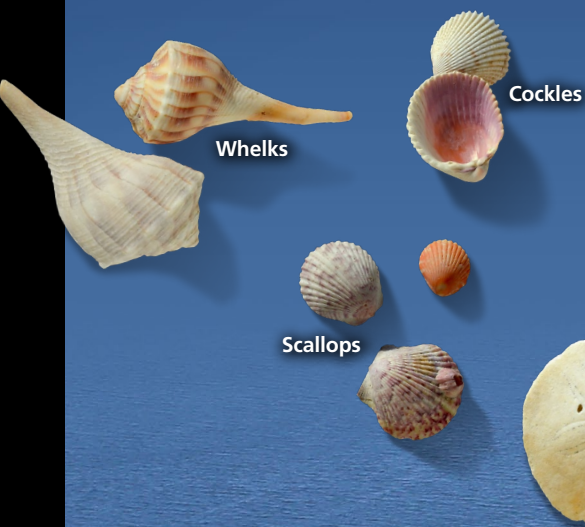


Along This Dynamic Seascape,



Sand dollar
SHELLS, SAND DOLLAR—NPS

Using boardwalks preserves vegetation that protects the dunes.

a chain of island strongholds guards against threats from the Gulf of America. 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.

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, salt water mixes with fresh water.

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 salt water from the Gulf and fresh water from the mainland 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 park and is a key factor in where these species live.



Bottlenose dolphin
© NICK SIDLE / HEARTSTONE

Sea oats

Yaupon holly

American oystercatcher
© BOB MENAK

Seagrass

Black needlerush

Saw palmetto

Slash pine

Live oak

Loggerhead sea turtle hatchling
© STEPHANIE PLUSCHT

Snowy plover
© MICHAEL WOLF

Perdido Key beach mouse
USFWS

Ghost crab
© PAUL POLLOS

Osprey adult with juveniles
© MARTIN PASSCHER

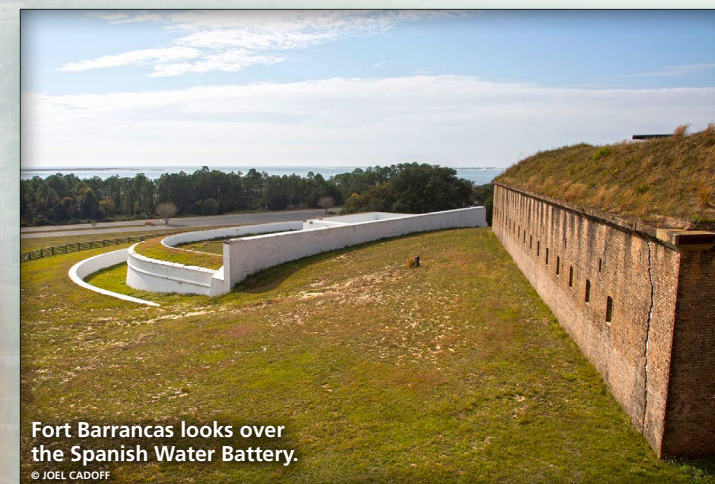
Great blue heron
© PAT LUBAS

Diamondback terrapin
© PAT LUBAS

Alligator
© ROSMARIE ALENUS

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.

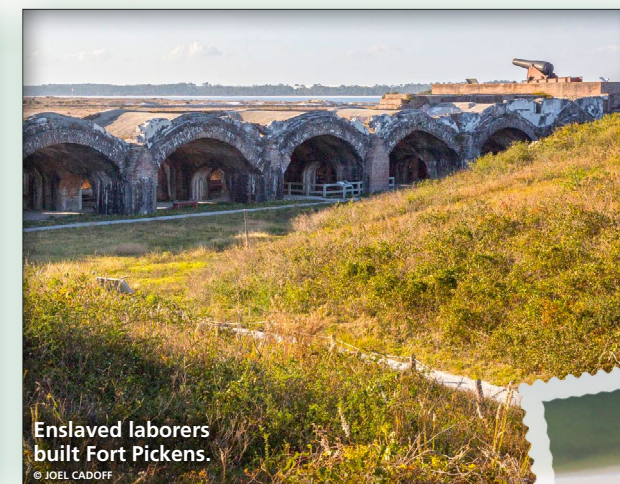


Fort Barrancas looks over the Spanish Water Battery.
© JOEL CADOFF

Fort Barrancas

PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

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



Enslaved laborers built Fort Pickens.
© JOEL CADOFF

Fort Pickens

SANTA 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
PENSACOLA / WIKI

Fort Massachusetts

SHIP ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI

On Ship Island, Confederates exchanged fire with the USS *Massachusetts*. After reclaiming the island, the US Army established Gulf Squadron Headquarters and completed the fort in 1866.



Battery Worth
© STUART SCHAEFER

Fort Barrancas and Advanced Redoubt
Fort McRee
Fort Pickens
Naval Live Oaks

Defending the Shore

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

