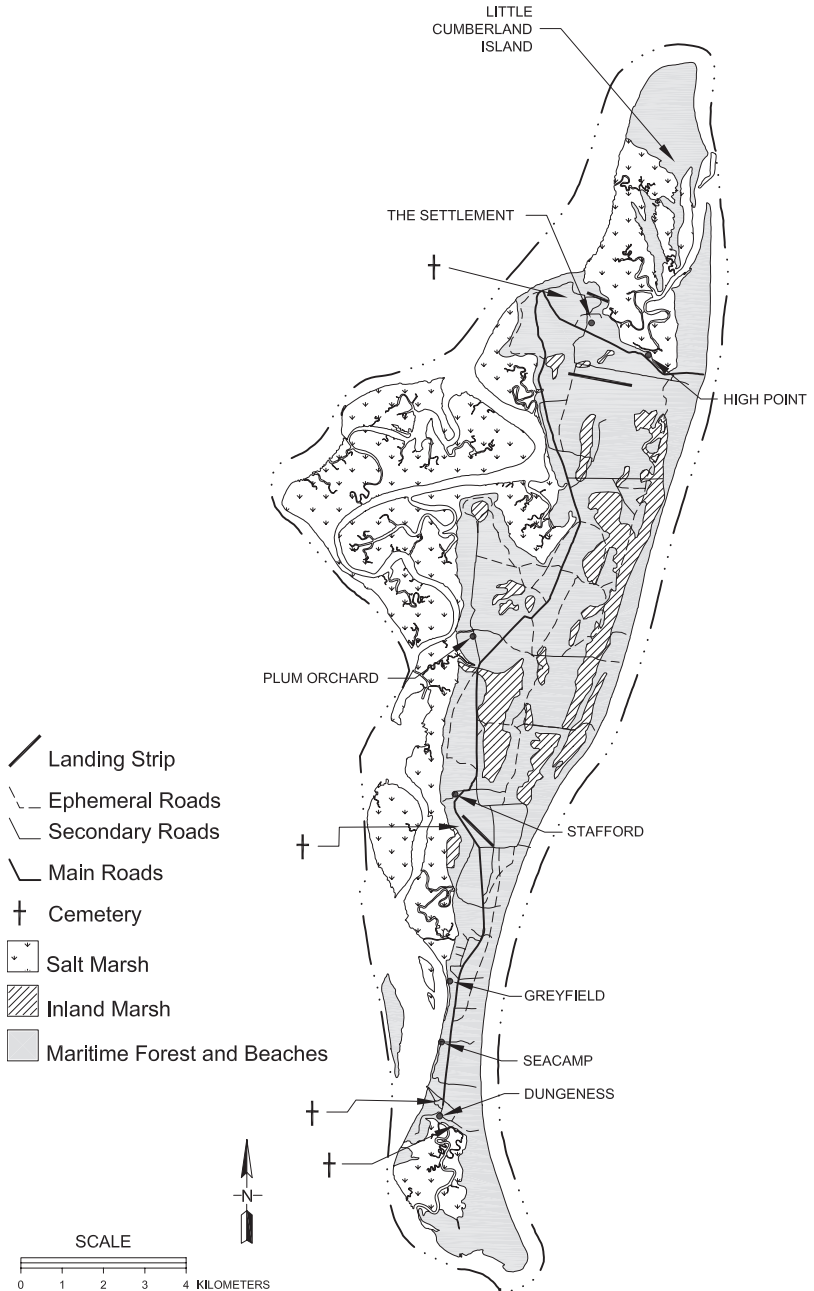


Planning and Operating in the 1970s

In November 1972 National Park Service officials turned from celebrating the establishment of Cumberland Island National Seashore to the reality of managing it. The legislative history of the new unit stressed its importance in all three of the national park system's *raison d'être*—recreation, cultural resource protection, and natural resource preservation. From the beginning, Park Service planners at Cumberland faced uncertainty and conflict over how to prioritize them. Budget limitations and conflicting laws and policies demanded decisions unpopular among some agency personnel and segments of the public. The presence of a highly vocal and politically powerful group of island residents further complicated management.

In addition to the ongoing program of land acquisition, seashore officials faced a daunting array of tasks. First, they needed to evaluate the natural and cultural resources, which required research on the ecology, archaeology, history, and historical architecture of the island. Assessment of the impact of decades of vacation use by the Carnegie and Candler heirs was also necessary. Decisions had to be made on what to preserve, what to ignore, and what to eliminate (map 5.1).

Extensive planning would also be required. The National Park Service had to locate and acquire a permanent headquarters site on the mainland, develop recreation and interpretation facilities on the island, and devise a transportation plan for the new national seashore. Planners also had to decide upon the levels of visitation and tourism infrastructure. At least four island areas—Dungeness, Stafford, Plum Orchard, and High Point—Half Moon Bluff—required historic resource, landscape, and public use plans. Adaptive use of existing historic structures had to be developed. Even historic interpretation for visitors required more than the usual amount of



Map 5.1. Cumberland Island in 1972

planning. What historic period should be emphasized: that of the Indians, the cotton planters, or the rich man's retreat? In addition, section 9 of the act that established the seashore required the Park Service to report on the suitability of any part of the island for wilderness designation.¹ Given the agency's responsibility for tourism development on a designated recreation area, as well as its traditional reluctance to pursue such restrictive management zoning, this would be a particularly controversial task.

Finally, while Park Service officials grappled with these fundamental, long-term issues, they had to open the seashore to visitors and manage the day-to-day operations. These duties required a staff and a regular budget plus special funds for planning, development, and resource management. The agency had to locate and open a temporary mainland visitor contact station, develop interim transportation to and on the island, provide a few minimal facilities on Cumberland for visitor use, and interpret the natural and cultural features in a very short time. These immediate needs inevitably led to another question. What privileges and limits did federal law and the retained-rights contracts impose on the island's residents, both contract holders and fee simple owners? Long-term planning was expected to settle most management issues, but satisfying a public anxious to visit its new recreation reserve and protecting the resources demanded immediate decisions.

During the 1970s the National Park Service tackled all of these issues and programs with varying degrees of success. Seashore officials met shocking legal setbacks, extensive disagreement with other government agencies, and criticism from every quarter of the public. By 1980 the Park Service realized that it was in the middle of a management quagmire.

What Did the National Park Service Receive?

The National Park Service presence on Cumberland Island and the nearby mainland was initially minimal. For the first year Superintendent Walter Bruce of Fort Frederica National Monument conducted the affairs of the new unit. Other than land acquisition, which was being handled by officials from Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Park Service activities consisted of periodic visits to the island and information-gathering studies. Personnel from the Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta undertook many of these initial inspections, while the agency's Technical Information Center in Denver, Colorado, or specialists outside the agency conducted the more in-depth studies. No budget for Cumberland Island existed in fiscal year 1973, so the

regional office diverted \$94,700 for operations from other parks. By April 1973 the Park Service had two employees, two boats, and two jeeps on the island. Because the latter were in a constant state of disrepair, much of the inspection work on the island had to be done in vehicles borrowed from the state of Georgia.²

Almost immediately an issue arose that presaged future management problems. The nine decades of Carnegie presence on the island had deposited a substantial amount of trash in dumps near the various estates. Added to this were waste materials left by Charles Fraser and those residents constructing new homes or altering old ones on their estates. Numerous old automobiles in varying states of decomposition lay scattered around the island. The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* described one waste pile east of Dungeness as a “rancid open garbage dump.” Another observer said it was “900 feet square.” Carnegie in-law and sometime island resident Landon Butler told the newspaper, “When we wanted the Park Service to take over the island we thought they would take care of things like this” (fig. 5.1).³

National Park Service officials responded that their hands were tied. Jim Bainbridge, associate regional director for operations, told the *Atlanta Journal* that because Congress had not authorized funds for the new seashore, it was illegal for them to carry out any activity on the island. He added, “The residents are responsible for putting the garbage there and now they are the ones complaining about it.” The islanders wanted the Park Service to bury the trash with a rented bulldozer, but Thompson responded that the agency could not do that because “we might find that burying it is going to pollute an underground water system.”⁴ Eventually, after an Environmental Protection Agency inspection, the Park Service removed most of the waste material. Members of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) accomplished much of the work during summer 1974. Nevertheless, simple cleanup work continued for nearly a decade on the island.

The removal of old cars was complicated by questions of ownership. As late as 1983 the agency was still looking up ownership of identifiable vehicles and notifying the last known titleholder either to remove it or sign a release giving the Park Service the power to do so.⁵ Relations with the residents soon became inflamed over the disposition of some automobiles. When Bert Roberts was named superintendent of the seashore in November 1974, a number of older cars in very good exterior condition were stored in the Dungeness carriage house, which the Park Service planned to convert to a maintenance facility. Roberts ordered rangers to tow the cars outside and



Fig. 5.1. The wrecked remnants of automobiles littered the island in 1972 when the Park Service took over.

place them in a row along a nearby trail. This relocation added fuel to the residents' suspicion that the Park Service had no desire to preserve historic resources. In the 1980s the cars still formed an attractive curiosity for passing visitors, but currently they are rapidly becoming an oxidized soil layer.⁶

Three things were notable about the incidents with the trash and abandoned automobiles, and they set the tone for the incessant management conflict in later years. First, the Park Service faced the fact that it owned an island heavily changed by centuries of human use. The agency's desire to make it resemble an ideal national park would become controversial and burdensome.

Second, the retained-estate holders expected to be comanagers of the island. They had very well established ideas of how the natural and historical resources should be handled. These ideas would repeatedly clash with standard Park Service policy and the personalities of some agency officials.



Fig. 5.2. The dock at Dungeness was unusable in 1972.

Finally, the National Park Service was seriously underfunded for the tasks at hand. The difficulty of accomplishing the relatively simple chores of trash and abandoned automobile removal took years to solve. Monitoring the resources of Cumberland Island National Seashore, maintaining them, especially the more than 100 structures on the island, and interpreting them for visitors would prove enormously expensive. At no time did the national seashore have anywhere near the money necessary to do all these tasks well. As resources conspicuously decayed, many island residents, visitors, and the local public refused to accept that explanation (fig. 5.2).

Early Operations

The national seashore opened its first mainland office on land provided by the Brunswick Pulp and Paper Company near Shellbine Creek. As the date for opening of the seashore to the public approached, however, the Park Service decided that it needed a site more accessible to deep water and handy for visitors. In addition, the Brunswick Company lost interest in donating land to the government. With a final decision on a mainland site

mired in the planning process, the Park Service elected to move to St. Marys on a temporary basis. Initially it intended to occupy a trailer in front of the riverfront MacDonnell Building until office space in the Century Theater Building across the road (now a submarine museum) became available. However, in May 1975 seashore officials moved into the MacDonnell Building on a month-by-month rental basis.⁷

Public pressure on the National Park Service to open the seashore for visitation began in November 1974. Although park rangers had received periodic questions about public access, the national seashore's second birthday ignited criticism that the Park Service had "locked up" the island. In response, the agency began planning to open to visitors during the summer of 1975. Public hearings and meetings with Camden County officials and businesses followed. Director Gary Everhardt and other senior Park Service officials visited to demonstrate the agency's commitment. The national seashore chartered a boat to conduct two round-trips per day from St. Marys to the dock at Sea Camp. The seashore opened on June 5 with plans to run through the end of August. Because the boat was small, reservations were required.⁸

On the island the Park Service, believing that a walk from Sea Camp to Dungeness and back again was too strenuous for some visitors, decided to provide transportation. Initially it used three trams to convey visitors (fig. 5.3). Later the General Services Administration provided a forty-passenger bus. The bus turned out to be one of those ideas that look good on paper but do not work well on the ground. On its maiden trip down the Main Road, it struck a low-hanging oak branch and ripped off part of the roof. This left only the trams, which repeatedly bogged down in the sand. Subsequently the Park Service abandoned the transportation system when seashore maintenance crews repaired the dock at Dungeness and the passenger boat was able to moor at both docks on the island (fig. 5.4).⁹

During the first three months, the island received 3,482 visitors, prompting the Park Service to continue boat runs through the off-season on fewer days of the week. The following full year saw 17,480 visitors. More than 3,400 stayed overnight on the island, primarily at Charles Fraser's old campground near Sea Camp. By 1978 visitation topped 37,000 and included nearly 13,000 overnight campers and backpackers. Most visitors to Cumberland walked to and through the Dungeness complex, paying special attention to the ruined mansion. They then returned by foot or tram to Sea Camp, often by way of the nearby beach. Nearly all island visitors reported that they greatly enjoyed their time on the island.¹⁰



Fig. 5.3. In the 1970s the Park Service moved visitors between Dungeness and Sea Camp by tram. Once both areas had ferry service this expensive practice was discontinued.



Fig. 5.4. Visitor access is still by two or three passenger ferries each day.

One reason for their enjoyment was the elaborate interpretive program developed by the seashore's rangers. They offered such activities as seining in the ocean to study sea life, sunrise beach walks, evening history talks, "marsh tromps," and education about waves, currents, and the basics of surfing with the use of "boogie boards." Rangers also provided orientation talks on both the mainland and the island. Interpretive signs and a park brochure were available by 1977. The Park Service planned even more programs for the seashore's permanent mainland base once that was in place. In 1979 the Park Service added tours of the Plum Orchard mansion, which proved immensely popular. Unfortunately, the constraints of transportation limited the number of visitors who could enjoy this additional feature.¹¹

Opening the seashore to visitors blunted much of Camden County's criticism of the National Park Service. However, the intense demand to enjoy the island soon raised the issue of access by private boat. Docking facilities on the island were limited, and many were private. Before 1979 Sea Camp and Plum Orchard were two potential landing sites for the public. However, public ferries monopolized the former while the latter was very small. During the first two months that the seashore was open, National Park Service officials turned down several hundred requests to land private boats on the island from "public bodies, corporations, organizations, groups, and individuals."¹²

The private landing issue drew Park Service attention to a potential public relations nightmare. During the seashore's first two years, the Brunswick Pulp and Paper Company had periodically brought guests to the island for tours. Seashore rangers facilitated these visits by providing logistical support and guide services. The policy of allowing these tours developed under Sam Weems during the time when the Park Service expected to have its headquarters and a parkway on Brunswick land. On occasion the company used a boat provided by the Georgia Game and Fish Department to bring vehicles in order to drive around the island. The Park Service anticipated legal problems when public visitation began and planned to issue a special-use permit to the Brunswick group. However, once the requests for landing private boats began pouring in, agency officials quickly changed their minds. Regional Director Thompson informed Brunswick officials that public scrutiny would certainly call this arrangement favoritism, and therefore it must stop. He cited the pressure coming not only from Camden County but also from tour companies in Fernandina. Thompson suggested

that the paper company work out an arrangement with the Greyfield Inn. However, as the Brunswick Company's interest in hosting the seashore headquarters waned, so did its desire for a special-use permit.¹³

Questions about Retained Rights

Island residents began to test the limits of their retained rights as soon as Cumberland Island National Seashore became a reality. Questions of new construction, extension of residents' rights to renters and guests, employment of off-duty national seashore personnel, auto use, airport landing rights, and docking privileges all surfaced during the first seven years. Some were resolved, but most were not. National Park Service officials soon found that the broad agreements negotiated by the National Park Foundation, as well as by the agency itself, left a lot of room for differences of opinion.

For example, most retained-right agreements allowed docking on estate lands or Park Service facilities. One of the first conflicts to arise concerned the dock at Dungeness. Although the Park Service did not use it for passenger embarkation until 1979, it did unload construction materials there. The agency turned down several requests to use the dock by those without specific rights in their retained-right agreements.

Another dock in dispute was at Old House Creek. A man named Ben Jenkins secured a long-term lease from Gertrude Schwartz, trustee of Andrew Carnegie III. His attempt to build a new dock 400 feet from the Park Service's structure resulted in a brief, furious conflict. It was settled when seashore officials allowed him to adapt their dock for his use. At Hawkins Creek on the north end of the island, the Candlers used Brickhill Dock, which actually was on property formerly owned by the Carnegies and Charles Fraser. Decades of tacit permission to use it had engendered a proprietary feeling among the Candlers. When others began using the dock, they complained and succeeded in gaining a special-use permit that excluded other residents. Questions of who had rights to do what and where they could do it also extended to parking privileges, beach-crossing areas, airfields, and private roads.¹⁴

Other retained-rights issues also arose. The Park Service repeatedly turned down one resident's request to hunt and trap all over the island at any time ignoring state game laws. Conflict arose over some construction projects on retained estates and the waste they caused. Residents com-

plained about trespass by both visitors and Lucy Ferguson's cattle. The rights to rent or sublease property had to be clarified repeatedly. Law enforcement jurisdiction on both federal and retained-estate lands remained in limbo until 1982 when Georgia established concurrent authority with the Park Service. Establishing rights of use and residency was a process of the government and the residents feeling out each other. Debate persisted about the letter of the law, the exact wording of the retained-rights agreements, and the spirits of both.¹⁵

Driving on the island was the most serious retained-rights issue to surface during these early years. Although seashore officials did not challenge anyone's right to drive at this time, they attempted to close the South Cut Road that Charles Fraser had bulldozed in 1970. The road lay well within the area the Park Service expected to be designated wilderness. It was not a historic road, and the Park Service did not anticipate a negative reaction to its announcement. However, the Perkins family and Thornton Morris held retained estates adjacent to the western end of the road and used it to access the beach. They even had renamed it "Perkins' Beach Road." Their reaction and the effort they made to retain use of the road demonstrated the residents' fierce determination to protect their right to drive all over the island.¹⁶

In September 1978 Thornton Morris anticipated the problem and began laying the groundwork for retention of his rights and those of the Perkins family. He explained that National Park Foundation representative George Sandberg had assured him "that the Perkins retainees would be able to use the Perkins' Beach Road to get to and from the beach, and that this use right would continue until such time as the National Park Service provided an adequate alternate means of transportation from the reserved area to the beach." He also reminded Park Service regional director Joseph Brown that Coleman Perkins had not wanted to sell his land to the government. He had done so because without his sale the Andrew Mellon Foundation would have refused to provide money for Cumberland land acquisition.¹⁷

The National Park Service rejected Morris's argument after securing an opinion from the regional solicitor. Agency director William Whalen told local congressman Bo Ginn, who inquired after receiving complaints from Morris, that in the hearings for wilderness planning, the public had expressed an intense desire to establish the maximum amount of wilderness and to limit areas of "potential wilderness." The latter would include areas of nonconforming uses like roads. As a result, park planners decided to

limit access from the Main Road to the beach to a single route, the Duck House Road. That area had to remain open anyway because of a specific retained-right agreement. Whalen stated that the Perkins family and Morris were being given “the same right of access to the beach as others.”¹⁸

By April 1980 environmental organizations became involved in the controversy. The Park Service and Congressman Ginn received letters from the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and the Georgia Conservancy urging closure of the road in order to protect wilderness values. Congressman Ginn defended Morris and the Perkins family explaining that while they did not have a specific legal commitment to use South Cut Road, they did have “sound documentation to support a route of ‘convenient access’ to the beach.” This communication to the Wilderness Society followed a summit meeting on the issue at Ginn’s office on April 30. Representatives of nine congressmen and Senators Nunn and Talmadge, as well as Park Service representatives, Thornton Morris, and the Georgia Conservancy, attended. The conservation group saw the writing on the wall as the lawmakers sympathized with Morris.

An agreement was reached whereby the Park Service would seek a “potential wilderness” designation for the road, and Morris and the Perkins group would be issued twenty-year special-use permits. The level of congressional pressure that could be brought to bear by the island residents swept away Park Service resistance. It would not be the last time that the Carnegie and Candler heirs used their powerful contacts to influence seashore policy. On September 22, 1980, Joe Brown sent the special-use permits to Thornton Morris. He stated that nothing in these permits automatically assured their renewal. However, he added that “based on the information now available,” he anticipated that the permit would be renewed.¹⁹

Into the Fray: Long-Term Planning at Cumberland

The National Park Service developed a steady management operation and a popular program for visitors on Cumberland Island during the years 1972 to 1980. However, the agency never intended for many of those practices to become permanent. The Park Service began trying to determine the level of recreation development and resource management even before legislators established the seashore. In addition, Congress awaited a report on the wilderness suitability of the island. Two interconnected planning processes,

one for a “general management plan” and another for a “wilderness recommendation,” became the most consistently controversial actions for the agency in its early years on Cumberland.

During the congressional hearings to establish Cumberland Island National Seashore, the National Park Service promised extensive recreation development for visitors over much of the island. Officials explained that the designation “national seashore” meant a high capacity for recreation and promised up to 10,000 visitors per day for Cumberland. Indeed, the Park Service could not have secured enough local and state backing to pursue establishment of the new seashore park without such a goal. After Cumberland Island National Seashore became a reality, agency planners concluded that they were bound by congressional intent to move ahead with the extensive development.²⁰

What they experienced, however, was a backlash against large-scale development that was sweeping through the park system across the country. The rise of the environmental movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s changed the rules by which park officials could manage their units. The staffs of nearly all of the fourteen national seashores and lakeshores endured a similar cycle of promising extensive tourist development for avowedly recreation-oriented units only to have it thrown back in their faces during the planning process.²¹ These public reactions were facilitated by passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). This critical environmental law orders federal agencies to absolutely minimize the effects of their actions on the natural environment. In addition, NEPA requires the federal government to conduct research on the potential effects of any action and make the results public. Thereafter, citizens and organizations can comment on the plans, and their ideas must be noted in the final decision. At Cumberland Island environmentalists, residents, historic preservationists, and others continually used the NEPA process to reject or modify Park Service plans.²²

The contentious struggle for an overall “general management plan” and a “wilderness recommendation” focused on five primary issues. The first concerned the location of a headquarters, visitor center, and ferry embarkation point on the mainland. A second issue was the amount of tourism infrastructure to be developed on the island. Third, the maximum number of visitors allowed onto Cumberland also had to be determined. A fourth question concerned what form of transportation should be furnished to visitors on the island, if any. Finally, the amount of acreage of the

young national seashore, if any, that should be placed under the protective but highly restrictive designation of wilderness had to be decided. Each of these issues spawned controversy.

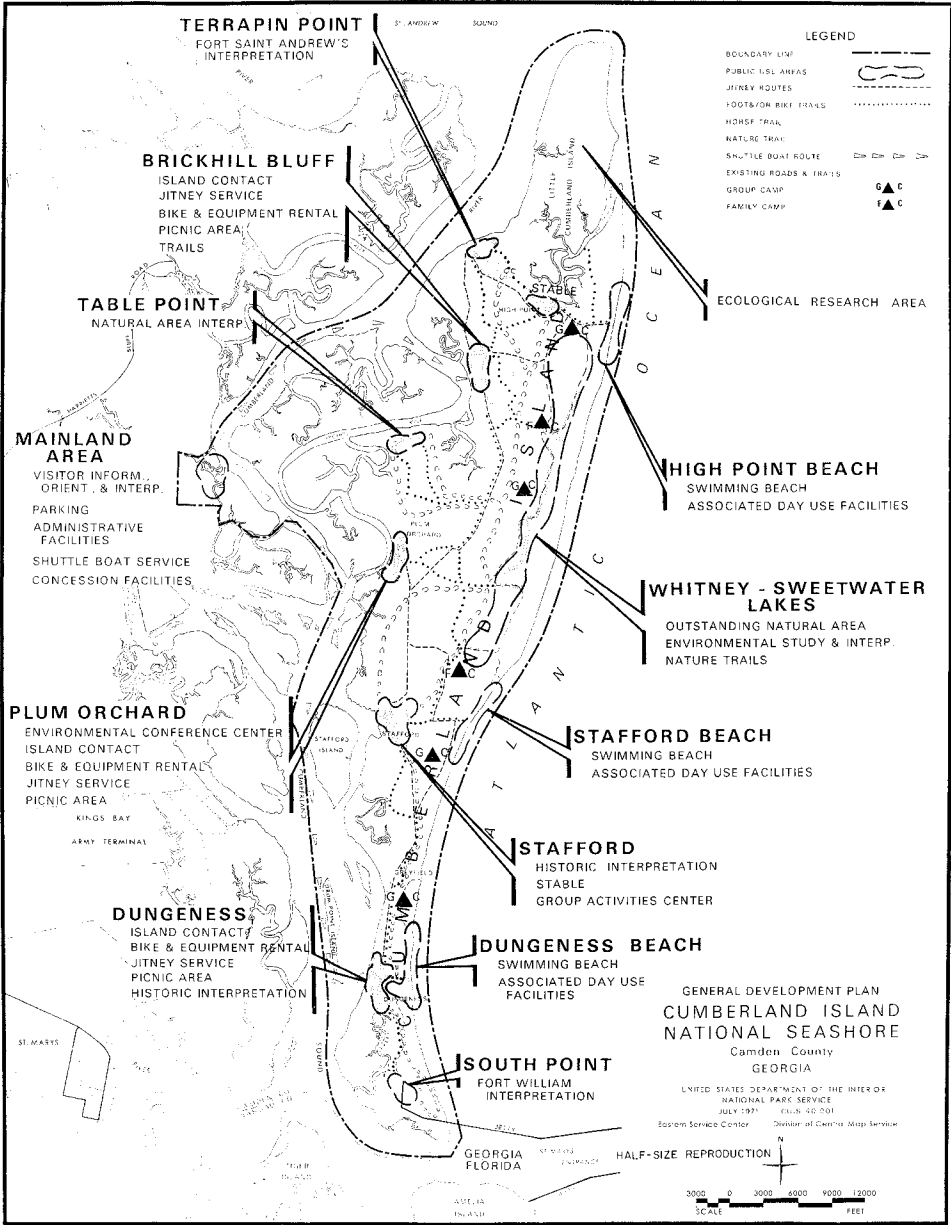
Devising a General Management Plan

In 1971 the Park Service released a master plan that outlined its ideas for recreation on Cumberland (map 5.2). The mainland base would be near Cabin Bluff and connected by a new road to Harrietts Bluff Road or directly to Interstate 95. Roughly 300 acres in size, it would accommodate 1,500 cars, employee housing, and maintenance facilities. The plan envisioned private hotels nearby where more parking would be available. A fleet of twelve 100-passenger ferries would connect to the island at Brickhill Bluff (Brickkiln), Plum Orchard, and Dungeness. Each of these sites would have interpretive facilities, a jitney terminal for island transportation, and concession facilities to rent bicycles and camping equipment. The jitney service would run the length of the island, connecting the three docks as well as three beach areas, six campgrounds capable of accommodating a total of 400 overnight visitors, and high-interest areas like Half Moon Bluff, High Point, Terrapin Point (near the old Cumberland Wharf), and Stafford. The concessions would sell picnic supplies also.²³

For the visitors the Park Service planned stables for eighty horses and many miles of new trails across the island to be divided into horse, bike, and hiker categories. Interpretive facilities would be located at all recreation and concession sites and adjacent to historic or archaeological resources. The British forts and the Spanish mission would also receive interpretation should they ever be found. Three areas of intense beach use would accommodate 7,000 sunbathers and swimmers at one time. Each would have bathhouses, shelters, comfort stations, and concessions to sell beach equipment and “light refreshments.”

Seashore officials planned to turn the Plum Orchard and Stafford mansions into environmental conference and study centers operated by a concessioner. They also suggested that the Recreation House at Dungeness could be used as an interpretive center “if restoration proves feasible.” The planners offered no specific upper limit of visitors, but the level of development and the capacity of the intensive-use beach zones suggested that 10,000 visitors per day could be easily accommodated.²⁴

A year later, as Congress considered the Cumberland bill, the Park Ser-



Map 5.2. The Park Service's 1971 master plan for the proposed Cumberland Island National Seashore. (National Park Service, Oct. 1971, *Master Plan, Proposed Cumberland Island National Seashore*, CINS Library)

vice released a draft environmental statement on the proposed plan.²⁵ The environmental statement supported the development concepts of the master plan. Seashore planners projected that the majority of the negative environmental effects would occur at the mainland headquarters site. They called island impacts such as dredging near docks, changes to the undisturbed character of parts of the beach, and control of noxious insects insignificant. The master plan and the environmental statement helped convince Camden County and the state of Georgia to back the national seashore legislation.

Any reservations about the propriety of these development levels seemed to be answered by a series of in-depth studies conducted by the highly respected Conservation Foundation, an environmental study and promotion group based in Washington, D.C. In 1972 the foundation published a document entitled *National Parks for the Future*.²⁶ The organization's researchers made numerous recommendations for future national park management. Among them were suggestions that the Park Service should involve citizens in the planning process, a procedure already mandated by NEPA, base its planning on natural resource impacts, also ordered by NEPA, conduct carrying-capacity studies to determine the appropriate number of visitors, and manage resources according to established guidelines.

In the case of the latter recommendation, a 1970 law, often called the General Authorities Act, already provided the foundation.²⁷ The statute discontinued the Park Service's practices of categorizing units as predominantly historical, natural, or recreational and managing resources in accordingly hierarchical levels of importance. The law ordered that the agency manage the entire park system as one complex unit and afford all resources equal protection.²⁸

The Conservation Foundation study had many specific recommendations, some of them fairly theoretical. Subsequently the organization acquired a grant to study these proposals on the ground and selected Cumberland Island as its test case because it was a new unit. Foundation staff members and Hans Neuhauser, a leader of the Georgia Conservancy, took charge of the project to study and plan for Cumberland's management program. Four teams studied natural resource management, the mainland embarkation options, priorities for interpretation, and the visitor carrying capacity of the island.²⁹

Albert Ike and James Richardson of the University of Georgia Institute of Community and Area Development conducted the carrying-capacity

study. In a 1974 draft they gave figures based on recreation and ecology literature for each of the development areas of the Park Service's master plan. They estimated the total capacity of the island at nearly 16,000 visitors per day.³⁰ Eighteen months later Ike and Richardson released a revised report that dropped the maximum carrying capacity to just under 14,400 visitors.³¹ The Park Service argued that these figures, coming from a reputable conservation organization, supported its master plan.

However, the foundation's authors offered a number of conceptual and concrete recommendations that urged caution in developing infrastructure and setting visitor limits. First, they emphasized the need to determine the psychological carrying capacity of each area. The figures given in their report were based purely on ecological tolerance. Further studies would be needed to determine whether visitor enjoyment would be compromised at these visitation levels. Second, they suggested that the Park Service should start with small areas devoted to activities like swimming, horseback riding, and camping in order to measure their actual carrying capacities. Thereafter, it might expand the development areas or activities to the plan's proposed levels as test results warranted. Ike and Richardson also recommended that the Park Service make visitor education the top priority. They prioritized the acceptability of various outdoor activities, rating nature walks, beachcombing, and hiking highest and swimming and cycling somewhat lower. At the bottom of the list were fishing, hunting, horseback riding, and marine boating. This ranking took into account both the psychological and environmental impacts as well as the availability of those activities on the mainland.³²

Finally, the report made specific development recommendations. The authors proposed two rather than three intensive-use beach areas. They suggested dropping the High Point area because of its importance as a turtle-nesting site. Ike and Richardson also recommended substantial research on soil and biotic tolerance before any development took place. They proposed no more than twenty sixty-passenger jitneys and forty horses for guided tours. They endorsed camping for up to 1,300 persons in fifteen areas but insisted that these visitors should bring their own equipment with them rather than rent it from a concession on the island. Of greatest importance, they recommended that the Park Service plan for 10,000 visitors per day rather than 14,400 to allow flexibility. The general tone of the report urged slow and cautious incremental development in order to test both carrying capacities and visitor demand.³³

With the apparent sanction of this respected conservation organization, the National Park Service forged ahead with plans similar to those suggested in the 1971 master plan. However, the levels of visitation and development envisioned by the agency drew immediate criticism. Five months before the final seashore legislation passed, one advocate wrote: “The NPS still has a lot of people on its staff who are imbued with the idea that ‘parks are for people’ and to hell with the basic beauties and wonders that attract people in the first place. Some of them seem to forget that if the resource is degraded, the experience of the visit is degraded.”³⁴

A noisy portion of the criticism leveled at the Park Service came from Lucy Ferguson and her guests at the Greyfield Inn. Consumed by fears that the government would condemn her land, she railed against the Park Service and virtually any action it took. After Congress established the seashore, she even hired former attorney general William Ruckelshaus to manage a political campaign to redesignate the island as a national wildlife refuge or as a national park with a strict emphasis on natural resource protection.

Son-in-law Putnam McDowell repeatedly sought to tone down her virulent antagonism and save her from what he saw as a pointless and expensive campaign. In May 1974 he wrote to her: “The biggest thing you are up against is that the legislation passed by the Congress, under which about 80% of the Island was acquired, calls for a National Seashore Recreational Area and nothing else. This classification has a certain meaning under the law and it is hard to see how the Park Service can move very far away from the recreational precedent set in the case of Hatteras and Cape Cod.”³⁵ Later, McDowell confessed to Thornton Morris: “If I recommend to her that she stop now—which is what I think she probably should do—I think she is going to have some fun with the idea that she’s a real fighter, but I’m a quitter, and wouldn’t support her. I usually face things like this head on; but I’m inclined in this case to let Mr. Ruckelshaus and Mrs. Ferguson drift hand-in-hand into the sunset until money separates them.”³⁶

McDowell sensed that many factors would contribute to a Park Service decision to back away from its most extreme plans. He believed that Ruckelshaus’s influence was very limited and that other members of the Carnegie heirs were unwilling to contribute funds for this battle. Eventually, Lucy Ferguson shifted her campaign to encouraging the establishment of a designated wilderness over as much of the island as possible. In this she found broader support from other island residents. In her campaign against the

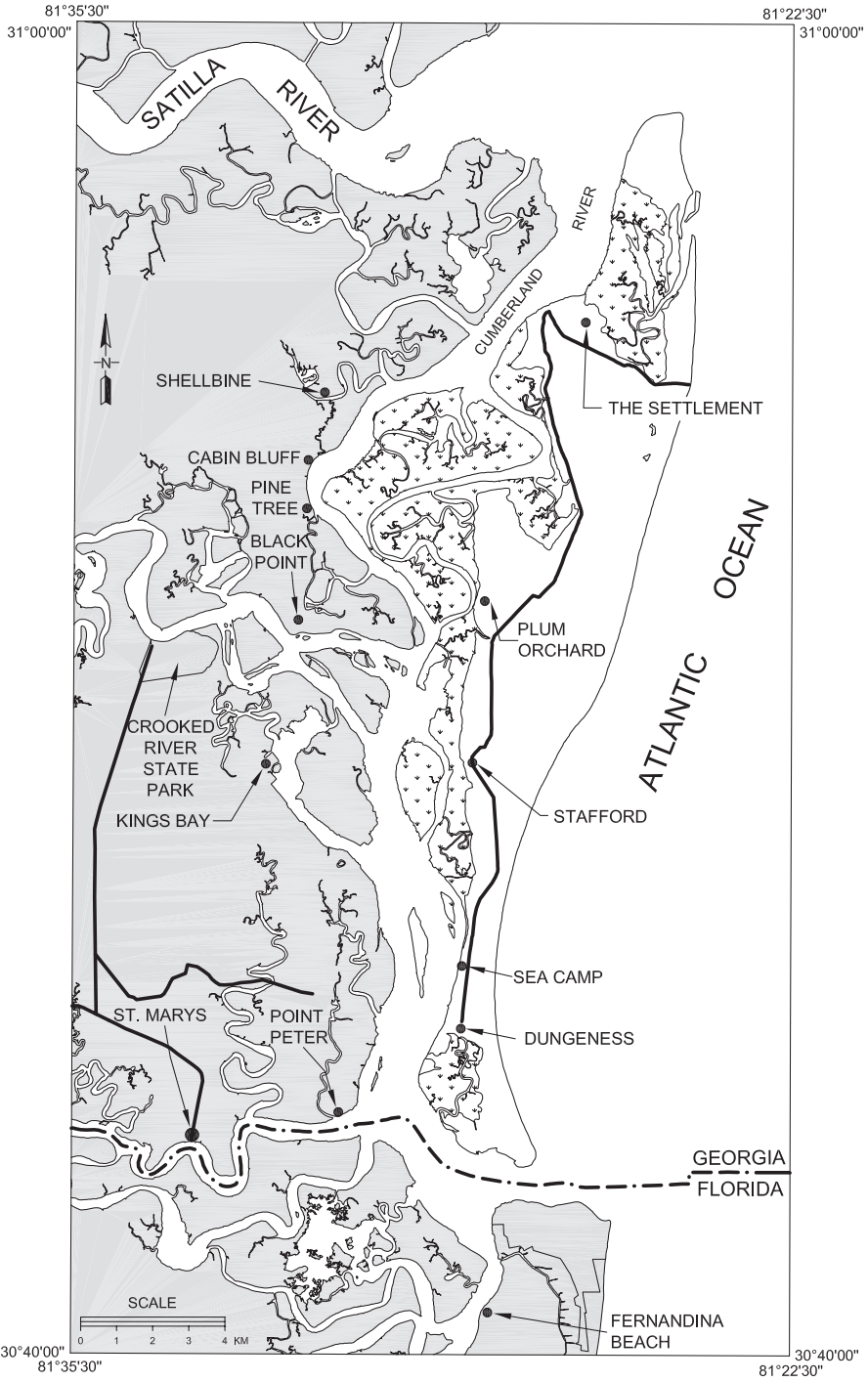
Park Service, Ferguson lost no opportunity to enlist her guests' support. The Park Service and the secretary of the interior received a number of complaints about agency plans to remove feral hogs, transport visitors to the north end of the island, develop beach recreation, and receive 10,000 visitors per day. In some cases considerable disinformation came from Greyfield, which the Park Service had difficulty correcting.³⁷

Lucy Ferguson's antagonism was but a small part of the public unhappiness with National Park Service plans for Cumberland Island. Under the glare of public attention, the park planners began to reduce the level of planned visitor development for the island. While they did not abandon the idea of 10,000 visitors as a maximum, they stressed that this was not a goal for every day but a limit for a few days of the year. Furthermore, they suggested that this figure represented the visitation to the entire seashore unit. Perhaps half of those visitors would only stop at the mainland center and not take the time-consuming trip to the island. Finally, they assured congressmen and the public that any visitor development would take place slowly with constant monitoring to detect any adverse environmental effects.³⁸

Environmental organizations responded angrily to the Park Service's apparent intransigence and brought unexpected pressure to bear. Lucy Smethurst of the Georgia Conservancy persuaded her cousin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior E. U. Curtis Bohlen, to visit the island, listen to Conservancy representative Hans Neuhauser, and then order the Park Service to carry out additional visitor carrying capacity and ecological studies before developing the island.³⁹

In February 1975 the Park Service held a hearing in Woodbine, the seat of Camden County, to receive input from the public on its proposals. Approximately 200 people attended, primarily members of various environmental organizations. The Park Service presented an array of options for each element of a general management plan. For example, ten different locations for a mainland visitor center were offered, including four on Brunswick Paper Company land, two at the Kings Bay Army Terminal, one at Crooked River State Park, one at St. Marys, one at Point Peter just east of that town, and one at Fernandina Beach, Florida (map 5.3). Seashore planners also presented a wide variety of options on the island for camping, beach use, embarkation points, historic interpretation programs, and visitor limits. In addition, the Park Service offered several different proposals for wilderness areas totaling from none to 29,300 acres.

The *Atlanta Journal* reported that the most hotly debated issue was the



Map 5.3. Mainland embarkation points considered by the National Park System

number of visitors to be allowed on the island each day. Superintendent Bert Roberts suggested that a realistic figure might be 5,000 to 6,000 per day, but most speakers demanded still lower limits. The only exception was a representative of Charles Fraser's Sea Pines Company who insisted that its contract with the National Park Foundation required the Park Service to develop extensive recreation facilities and high visitation levels. Possibly Fraser still envisioned a role as island concessioner.⁴⁰

A second contentious issue was the amount of land to be nominated for wilderness status. Congress initially passed the Wilderness Act of 1964 in response to the U.S. Forest Service's single-minded pursuit of logging and other consumptive uses at the expense of recreation and environmental preservation. However, the law ordered all federal land agencies to review every roadless area of 5,000 acres or more for suitability as a "wilderness area." Within such a preserve automobiles and other mechanical devices, buildings, and nearly all other modifications of the natural environment are prohibited. Later judicial interpretations and congressional additions have strengthened wilderness status to exclude bicycles and even baby carriages. At least initially, the National Park Service opposed the legislation on the grounds that it would constrain its dual mandate to protect park resources but also to provide for their use by the public.

Designation of each new wilderness area requires an act of Congress. At both this hearing and a follow-up one in East Point, Georgia, the participants predictably sought the maximum amount of wilderness designation. Mildred Frazier of the Georgia Coastal Audubon Society proposed that the entire island be classified as wilderness.⁴¹

After the hearings Park Service planners returned to the job of designing draft versions of the general management plan and wilderness recommendation. The vast difference between the original plans and what the public at the hearings demanded demonstrated the gap between the Park Service's concept of its mandate and the opinions of environmentalists and island residents. Somehow, the Park Service had to forget promises made during the legislative battle and its own experience in developing mass seashore recreation. In early September 1975 Assistant Secretary Bohlen informed Congress that the Park Service would not have a wilderness recommendation ready by the October 23 deadline.⁴²

As the Park Service planners toiled, another element of the original master plan changed. Brunswick Pulp and Paper's decision to rescind its land donation to the seashore eliminated four of the potential visitor center sites.

At the same time, a resurgence in activity by the U.S. Army at Kings Bay removed two more possibilities.⁴³ Finally, the feasibility of embarking from Fernandina Beach, Florida, evaporated. Bert Roberts gave the resort town hope that it could become a secondary embarkation point during a visit in February 1975. However, the Conservation Foundation team studying the issue of mainland access included an official from Camden County. He convinced the rest of the team to recommend that all island access originate within the county in order to compensate it for lost tax revenue on Cumberland.

Over the ensuing decades Fernandina Beach promoters periodically mounted campaigns to secure a second embarkation point with applications to the Park Service and letters to their congressional delegation. Typically, this occurred when a new superintendent arrived at the seashore. In some ways Fernandina Beach does offer better facilities, but the Park Service has continued to honor its commitment to Camden County.⁴⁴

A New Plan Fails

In October 1976 the Park Service released an “environmental review for the general management plan and wilderness recommendation.” In every area the new plan sharply contrasted with the 1971 master plan. The only options left for the mainland base were St. Marys and Point Peter. Seashore planners recommended that the headquarters stay in St. Marys, but the visitor center and primary ferry terminal be at Point Peter. A single owner held the historic peninsula, and the agency saw no reason to doubt that it could obtain the land.

Park Service planners had drastically reduced the level of development on the island. The plan called for two day-use beaches at Sea Camp and at Nightingale Avenue northeast of Dungeness. Instead of up to 7,000 persons total, each would accommodate only 200. It also proposed five wilderness campgrounds with a total limit of 80 campers and three improved ones south of the wilderness with a combined maximum of 180. Concession services were reduced to some vending machines in the developed areas. No horseback riding or bicycling concessions were mentioned.⁴⁵

The greatest change came in the daily visitation limit. The Park Service included a breakdown of its reduced recreation facilities at maximum use. A total of 1,060 persons could be accommodated on the island at one time. Assuming a 50 percent turnover for the day-use activities, the planners

added another 400 for a daily total of 1,460. This was a far cry from 10,000 to 16,000 per day. The jitney service remained in the plan to operate primarily between Stafford and Dungeness. Occasional jitney tours to Plum Orchard and the north end of the island would be scheduled on a reservations-only basis. Seashore planners had decided to continue the jitney service based on its success at Yosemite National Park, where the agency used it to eliminate automobiles from part of Yosemite Valley.⁴⁶

The Park Service recommended wilderness designation for slightly over 20,000 acres north of Stafford (map 5.4). Planners excluded the Main Road, which they labeled a "historic trace," the High Point and Half Moon Bluff complexes, and the retained estates. In addition to the upland acreage, the wilderness would include the marshes adjacent to both Cumberland and Little Cumberland. In July 1977 the Park Service issued two more documents for public review, a draft general management plan—wilderness study and a draft environmental statement. These documents reiterated the visitor development plans of the 1976 review and clarified the nature of the proposed wilderness. The exclusions divided the wilderness into three separate sections amounting to a total of 8,851 acres for immediate designation and another 11,794 acres to be established as potential wilderness. The latter would automatically become wilderness when conflicting uses stopped.⁴⁷

In September 1977 the Park Service confidently presented its wilderness plan at hearings in St. Marys and Atlanta.⁴⁸ Once again the reaction of the audiences shocked veteran agency officials. For the second time park planners heard themselves characterized as an irresponsible agency rushing heedlessly toward destruction of the island. Hans Neuhauser set the tone of public response:

The Park Service's wilderness plan indicates that the area north of this line [at Stafford] would be wilderness, except for the road to Plum Orchard; except for the road to Terrapin Point; except for the road to High Point; except for the road to the beach at the north end; except for the reserved estates; except for the north end of Cumberland from Terrapin Point to High Point; except for the powerline corridors from the mainland to Cumberland; except for the powerline corridors from Cumberland to Little Cumberland; except for major tidal creeks; except for Christmas Creek; except for jeep or motorcycle patrols on the beach; except for pig hunts; except for turtle management; except for septic systems; except for drainfields and land use around them; except for reserved rights of access; and except for the submerged lands.












There appears to be more exclusions of wilderness than there are inclu-

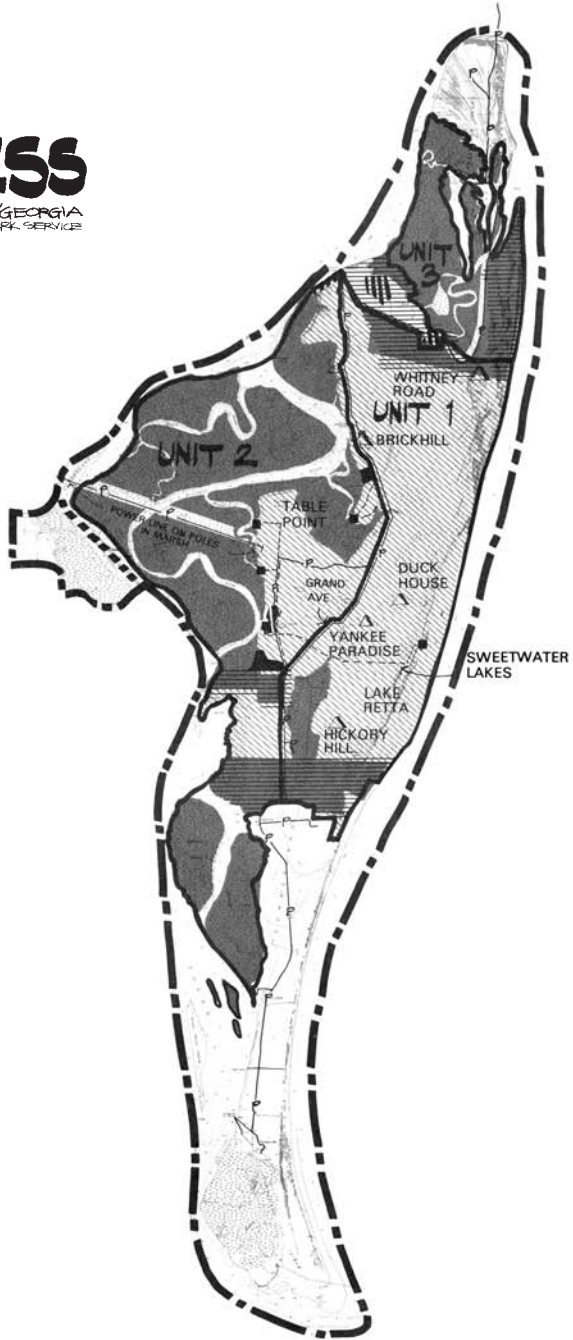
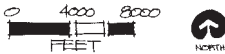
WILDERNESS

CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE/GEORGIA
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ACREAGES:	
PARK	36,878.17
FEDERAL	15,631.82
NON-FEDERAL	21,246.35

UNIT	WILDERNESS	POTENTIAL WILDERNESS ADDITIONS
1	6,259.85	1,309.46
2	2,591.53	7,858.70
3		2,614.90
TOTAL	8,851.38	11,784.06

-  PROPOSED BOUNDARY
-  EXISTING BOUNDARY
-  PRIVATE LAND CONSIDERED IN WILDERNESS UNITS
-  RESERVED ESTATE
-  RESERVED ESTATE ACCESS ROAD
-  POWER LINE BELOW GROUND
-  WILDERNESS AREA
-  POTENTIAL WILDERNESS
-  HISTORIC AREA
-  CAMPING
-  MARSH



Map 5.4. An early National Park Service proposal for three discrete wilderness areas on Cumberland Island. (National Park Service, June 1977, *Draft Environmental Statement, General Management Plan, [and] Wilderness Study*, Denver Service Center Map 640/20030B)

sions. In fact, the Park Service's wilderness plan consists of just the scraps left over from their development plan. Whatever the Park Service feels that it cannot conveniently develop is relegated to wilderness.⁴⁹

Every environmentalist challenged the idea of running jitney tours to the north end. John Crawford of Wilderness Southeast used an analogy: "If you can drive to the top, why climb the mountain? Why climb the mountain if people are driving to the top?" Carol Ruckdeschel added:

In the environmental impact statement it says, more or less, that the via-jitney visitors, even though not physically capable of a true wilderness experience, will be able to get a taste of wilderness by being driven to the edge of it. That's more or less a quote. In other words, a taste of wilderness when you get off the boat and get on the wheels and look at it from your seat, I assume, and that's a taste of wilderness.

I think that right there we ought to stop and analyze this planning of wilderness, because it doesn't seem to reflect an understanding of wilderness, of what it's all about.⁵⁰

Some environmentalists challenged other aspects of the plan. Several rejected the agency's proposal to develop campgrounds near the island's lakes. Another opposed hunting on the island. Still another pointed out that one of the three units of wilderness proposed by the Park Service did not meet the 5,000-acre minimum required by the Wilderness Act.⁵¹

Presumably the National Park Service expected some antagonism to the plan from environmentalists. However, the opposition included Georgia mainlanders as well as island residents. In addition to Carol Ruckdeschel, four other retained-rights holders spoke at one of the two hearings. All but Mary Miller favored including the roads in the wilderness. Thornton Morris, representing himself, Lucy Ferguson, and other residents, explained that the requirement to propose wilderness was an addition made by a Congress that did not trust the National Park Service to protect the island environment. He challenged the agency to "finalize the commitments which have been made to me and the family members [Carnegies] and owners of Cumberland Island by the national park officials for the last ten years regarding Cumberland Island, and to keep it as it is today, protected under the wilderness act, so that our grandchildren and their grandchildren can enjoy the same experience that I do."⁵²

A few comments did not follow the general trend. A representative of the Peachtree Sportsmen's Club ridiculed the idea that Cumberland Island was

a true wilderness and threatened to sue the Park Service if it did not open the island to hunting as the establishing legislation mandated. Several Camden County people agreed.

Alternatively, William Voigt Jr., former executive director of the Izaak Walton League, explained the history of the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975, and other legislation in order to support the Park Service position. He bemoaned the existence of retained rights but agreed that those commitments should be honored. He concluded by urging the Park Service to do everything in its power to manage the proposed wilderness for ecological preservation and to add the excluded areas as soon as their retained uses expired.⁵³

The Park Service also received a number of public responses to the 1977 plans through the mail. The review by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was one of the most extensive and important. The DNR agreed with most of the other oral and written respondents in opposing federal proposals to run a jitney to the north end of the island and to exclude a 490-acre tract along the entire northern coast. The National Park Service had proposed the exclusion to “provide a setting for the historic zones at High Point and Half Moon Bluff.” State reviewers answered that wilderness was “the primary focus of the Department’s concern.” And they rejected the exclusions as well as a concurrent recommendation to designate the entire island a historic zone. As an afterthought they also opposed the Park Service’s proposal for a mainland center at Point Peter.⁵⁴

The Georgia officials then made a number of recommendations. The National Park Service should abandon the idea of jitney travel north of Stafford except for visits to Plum Orchard. These could be halted when boat service to the mansion became available and retained rights of driving the Main Road expired. All retained estates, roads, and Little Cumberland Island should be included as potential wilderness. Thus, when incompatible uses ended, these would be immediately reclassified as wilderness. Interpretation of the north end historic features could be accomplished at the mainland visitor center or the south end of Cumberland for those unable to hike through the wilderness. Finally, wilderness legislation for the island should be structured so that the requirements of historic preservation legislation were met.⁵⁵

Once again Park Service planners regrouped to study their proposals. However, the draft plans and environmental statement had touched off a continuing public debate. The conflict over jitney travel to the north end of

Cumberland eventually drew Director Whalen to the island. In late fall 1978 he inspected the road and historic north end and listened to Cumberland Island officials. He then returned to Washington, D.C., and ordered them to drop plans for jitney travel north of Plum Orchard. One year later the agency discontinued all motorized transportation for visitors at the south end of the island.⁵⁶

In the meantime, the exclusion of 490 acres around High Point and Half Moon Bluff as a historic district continued to draw fire. Carol Ruckdeschel, who was living in and redesigning one of the historic structures in the proposed district, waged a letter-writing campaign to the Park Service, its Interior Department superiors, and the press. She challenged the historical importance of the various structures. This time, however, island residents resisted the environmental juggernaut that had so dramatically influenced Park Service planning. Joe Graves of the Johnston branch of the Carnegie heirs complimented the agency on its exclusion and decried the latest attempts by environmentalists to add even more acreage to a wilderness proposal that already included nearly 75 percent of the island's uplands. He added:

During the public hearings conducted by the National Park Service in Georgia and since then some Island residents and those who like to backpack and camp in wilderness areas have lobbied very effectively for the creation of a large wilderness area.

However, the people who will constitute the great majority of Park visitors are not organized to lobby for reasonable access and visitation in the Cumberland Island National Seashore. I wish to speak for those people.⁵⁷

Eventually Hans Neuhauser submitted a compromise plan that called for the Park Service to exclude 2 acres at the Settlement at Half Moon Bluff and 54 acres at High Point. This would allow 434 acres to be added to the potential wilderness area. In August 1979 acting Park Service director Ira Hutchison recommended to Interior officials that Neuhauser's plan be adopted.⁵⁸

By December 1980 National Park Service planning for Cumberland Island had changed dramatically. The agency sought a single wilderness zone beginning north of Stafford and ending in the marshes west of Little Cumberland Island. It included the smaller island but not the state-owned marshes west of Cumberland. The plan excluded the Main Road as far north as Plum Orchard, the estate itself, and the two historic areas at the north end. The new acreage totals were 8,540 acres of wilderness and 11,480

acres of potential wilderness. Seashore planners still called for a mainland embarkation center at Point Peter but proposed that it would not be necessary until the number of visitors coming through St. Marys topped 600 per day for the four high-use months. They continued to insist on a visitor limit of 1,460 per day but reduced their proposed island transportation to “one or two units” that would move visitors from the Dungeness and Sea Camp Docks to campgrounds, beaches, and the Dungeness historic complex. In addition, the Park Service still considered a reservations-only tour to Plum Orchard as a requisite.⁵⁹

Having come so far from the original master plan, the National Park Service felt confident that this new set of proposals would succeed. The agency had received massive and continuous input from the public. Dominated by environmentalists, the public had forced the agency to drop its development of three docks and three beaches spaced along the entire island to two much smaller sets of landing points and beaches on the south. Proposals for visitation limits fell from 10,000 to 1,460, beach use from 7,000 to 400, and camping from 400 to 260. The transportation operation shrank from virtually the entire island to a few established roads in the southern part of the island. Gone were horse, bicycle, and camping concessions. Also gone were interpretive operations at every conceivable historic and archaeological site. The only thing that increased between 1972 and 1980 was the size of the recommended wilderness. Under the 1971 master plan it would have been ludicrous to suggest any wilderness remained. Now the agency proposed more than 20,000 acres in a single block. Although more than half was rendered “potential” by incompatible uses and ownership, the security of the island’s natural resources seemed assured.