degrees in a matter of minutes, even with partially opened windows.

Kite Surfing

Kite surfing disturbs nesting birds and is not allowed within the Santa Rosa Unit from March 31 through August 31—within 200 meters (approximately 650 feet) of shore—except that it is permitted year-round on the gulf side of Opal Beach from Cluster A to Cluster E. However, kite surfers must also avoid the flagged swim beach when lifeguards are on duty.

Changing Weather and Surf

Watch the weather. Storms can quickly form over water. During lightning storms stay out of the water and seek shelter; rough surf and rip currents are dangerous. Observe beach safety flags. The sun is very intense. Stay out of the direct sun from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Use sun block and drink plenty of water.



Protect the Park and Yourself

- **Sandy road shoulders are soft. Park in designated parking lots.**
- **Protect your valuables in a safe place.**
- **Metal detectors are not allowed.**
- **Use the boardwalk crossovers to access the beach.**
- **Observe the beach safety flags.**
- **Observe the speed limit and enjoy the view.**

Protect Wildlife and Save the Dunes

A healthy dune system is vital to the survival of wildlife including the Santa Rosa Beach Mouse. The sand fencing allows the dunes to grow and boardwalk crossovers protect the plants that hold the island together. Each year from March through August, shorebirds nest on our barrier islands. Snowy plovers start in March, while least terns do not arrive in our area from Central and South America until mid-April. While snowy plovers are solitary nesters, least terns nest in colonies. Black skimmers also nest in the tern colonies. These birds need to remain on their eggs as much as possible, to shade them from the hot summer sun. Least terns defend their nesting territory and often dive bomb any intruder. So, if an area is posted as closed to the public for nesting shorebirds, please stay away from the area. There are many other areas open for your enjoyment

For more information visit the park's website at
www.nps.gov/guis

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