
Contested Paradise: The 1980s and Early 1990s

The fifteen years beginning in 1980 saw a maturation of management at Cumberland Island National Seashore. Park Service officials completed a general management plan and several development plans for historic and visitor-use zones. Congress established wilderness on the northern half of the island and added a layer of protection for the natural ecosystem. Agency historic preservation officers successfully nominated three more multiple-resource districts and several individual sites to the National Register of Historic Places. Natural resource management benefited from a substantial amount of research as well as the institution of monitoring programs for geological and biological processes. Visitors enjoyed the island, and the cadre of loyal Cumberland Island devotees grew ever larger. The national seashore became a storied as well as valued element of the national park system.

Yet many of the intransigent problems that arose during the seashore's early years persisted. The Park Service grudgingly accepted a general management plan that continued operations at what was originally intended to be a "trial" level. Enactment of wilderness legislation sharpened the conflict between retained-rights holders and environmental activists. Plum Orchard mansion swallowed Park Service maintenance funds as well as private donations while a long-term solution for its use and care remained elusive. Finally, natural resource threats continued at disturbing levels. Erosion marred sound-side archaeological sites. Horses multiplied in spite of their poor health and continued to impact dunes and marshes. In addition, a second and successful introduction of bobcats to prey on the island's excessive deer and pig populations incensed some residents and visitors. Finally, the

agency's relationship with St. Marys continued to be tinged with disagreement and suspicion.

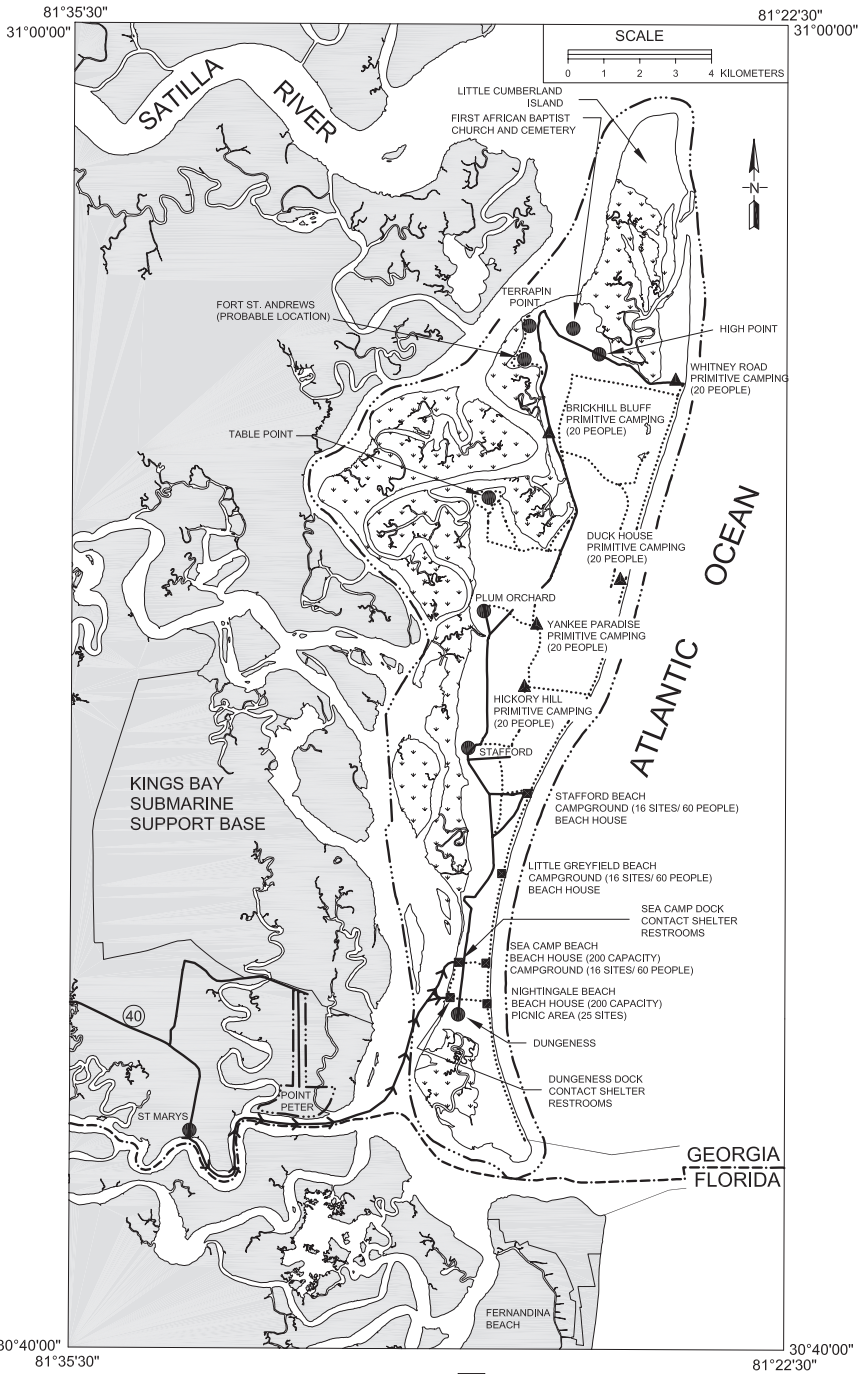
During the decade and a half, the staff at the national seashore increased, the budget for operations rose by 43 percent to \$1,125,000 in 1994, and visitation plateaued at roughly 46,000 people per year. However, the interpretation program drastically diminished. Across the entire park system, special resource needs and the spiraling demand for law enforcement siphoned both personnel and funds from interpretive programs. Cumberland had little crime, but fire management drew increasing attention after a frightening 1981 blaze. By 1994 the interpretation program shrank to a few talks or walks coordinated with the arrival and departure of the ferries.¹


The fundamental management philosophy at Cumberland Island continued to be shaped by conflict: use versus preservation, natural versus historic resources, active recreation versus passive inspiration. The island continued to serve as an arena for fundamental debate over agency values and policy. The irony of an idyllic retreat for nature and solitude embroiled in such passionate conflict continued unabated.


Another Try for a General Management Plan

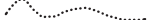
The National Park Service released yet another draft general management plan and wilderness recommendation to the public on February 25, 1981 (map 7.1). At the time, Cumberland Island was still a quiet backwater for a national park unit. Only 300 visitors—two ferry loads—came to the island on the busiest days. Island transportation between Dungeness and Sea Camp had been suspended two years earlier. Only one developed campground existed, the Sea Camp facility built years earlier by Charles Fraser. Three slightly improved primitive camp areas were located at Hickory Hill, Yankee Paradise, and Brickhill Bluff (Brickhill). No concessions, no beach facilities, and no stables for horseback riding were on the island. At the two debarkation points, the Park Service used existing structures, most of them historical, for limited interpretation and island management. On the mainland the seashore staff greeted visitors, prepared them for their visits to the island, and conducted planning, resource management, and all the other


Map 7.1. The National Park Service's 1981 general development plan for Cumberland Island. (National Park Service, Dec. 1980, *Final Environmental Impact Statement, General Management Plan, [and] Wilderness Recommendation*, CINS Library)




Park Boundary 

Visitor Transportation Route 

Trail 

 Mainland

 C. I. Salt Marsh

administrative functions from a hopelessly inadequate dockside building with extremely limited parking.²

Compared to all the previous drafts, the new document suggested only moderate changes to this scenario. The most significant were a proposed move of the mainland visitor center and the classification of more than 20,000 acres as wilderness. The new draft plan also called for a reestablishment of transportation at the south end of the island to carry visitors between the two docks, two developed campgrounds, the wilderness boundary near Stafford, and the Dungeness historic district. Very limited additional tours to Plum Orchard and High Point–Half Moon Bluff also would be available until retained rights were extinguished. The plan proposed several new backcountry campsites and a visitor limit of 1,460 per day, less than 15 percent of the figure offered in the 1971 master plan. Regional Director Joe Brown promised a thirty-day period during which interested agencies, organizations, and individuals could comment. If the public responded favorably, the plan would go into effect in early March.³

The public did not respond favorably. Most of the more than 4,000 respondents accepted the wilderness proposal with relatively little comment. However, they positively erupted over the development proposals. Abetted by a strident media, especially the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the public directed withering criticism at nearly every aspect of the scaled-down recreation plan. As in the past, the greatest anger focused on the level of visitation and on visitor transportation into the proposed wilderness. In addition, the choice of Point Peter for a mainland center met collateral criticism, much of it whipped up by the town of St. Marys.⁴

Within a few days letters began to arrive. Atlanta resident Patricia Koester wrote a typical view: "I was horrified to read in the Feb. 27 edition of the Atlanta Constitution that the National Park Service plans to open Cumberland to as many as 1,460 visitors daily! This is criminal! . . . Cumberland has been so special to so many of us. A chance to sit peacefully beneath those magnificent oaks, to encounter free animals, especially the horses, at any turn of the trail, oh, so many, many things. How can you dare to threaten all of this?"⁵ Robert Coram of the *Atlanta Constitution* seized the story as a personal crusade. He had visited Cumberland many times and even worked for the Park Service briefly some years earlier. Over the next month Coram followed the unfolding drama with articles almost daily denouncing the plan and its adherents. He attended environmentalists' meet-

ings, interviewed agency officials, and both encouraged and reported the growing correspondence antagonistic to the new plans. Regional Director Brown later said, "Coram chose his angle and worked it to the nth degree." The newspaperman, like many others, did not believe that the National Park Service took the public's comments seriously.⁶

The reaction of the public completely surprised National Park Service planners once again. In part this was due to the muted response from environmental organizations. The initial statements of the Georgia Conservancy, Atlanta Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and Wilderness Society were cautiously favorable. Each group was relieved to see the new wilderness proposal, and together they expressed preliminary agreement with the goals if not the details of the development plan. They too were surprised when Coram and his colleague Robert Ingle published articles accusing them of abandoning their principles and "caving in" to the Park Service. A spirited exchange of letters to the editor and caustic newspaper articles followed, the latter primarily from Ingle.⁷

As letters poured into the regional office, Park Service officials tried to defend the plan, citing a need to serve more visitors. They were belatedly supported by local congressman Ronald "Bo" Ginn. In a letter to the *Atlanta Constitution*, he called the existence of private lands the most serious threat to the island. He urged readers to turn their attention to helping the Park Service acquire the remaining tracts before the prices escalated out of reach and the current benign owners were replaced by some who might develop mass tourism. Finally, he warned, "With daily visitation on the island held at the current level of 300 persons daily, I expect that no funding is likely to be requested [by the Park Service] for Cumberland acquisition during any year of the current [Reagan] Administration."⁸

By the time Ginn wrote that letter, however, the National Park Service had already conceded defeat. On March 18, after receiving permission from Washington, Regional Director Brown scrapped the 485-page plan and ordered park planners to start over once again. Two weeks later Brown quit his position as Southeast Region director. Veteran official Robert M. Baker replaced him two months later.⁹

In April 1981 the Park Service decided to divide planning for the general management plan and the wilderness recommendation into two separate procedures. The generally favorable response to the wilderness proposal convinced agency officials that they could rush through a report to Con-

gress, now nearly six years late. In the meantime, seashore general management planners could try once more to satisfy the island's clamorous constituency.¹⁰

The Wilderness Bill

Free to focus on a wilderness bill for the island, the Georgia Conservancy and other conservation groups refined their idea of a proper proposal and submitted it to the Park Service and Congressman Ginn. In particular, they sought to have the Main Road north of Plum Orchard reclassified from potential wilderness to full wilderness status and the portion of the road from Plum Orchard southward to the wilderness boundary from nonwilderness to potential wilderness. Ginn introduced that bill to the House of Representatives on October 7, 1981, where it met a favorable response. Nevertheless, H.R. 4713 still faced an uncertain fate. Secretary of the Interior James Watt had promised that he would block the creation of any more wilderness areas during his tenure.¹¹

On October 16 the House Subcommittee on Public Lands and National Parks held a brief hearing on the bill. Despite Watt's antagonism, Park Service director Russell E. Dickinson recommended that the bill be passed. All the environmental organizations concurred except for the Coastal Georgia Audubon Society. With remarkable prescience its vice president for conservation, Verna McNamara, warned against including the Main Road south of Plum Orchard. She further recommended that Congress take out all the land south of Plum Orchard and west of the road. Her reasons were economic and visitor-oriented. She suggested that the cost of maintaining the mansion by boat only would be prohibitive. Also, taking visitors to Plum Orchard by boat would cost more and take up too much of the day visitors' limited time on the island. She added that disabled and elderly visitors deserved the right to see the mansion, that the road was already in use by retained-rights holders, and that the area her group wanted removed from wilderness designation was insignificant in acreage.¹²

Thornton Morris and William Ferguson spoke on behalf of island residents and submitted a long letter of comment as well. They reported that the residents supported the proposed bill in principle but wanted some clarification added. After the squabble over use of South Cut Road, the residents wanted to make sure that the retained-rights agreements superseded the restrictions of wilderness designation. Furthermore, Morris and Fergu-

son urged the representatives to make those same rights available to any future land sellers. The latter stipulation carried particular weight for the Candler, who had recently signed an option with the Park Service for their estate. Finally, Morris reminded the congressmen that the government had promised Lucy Ferguson that it would not try to acquire her land, most of which lay in the proposed wilderness area. They categorized all these caveats as “valid existing rights” and suggested that the phrase be inserted in the bill.¹³

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources sent a short but important telegram to the committee. It too supported the bill but not without certain understandings and stipulations. Commissioner Joe Tanner allowed that designation of the marshes as potential wilderness, even those where the state held jurisdiction, was acceptable but only if hunting, fishing, and the use of motorized boats could continue. He called these activities “traditional and legitimate rights” of the people and insisted that the Park Service respect them.¹⁴

Finally, Hans Neuhauser spoke in favor of the legislation that he essentially wrote. He eloquently described the value of the island for inspiration and a “wilderness experience” and recapitulated the long ten-year history leading up to the proposed bill. He requested two changes in the language of the bill to clarify the intent of the legislation. First, the Park Service’s proposed wilderness map still showed the roads as “potential wilderness additions.” He asked that the representatives order the agency to correct the map and manage the roads as wilderness. Second, to counter the recommendations of the Coastal Georgia Audubon Society, he urged the committee to state clearly that the intertidal lands on both coasts were to be immediately absorbed into the wilderness whenever the state transferred ownership to the Park Service. These lands included the portion south of Plum Orchard and west of the Main Road.¹⁵

After the House hearing the Cumberland wilderness bill entered the tortuous process of congressional enactment. Initially it appeared that the bill might become law before the end of 1981. Concurrent with Ginn’s introduction of the House bill, Georgia senators Mack Mattingly and Sam Nunn offered a similar bill in the upper chamber. The Senate passed it on October 21, only five days after the House hearing. That bill, S. 1119, immediately went to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. On December 10 the committee recommended passage of the Senate version but changed the acreage amounts of both the wilderness and potential wilder-

ness additions. The Department of the Interior requested the changes in order to include a 65-acre parcel of private land recently acquired by the Park Service in the area to be designated wilderness and another 268 acres composed of the waters from the island eastward to the national seashore's boundary one quarter mile east of the mean high-tide line.¹⁶

With these changes the House passed the bill on December 15, and all parties awaited what was expected to be a simple voice vote in the Senate to accept the minor alterations. Anticipating resistance from President Ronald Reagan, the bill's proponents attached it to another bill that proposed changes to the boundaries of Crater Lake National Park, legislation the president was known to favor. Hopes for passage of the bill evaporated, however, when it went before Senator Malcolm Wallop (D.-Wyoming), chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Lands. Despite the absence of any opposition to the new dual-purpose bill, Wallop claimed that he had not been thoroughly briefed and wanted time to review it. Senators Nunn and Mattingly lobbied furiously for its immediate passage, but to no avail. Whether fellow Wyoming native James Watt had any hand in this delay is unknown.¹⁷

In May 1982 Senators Mattingly and Nunn introduced a new bill, S. 2569, which was identical to the former S. 1119 as amended by the House of Representatives. On June 24 the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Reserved Waters held a hearing at which only legislators and environmentalists spoke about Cumberland wilderness.¹⁸ A second bill concerning U.S. Forest Service lands also was under consideration in the hearing and drew its own set of speakers.¹⁹ All the participants favored the Cumberland legislation. Representatives of the four main environmental groups, the Georgia Conservancy, Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, and Atlanta Audubon Society, explained the checkered history of Park Service planning and the repeated demands by the public for wilderness designation. The subcommittee then referred the bill to its parent Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.²⁰

While the congressional procedure lumbered on, another complication arose. The National Park Service let it be known that it would forbid any motorboats from landing on the shores of the designated wilderness zone. Furthermore, although tidal creeks in the wilderness were excluded from the wilderness and, hence, open to motorboat traffic, those boats could not land.²¹ Camden County officials, led by Commissioner Jack Sutton, reacted with outrage, as did the local public. Sutton claimed that local fishermen

had been able to land on the beach and siene for fish for generations. This claim naturally drew much popular support in spite of the history of antagonism to trespassers from the Carnegies in general and Lucy Ferguson in particular.

Sutton called for a “boat-in” protest off the western shores of Cumberland Island for two days beginning on July 31. He confidently predicted 200 watercraft would gather around his houseboat, which he moored near the Dungeness estate. When the weekend came, fewer than 60 boats showed up, carrying approximately 100 people, picnic lunches, and coolers full of drinks. A country and western band played on the roof of Sutton’s houseboat, and all the participants seemed to have a good time. Sutton later expressed disappointment at the turnout and blamed a Jacksonville, Florida, kingfishing tournament for drawing away many supporters.²²

The event did draw the attention of the Georgia House of Representatives, which passed a resolution urging the National Park Service to “respect the recreational needs and concerns of Georgia residents in its management of Cumberland Island.” However, Camden County’s protests had no effect on Congress in Washington or on the Park Service. The Senate Energy Committee voted unanimously to recommend passage of the bill, and the Senate did so on August 19. In spite of a last-minute effort by Secretary Watt to kill it, President Reagan signed the bill on September 9, 1982.²³

Public Law 97-250 gave the National Park Service wilderness designation for 8,840 acres on Cumberland Island and potential wilderness status to another 11,718 acres. The legislative history of the act did address some concerns central to administering the island’s many resources. The legislators allowed the Park Service to take small groups of visitors to Plum Orchard and High Point–Half Moon Bluff by vehicle over the Main Road. However, they also made it abundantly clear that they favored stringent adherence to the Wilderness Act of 1964 wherever and however possible. Congress expected to be notified of any Park Service deviance from these principles. To that end the lawmakers charged the Park Service to use water transportation unless it proved completely impractical and unaffordable. The final law also included protection for “valid existing rights” as requested by Thornton Morris and William Ferguson. President Reagan, in his statement on the new law, echoed Congress when he admitted that houses and traffic in a wilderness area were inconsistent, but he noted that the island would develop into a proper wilderness as the retentions ended. Also like Congress,

Reagan offered no specific recommendations for how to manage this apparent legal contradiction.²⁴

Wilderness Use

With management of the Cumberland Island wilderness left unclear by Congress, seashore administrators faced a number of challenges. For guidance, they relied on two pieces of legislation: the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Cumberland Wilderness Act. The 1964 law expressed an idea to strive for. Section 4c of the act spelled out what activities were prohibited:

Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and, except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purposes of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other forms of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.²⁵

Although the Wilderness Act allowed for nonconforming activities associated with retained rights, the 1964 lawmakers never anticipated the number of intrusive uses present at Cumberland Island. Superintendent Morgan described the situation to a university professor who was researching wilderness across the country:

The legislation [to establish Cumberland's wilderness] established an area of 8840 acres within which there are seven estate reservations with homes, rights of vehicular access through the wilderness, right of ingress and egress to the reserved estates, right to use various roads which bisect the wilderness area, an underground power cable which traverses the wilderness, goes to each resident structure and requires periodic maintenance; there are fourteen estate reservations on either side of the wilderness with the right of passage through it and there is an airstrip (reserved estates) on either side of the wilderness lands. Also, the surrounding water is non-wilderness so motorized craft can access the land at many points. We expect the valid existing rights will continue for 50+ years.²⁶

The intensity of interest-group attention increased the difficulty of managing the wilderness area. The same environmental groups that shaped the

Cumberland Island wilderness legislation now insisted on management as close to the principles of the 1964 law as possible. Island residents protected their rights just as fiercely. Backpackers challenged the residents' right to drive any roads or the beach within the wilderness zone. They also complained about low-flying aircraft, including those trying to land at the two airfields abutting the wilderness. The Sierra Club insisted that the Park Service itself should not use vehicles or power tools, that people renting from the residents not be allowed to drive, that the Greyfield Inn not be allowed to give motorized tours in the wilderness, and that maintenance of the Plum Orchard structures be accomplished by boat. Wilderness enthusiasts arriving on the island expected to find a pristine reserve like those in western national parks. Instead, they found houses with no-trespassing signs and cars.

In 1986 a University of Georgia researcher conducted a study of visitor satisfaction and expectations. The results showed that the greatest focus of conflict was between hikers and drivers on the Main Road.²⁷ Hikers naturally used the wide thoroughway for an easy trail. Other than the beach it was the only unobstructed path. When a vehicle came, the incensed backpackers would spread across the road so it could not pass. This in turn outraged the drivers, especially the Carnegie and Candler heirs who resented the dismissal of the rights they had earned by preserving the island and creating the seashore. They furiously defended their retained rights. The wife of one of the Greyfield owners asked a reporter: "How many times have any of you been driving on a right-of-way to your property and had people curse at you, give you the 'finger' (try explaining what that means to a frightened 4-year-old sitting beside you in your vehicle), spit or throw things at your vehicle?"²⁸

Seashore officials sought advice and legal counsel from the regional office. A few months after the national seashore wilderness was established, Superintendent Morgan wrote to the regional director asking for a definition of wilderness or potential wilderness status for each of the roads on the island and for an explanation of what constituted an emergency that would allow the Park Service to use vehicles in the wilderness. His final comment would become a common administrative plaint: "Management of the designated wilderness area is a hot issue and actions taken are highly visible. I need some guidelines on operations, within the wilderness, that will be defensible and hold complaints to a minimum."²⁹

Acting regional director Neal Guse responded that the entire main road and all the side roads were potential wilderness and that the seashore

rangers could use the roads not only for emergency purposes but also “for law enforcement and for administrative purposes necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of these areas as wilderness.” The specific language came from the Senate’s remarks on the seashore wilderness bill. He ignored the House version, which was much stricter.³⁰

Somehow this letter reached the various conservation groups, and the four principal ones immediately fired an angry letter to Robert Baker demanding that the Park Service respect wilderness law. They rehashed the legislative history and insisted that all the roads except the one to Plum Orchard were full wilderness and that rangers could only use them for emergencies. The environmentalists also promised to monitor the Park Service carefully as it performed its Cumberland Island duties.³¹

Two problems exacerbated the wilderness driving issue. One concerned short-term renters who brought their cars to the island. National seashore managers were never quite certain what to do about retained-rights holders who rented their homes. Most of the deeds specified that the rights to an estate did not include any commercial use of the property. However, at Cumberland those same deeds did not classify renting one’s home as a commercial use. Island residents fell back on the legal phrase “and their assigns” to justify extending their right to drive to the renters.

While the National Park Service did not transport vehicles to the island, the Greyfield Inn did. With more than 100 derelict cars still lying around in 1985, this was a sore point for the environmentalists. The problem appeared to be solved in late 1986 when the Greyfield owners voluntarily stopped transporting cars for anyone staying less than a year. Although this gratified the Park Service and environmentalists, it met resistance from the other residents who rented their homes. Mary Bullard was particularly upset, claiming that she would lose renters. The Fergusons mollified her by promising to transport cars for her relatives even if they only stayed for a few days.³²

A second problem also involved the Greyfield Inn. The Park Service found it difficult to influence a private operation on private land. The 1964 and 1965 court decisions dividing the Carnegie Trust’s lands guaranteed that these heirs could drive the Main Road. It did not address other roads, and the other heirs’ deeds of sale and retained-rights contracts were often vague. However, because the Carnegies had always used all the public roads, Greyfield continued to do so. When the Park Service reviewed the deeds and questioned this practice, the residents claimed that it was a traditional use. They cited promises made by Stewart Udall, George Hartzog, and land ne-

gotiator George Sandberg not to interfere with such uses. In the case of the 1979 South Cut Road controversy, this argument had prevailed.³³

The Greyfield Inn also conducted tours of Plum Orchard, the Settlement, and other island sites for groups of eight to ten of their guests. This practice quickly attracted the attention of environmental groups because it seemed to flout the 1964 Wilderness Act's stipulation against any "commercial enterprises" in a wilderness area. However, the Fergusons argued that it was part of their legal right to traverse the roads on the island. Cumberland officials requested help from regional solicitor Roger S. Babb. He advised that, in spite of the vagueness of the legislative history and conflicting decisions in similar court cases, the Park Service could ban the Greyfield tours in the wilderness. Although Plum Orchard, the primary attraction, was not itself in the wilderness, it required transport along the Main Road, which was. Babb did admit, however, that the matter probably would have to be settled in court.³⁴ Apparently the Park Service elected not to pursue this contentious course because every land protection plan through the 1990s listed motorized tours into the designated wilderness as an activity "beyond the management control of the NPS."³⁵

One side effect of the retained rights to drive in the wilderness was that the Park Service had to maintain the roads. As in the case of South Cut Road, island residents challenged any agency decision to close or stop maintaining a particular road. When the government acquired the national seashore in 1972, it contained a latticework of rough roads. The agency immediately began to convert some of them to trails. Nearly all of today's trails were at one time roadways. Although most of these closures did not meet coordinated and combined opposition from the residents, virtually all of them irritated somebody. Even Carol Ruckdeschel, the indefatigable lobbyist for stringent wilderness management, complained when Bunkley Road at the north end was closed to vehicle traffic. Another side effect was a decision to build a trail through the wilderness so that hikers could avoid both the Main Road and the beach.³⁶

From time to time other wilderness issues arose that further strained the delicate balance that the Park Service tried to maintain between those favoring a strict interpretation of wilderness law and those who insisted that retained rights to drive rendered the wilderness open to other atypical activities. One of those activities was the use of bicycles. During the mid-1980s a spirited debate arose throughout the entire park system over the propriety of these nonmotorized mechanical devices in a wilderness area. The

Wilderness Act's ban on "mechanical transport" seemed to prohibit bicycling. However, mountain bikers argued that the human effort involved in riding along rough wilderness trails made it acceptable. The debate intensified nationwide after Point Reyes National Seashore in California banned bikes in its wilderness in 1985. One year later the *Federal Register* carried an announcement banning them in all wilderness areas but supporting their use on park roads or specially designated nonwilderness trails. Cumberland Island officials interpreted this to mean visitor bicycling in the island's wilderness area could continue because of the elaborate road system used by both automobiles and bicyclists from Greyfield. However, Superintendent Rolland Swain finally stopped wilderness bicycling in 1995 except for guests at Greyfield.³⁷

National Park Service wilderness management at Cumberland Island frustrated both environmentalists and retained-rights holders. Both groups complained that officials made spontaneous decisions for each situation without consistent policy guidelines. They added that the national seashore needed a wilderness management plan that would bring consistent enforcement of specified policies. Yet in 1994, with the Cumberland wilderness twelve years old, the seashore still did not have one.

Designing a wilderness plan for Cumberland Island, however, would be a difficult and somewhat intimidating task. Such poor congressional guidance in the 1982 act and so many diametrically opposed interest groups made it hard to know where to start. Seashore planners would have to set firm parameters for beach and road driving, determine the rules for maintaining historic structures in the wilderness, and decide whether to sanction traditional uses by the island residents or stick to the letter of the law and the specifics of individual retained-rights agreements. In all likelihood lawsuits would result from any managerial choices. As 1994 drew to a close, the Park Service grappled with how to begin the long process of designing a wilderness plan.³⁸

The Final General Management Plan

As the wilderness issue took on a life of its own, Park Service officials resumed work on the overall general management plan. On June 29, 1981, the *Atlanta Constitution* published a picture of new Park Service regional director Robert M. Baker smiling and holding a box crammed with some of the 4,000 letters protesting the withdrawn general management plan. Baker told

the newspaper, “The revised plan will be a reflection of what the public wants to happen on Cumberland.” The catastrophic response to the original plan had chastened veteran agency planners. Baker added, “We can’t afford to make a decision in a back room, float it, then go with it.” As the National Park Service began again on the general management plan, it took extraordinary steps to include public input, especially from environmental organizations.³⁹

Stinging from media ridicule for their tepid response to the earlier plan, the environmental organizations seized the opportunity to get even more involved in shaping the new one. On July 18 the Georgia Conservancy held a Cumberland Island workshop in Atlanta. Approximately 125 people attended, with a predictable majority of environmentalists. The Conservancy tallied the numerical results of the workshop. Fifty-three people supported the wilderness designation, and one said it was too large. Sixty people wanted either boat tours to Plum Orchard or no tours at all while four wanted limited vehicle tours. The record on St. Marys as a visitor center was 25 years and 1 day. Most other elements of the management plan received similar input. This time the Georgia Conservancy wanted to make sure the media would not brand it “soft” on Park Service development.⁴⁰

In September the Park Service held a two-day workshop on Cumberland Island. Regional Director Baker hosted a group consisting primarily of environmentalists and island residents. He announced, “This weekend, I am the audience and you are the experts.” Representatives of the Georgia Conservancy and the Sierra Club spoke in favor of leaving the island at the current level of development. Thornton Morris added: “You’ve got the best data you can ever get about keeping it [island visitation limit] at 300 people per day. More than 4,000 people wrote you saying to leave the island alone. I’m told it was the second-greatest outpouring of letters the Park Service has ever received.”⁴¹

One Park Service employee reminded reporters that a 300-person limit actually meant 200 because most visitors only went to the island if they could return on the later 150-passenger ferry. Nevertheless, at the end of the workshop, Baker promised that the new plan would be “scaled down considerably.”

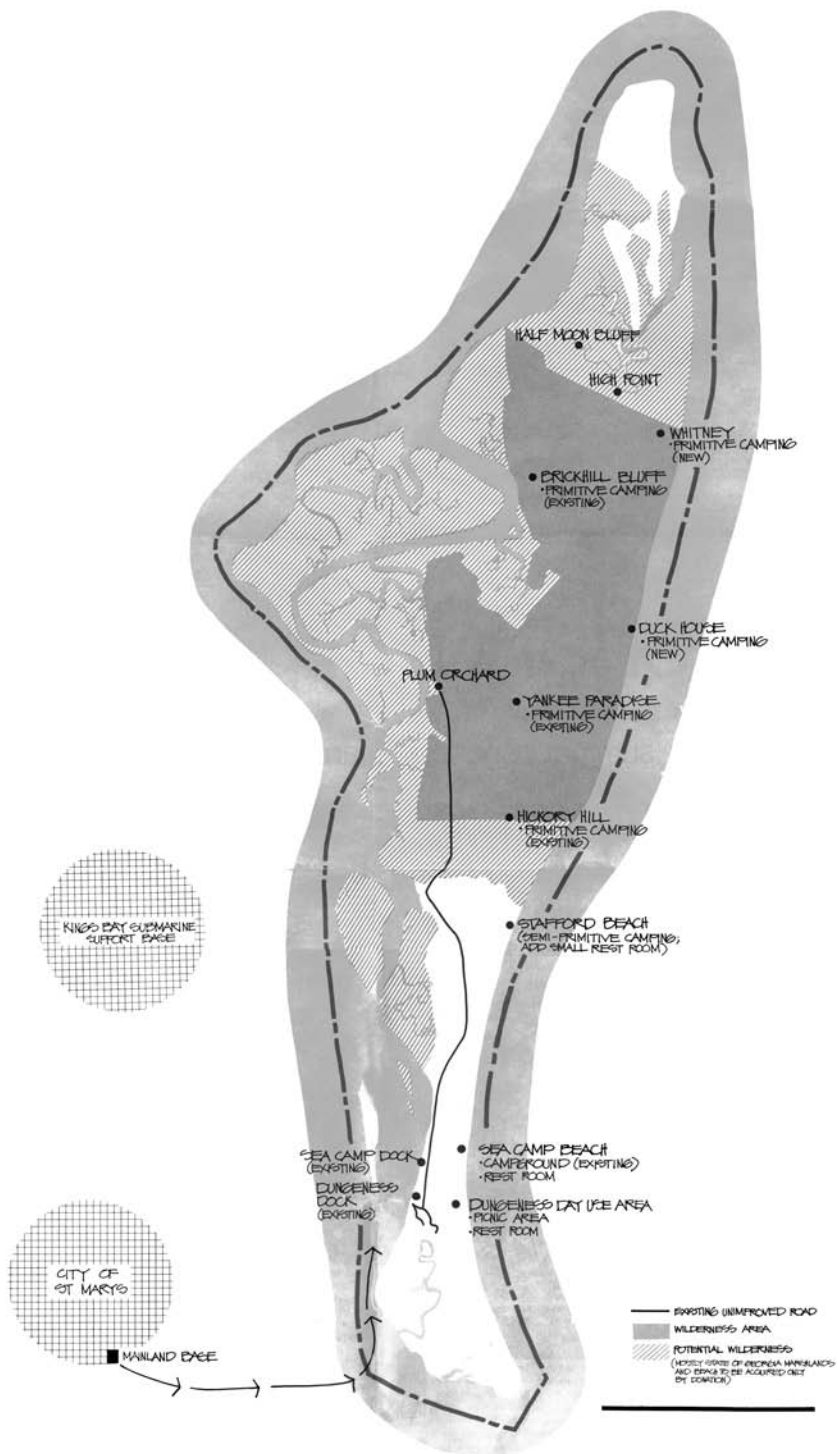
Two weeks later Robert Ingle of the *Atlanta Constitution* gloated over the changes. He commended the new regional director and explained that Baker “had not come up through the NPS and thus isn’t stuck with the good-old-boy network way of doing things.” The reporter also approved of new superintendent William Harris, whom he called “a dean of superin-

tendents, which means he won't have to prove anything to anybody or build monuments to himself." He blamed the former general management plan on departed superintendent McCrary, the Georgia Conservancy, and federal planners. He then insulted Denver Service Center personnel and complained some more about the dead plan.⁴² By this time the National Park Service recognized that its primary constituency was Atlanta, not Camden County. Much work would need to be done to repair the public relations debacle of the rejected management plan.

Local governments did not take their relegation quietly. Jack Sutton claimed that Camden County commissioners were not invited to the September workshop. A colleague agreed and added, "The local folks around Camden get the feeling that they [the Park Service] are more interested with what the folks in Chicago, New York and Southeast Asia think." Sutton also reiterated that Camden County had given up a lot of taxable land to the federal government. Echoing many earlier Camden complaints, he called the federal government a "private property-consuming monster" and summed up their actions: "It sees. It likes. It takes." In the case of the Park Service, he grumbled, "The least they could do is allow us to have some input on how the island is run." Subsequently, the Park Service claimed that it had sent an invitation to the county board of commissioners.⁴³

The Park Service mailed 6,000 copies of a summary revised general management plan on November 19, 1981 (map 7.2). The pamphlet described the previous planning efforts, the proposals of the previous plan, and the new recommendations. It included most of what the environmentalists and residents wanted. Visitation would stay at 300 per day, and the visitor facility would remain in St. Marys. In response to heavy criticism, the agency promised to improve its telephone reservations system. Many potential park visitors tried to call, only to receive busy signals. Later when they finally got through, no spaces were left in the campgrounds or on the ferries. The Park Service planned to limit camping to one developed site at Sea Camp, one "transitional" campground with a bathroom but no fire pits or tables near Stafford, and five primitive camping areas in the wilderness. Two of the latter, located at Duck House and Lake Whitney, would be new.

Map 7.2. The revised 1981 general development plan for Cumberland Island National Seashore. (National Park Service, Nov. 19, 1981, *Summary of the Revised General Management Plan for Cumberland Island, Georgia*, Denver Service Center, NPS 1829, copy in SERO Planning files)



With the lower visitation limit, the agency abandoned a day-use development at Nightingale Beach, scaled down plans for the two docks, and canceled island transportation except for occasional tours in sixteen-passenger vehicles to Plum Orchard. It also promised to study seriously the option of boating tourists to the mansion.⁴⁴

The new general management plan met instant approval. One day after its official release, one of Lucy Ferguson's grandchildren complimented it by calling it "the ultimate" plan. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources also enthusiastically endorsed the new document.⁴⁵

However, even this popular plan received some criticism. Camden County residents were upset that almost no facilities existed outside the wilderness to dock their boats. The Park Service planned to install mooring buoys. A boat could still come to the Sea Camp or Dungeness Dock to disembark passengers, but then the captain would have to tie up to the buoy and swim or wade ashore. Commissioner Sutton, already fighting the planned exclusion of motorboats from the wilderness, was particularly incensed. He asked the Park Service to design a dock for private watercraft and called the ferry operation "a damn hassle." In answer to criticism from environmentalists, he added: "I don't understand why the Sierra Club would fight this. We just want to dock and go to the beach. They can have the north end of the island as wilderness."⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the principal environmental organizations expressed pleasure with the changes incorporated in the new planning goals but were cautious. A representative of the Wilderness Society said the new plan appeared good but "there are a lot of things that aren't covered at all." William Mankin of the Sierra Club praised the Park Service's new management direction but offered a number of suggestions. He proposed that the Park Service should use horses for patrols north of Sea Camp and boats for tours of Plum Orchard, move the deer-hunting camp out of the wilderness to Plum Orchard, and delete the proposed campgrounds at Lake Whitney and the Duck House areas because of their ecological fragility. As for wilderness access by the elderly and infirm, he blandly stated, "People who can't walk ten miles can walk 50 yards into the wilderness if they wish." Hans Neuhauser echoed the Sierra Club's recommendations and added requests that the Park Service develop a fire management plan and conduct a full public review of any modification of the docks to accommodate private boats.⁴⁷

In March 1982 Superintendent Bill Harris and Assistant Superintendent Wallace Hibbard met with Neuhauser, G. Robert Kerr, and Carol Ruckde-

schel to review the status of general management planning. The Park Service agreed to drop the Lake Whitney and Duck House campgrounds. In addition, the officials promised to reassess the National Register listing of structures at High Point and Half Moon Bluff and to manage retained rights in the wilderness “more closely.” To that end they had requested copies of the final deeds between the residents and the National Park Foundation or the Park Service.

Two months later the agency released an “informal draft” of its detailed plan. Neuhauser still found problems with the document, claiming that it lacked detail and explanations of agency policy in matters where the legislative history provided conflicting guidance. He pointed out the issue of Park Service vehicle use in the wilderness as a case in point. However, the document was such a vast improvement over previous ones that he and the environmental community elected to accept it.⁴⁸

One more significant task remained. The Park Service had to submit the general management plan to the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Both those agencies then had to sign a “Memorandum of Agreement” approving the plan and its implications for cultural resource management. Regional Director Baker forwarded the plan to those agencies in early November 1982. After a series of interagency battles described below, the historic preservationists approved it in January 1984. The Park Service issued a “record of decision” adopting the plan the following month. The 1984 general management plan reflected the voluminous input from environmental organizations, Atlanta residents, and retained-rights holders. The only differences from the summary revision of November 1981 were the deletion of two environmentally sensitive campgrounds and reclassification of all of the Main Road as wilderness. The voices of tourism interests and the desires of Camden County were unceremoniously swept away.⁴⁹

Mainland Operations

The enactment of wilderness legislation and adoption of a popular general management plan freed the Park Service to concentrate on defining and implementing the new directives. One of the first tasks the Park Service faced was developing a permanent visitor center and ferry embarkation point in St. Marys. Late in 1983 Congress passed legislation eliminating the Point Peter site from the seashore’s land acquisition schedule.⁵⁰ The law

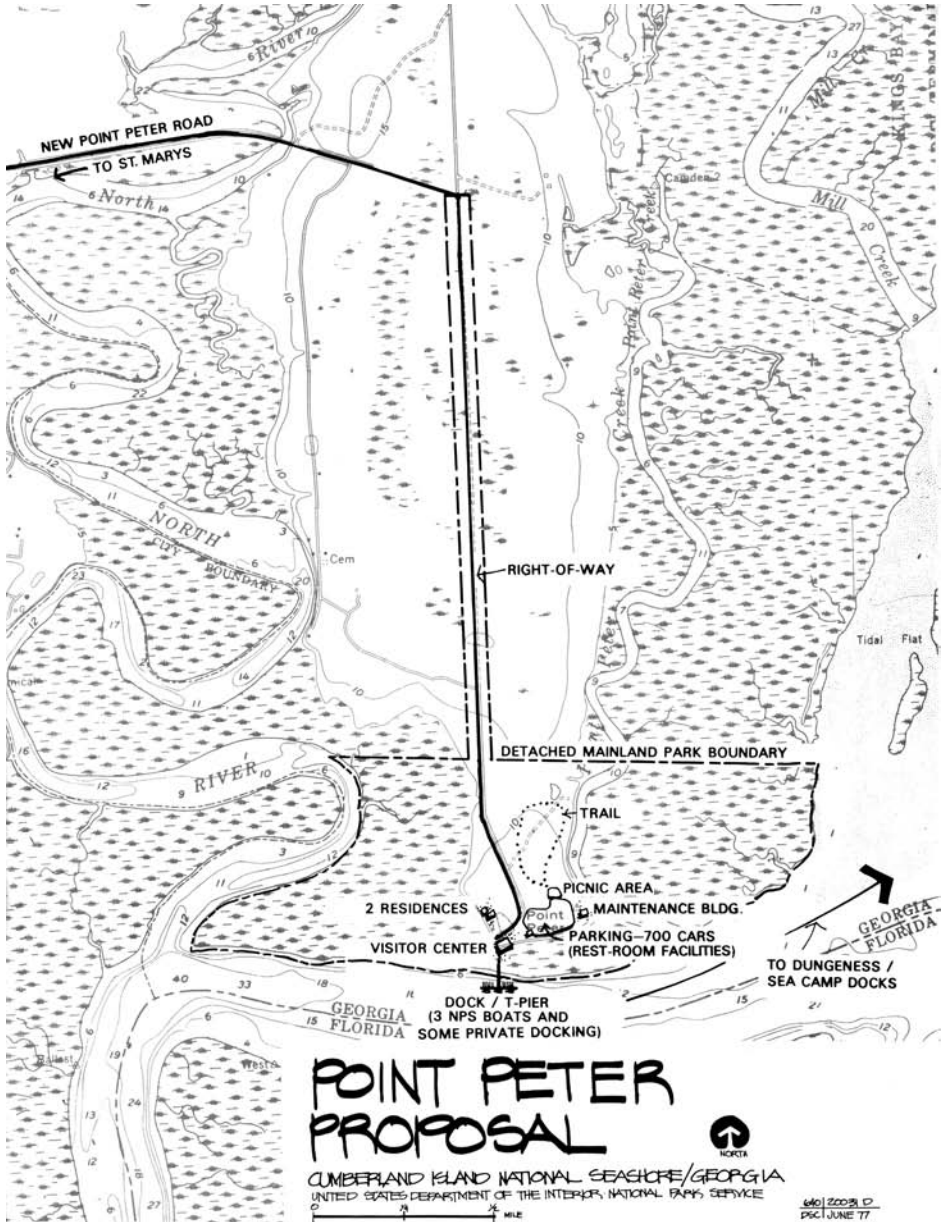
ended a ten-year quest by the Park Service to establish a mainland base in a parklike setting. For eight of those years the focus had been on the marshy peninsula east of St. Marys.

Originally, seashore officials had planned to acquire a 100-acre area that would contain the visitor center and ferry dock plus a maintenance facility, employee housing, picnic tables, and a self-guided nature trail (map 7.3). There, visitors would encounter an integral part of the native ecology and environmental education of the national seashore. Thus the Park Service could satisfy those visitors who might not have the time or opportunity to visit the island. As an added benefit, Point Peter was closer to Cumberland. National Park Service officials had convinced Congress to authorize acquisition of the area in the 1978 act that raised the funding ceiling for land acquisition.⁵¹

From the moment it became public, the Point Peter proposal met implacable enmity from Frederick G. and Jean Lucas Storey, the couple who owned the property. According to the *Savannah Morning News*, when the Park Service aired its plan to obtain Point Peter, it caught the Storeys completely off guard. Frederick Storey bluntly responded, "We have, through our lawyers, this week put the park service on notice that we do not intend to sell our property under any circumstance to anyone at any price for any purpose." As Park Service officials asked each other why no one had contacted the Storeys before they released the plan, the couple began a long and furious campaign of letter writing and legal actions to block condemnation by the federal government.⁵²

Initially the town of St. Marys accepted a decision by seashore officials to move their operation when visitation reached a level of 600 per day for the summer months. However, it reversed its position for two reasons. First, public antagonism to any increase in visitation suggested that the number might not go above 1,000 per day. City fathers believed that St. Marys could handle that number.

The second reason was a 1979 plan for the city's waterfront, conducted under contract with the Coastal Area Planning and Development Committee. Consultants from Roberts and Eichler submitted a remarkably ambitious proposal to turn the downtown area into a major tourist attraction based on the city's long history and its advantageous proximity to Interstate 95 carrying tourists to Florida, the Kings Bay submarine base, and Cumberland Island National Seashore. The Park Service presence was the key to the level of development. Uncertain whether the seashore's offices would



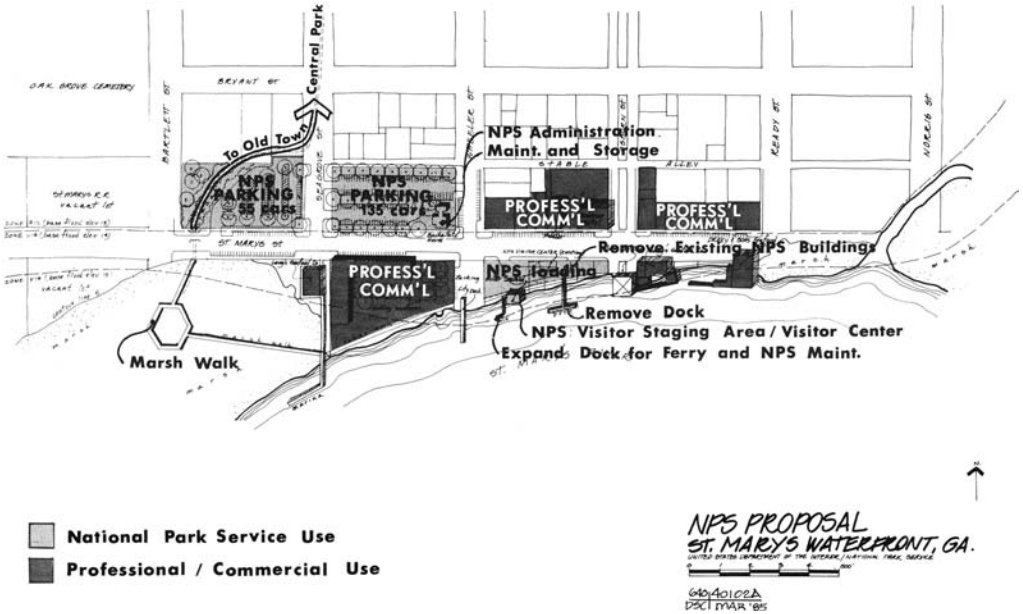
Map 7.3. The National Park Service development proposal for a Point Peter headquarters and main embarkation center. (National Park Service, Dec. 1980, *Final Environmental Impact Statement, General Management Plan, [and] Wilderness Recommendation*, CINS Library)

stay or not, Roberts and Eichler drew up two plans. If the Park Service stayed in St. Marys, the town would re-create an eighteenth-century seaport, develop extensive new commercial operations, and design a trolley system to bring tourists from remote parking lots. If the Park Service moved to Point Peter, the town would have to drop plans for a seaport museum and trolley system and vastly reduce commercial development. Camden County was the poorest county in the United States containing a national seashore or lakeshore. Both the town and the county were anxious to bring tourism to support development in other economic sectors.⁵³

When the Park Service chose to remain in St. Marys, the city and agency planners worked together to develop a waterfront plan to suit the needs of both. In November 1985 the seashore adopted a development concept plan under the assumption that St. Marys officials liked it. The plan called for Park Service acquisition of three properties, two of which contained structures on the National Register. The primary property was a block-long stretch of the shoreline containing the rented building then used by the seashore plus a scenic but decaying seafood operation known locally as Miller's Dock. It consisted of a small pier and commercial building. Diagonally across the street from that property was another block with a historic building known as the Bachlott house and an oak-studded field. The third block lay just west of the Bachlott block (map 7.4). The Park Service proposed to raze its current headquarters and Miller's Dock and build a large, new visitor center and ferry landing on the site. The Bachlott house would be renovated to house administrative offices while the rest of that block and the adjacent one would serve as parking for seashore visitors. Both parking blocks would remain unpaved and would accommodate a total of 190 cars. This would relieve the city of visitor parking along the streets, which displaced local people conducting business downtown.⁵⁴

Before the Park Service could secure funds to act, however, problems surfaced. In its own separate 1985 plan, St. Marys decided to limit parking on the street to two hours. This created a crisis for the Park Service because it did not yet own the proposed parking blocks, and visitors had nowhere to leave their cars for the day.⁵⁵

At the same time, several developers began to investigate the town's waterfront. Their attention focused primarily on Miller's Dock. After preliminary inspections and negotiating, the Sea Winds Development Corporation of Atlanta offered the dock's owners \$385,000 for the complex. The



Map 7.4. The National Park Service development plan for St. Marys. (National Park Service, July 1985, *Draft Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment, Cumberland Island, St. Marys Waterfront, Georgia*, CINS Library)

Park Service appraised the property and offered \$100,000 less. The Millers rejected the government's offer. At that point Superintendent Ken Morgan informed all parties that the agency might condemn the property. This information had already scared off one potential developer two years earlier.⁵⁶ In late 1988 the Park Service learned that Sea Winds had purchased Miller's Dock anyway and planned to build a 371-foot pier into the river plus a restaurant and gift shop in the old building. Subsequently the same corporation bought the Bachlott house as well.⁵⁷

The town of St. Marys took the position that a major commercial facility on taxable property was better than an expanded government operation on land removed from the tax rolls. In addition, it began to romanticize the picturesque and familiar old fishing complex. Local historic preservation groups opposed the idea of razing the structure. From 1989 through most of 1991, the Park Service quietly investigated a condemnation action. During that same period city and county officials, historic groups, and local businesses loudly supported Sea Winds and resurrected the menacing image of

a grasping, dictatorial federal government.⁵⁸ Ken Morgan tried to downplay the local image of federal government bullying. He told the *Camden County Tribune*: “It’s not a case where the property owners are thrown out on the street. They’re willing to sell; we just can’t make up the difference in price. At least at Cumberland Island, the people who went to condemnation proceedings came out better than those who sold the property outright.”⁵⁹

The Park Service sought other ways to expand operations but met more resistance from St. Marys. In June 1990 it submitted a proposal to redesign the area east of its current building and convert the town’s waterfront pavilion to an embarkation point. Under this arrangement St. Marys would donate the pavilion. A large crowd of local people enthusiastically supported the city councilmen as they unanimously turned down the proposal. U.S. Congressman Lindsay Thomas cautioned the locals not to be too antagonistic as he tried to work out a compromise: “I want to [be] sure that the park service also maintain[s] its departure point for Cumberland right here in St. Marys. I think we all know that Fernandina would be happy to have that.” Eventually, the financial condition of Sea Winds ended the stalemate. The corporation declared bankruptcy in 1991, and the Park Service negotiated to buy both Miller’s Dock and the Bachlott property.⁶⁰

Just as it appeared that the seashore’s controversies in St. Marys might have ended, another issue arose. After purchasing Miller’s Dock, agency architects found it too dilapidated to renovate. In a repeat of the Dungeness Recreation House conflict, the Park Service let it sit until part of the dock collapsed. The agency then notified the Advisory Council and state historic preservation offices of its intention to tear the complex down. Although the St. Marys Historical Preservation Commission eventually agreed with this action, many Camden County people cited this as more evidence of National Park Service disdain for their historical resources.

In early 1994 St. Marys and the Park Service briefly considered a memorandum of agreement with the city for federal development at the waterfront. The Park Service would agree to keep the Miller’s Dock site as a “passive recreation area” until it built a new structure and to give high priority to renovating the Bachlott building. Thereafter it would either use the building itself or lease it as a historic property. The city, in turn, offered a structure known as the Coastal Bank Building on a nearby street for a reduced price with the understanding that the Park Service would turn it into a museum for both the seashore and the town. Although the two government parties never signed the agreement, the Park Service followed many of

its prescriptions. Despite the acrimony of the past, both groups promised a harmonious working relationship in the future.⁶¹

Natural Resources

Management of natural resources at Cumberland Island advanced significantly during the 1980s and early 1990s. A number of important scientific studies took place, many of them sponsored by the cooperative park studies program at the Institute of Ecology, University of Georgia. The Park Service began monitoring programs for horses, sea turtles, deer, and pigs. Scientists also collected baseline data on the vegetation, dunes, water quality, and fire history. New technological tools, such as a geographic information system at the regional office, enabled researchers to begin compiling a long-term spatial profile of the island's many natural processes and human modifications.⁶²

Unfortunately, natural resource management got off to a controversial start in the 1980s. Late in the evening on July 15, 1981, a lightning-caused fire broke out north of South Cut Road in vegetation so thick that one "could literally walk through 20 or 30 feet on top of palmetto without touching the ground."⁶³ At 4:30 the next morning a turtle researcher discovered the blaze. Superintendent Paul McCrary was immediately notified, and seashore rangers began arriving by 6:15. They initially decided to use Charles Fraser's two bulldozed roads as firebreaks and cleared more brush to start backfires. However, by late afternoon the fire jumped the North Cut Road and moved toward the Candler property. Firefighters then decided to change their strategy to protecting buildings.

In the afternoon the staff received warning of thunderstorms with high winds. McCrary called the Georgia Forestry Department, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Park Service's regional office seeking aircraft to assist in the battle, but these groups were either bogged down fighting other fires or reluctant to fly with potential gale winds on the way. Over the next five days, the Park Service brought in two pieces of heavy equipment and a helicopter to fight the fire. Crews from the Forest Service, Georgia Forestry, and Everglades National Park arrived, as did an eleven-man fire-fighting crew from the regional office. They widened South Cut Road and started backfires while watering homes at the north end to keep them from burning. By July 22 crews of more than forty firefighters, several tanker planes, and a light rain brought the fire under control.⁶⁴

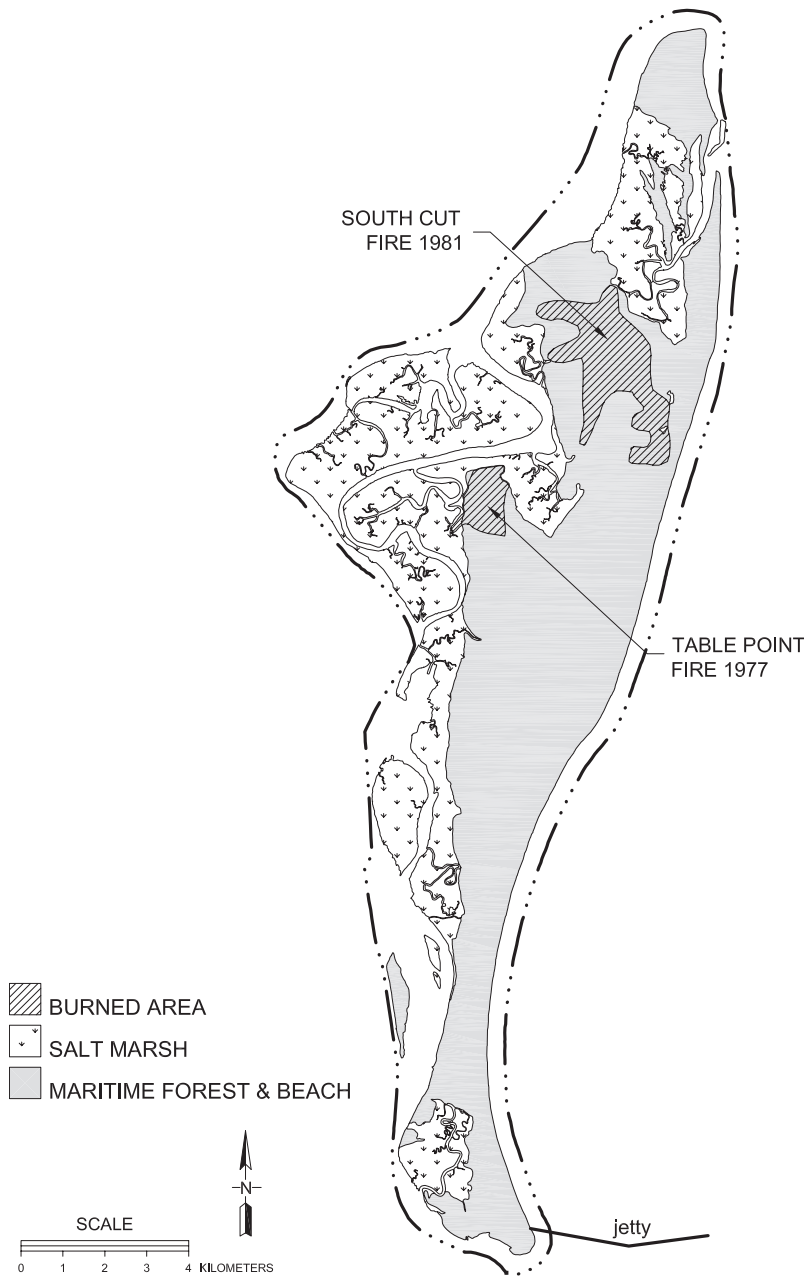
On July 27, after a few rainless days, the fire flared up again. Firefighters burned 100 acres themselves to deprive the renewed fire of fuel. Crews continued to battle the flames until August 2 when rain damped down the blaze. Wary of another reignition, fire crews surveyed the area from the air until August 24 when a tropical storm arrived to finally end it. By then the “South Cut Fire” had burned more than 1,700 acres (map 7.5). Due to the firefighters’ focus on saving buildings from the first full day of the blaze, no structures were lost.⁶⁵

Before the fire was out, firefighting agencies gathered to analyze the Park Service’s preparedness and response. A clash of missions between the Park Service on one side and Georgia Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service on the other quickly became apparent. The central focus of the debate was the lack of heavy equipment on the island to fight fires. Not only did the seashore not have any, it did not request any from the other two agencies during the early days of the fire. The Park Service explained that such equipment was unacceptable because it damaged both natural and archaeological resources. A 310-acre fire at Table Point four years earlier had not damaged its rich prehistoric remains precisely because the Park Service did not bring in large road graders of the type the other agencies routinely used.

The debate then focused on management priorities. Fire specialists from the Park Service argued that their agency took a long-term view in management and that this same area reportedly had burned a quarter century earlier with no apparent damage to the vegetation. The island would recover. Georgia officials, however, would not accept the danger to personal property and to state resources. One official projected that the fire would invite an insect infestation that would then spread to the mainland. Both sides claimed that the island residents supported their position.⁶⁶

In the meantime, local and state officials publicly denounced the Park Service. Senator Mattingly, in particular, called Secretary of the Interior Watt and demanded an investigation. The claims of Georgia Forestry that the Park Service was unprepared and apparently unwilling to fight a fire properly continued to resound in the press and at various interagency meetings.

One immediate casualty of the episode was Superintendent McCrary. His stubborn refusal to accept large, potentially destructive equipment made him a particular target for Georgia Forestry and Senator Mattingly. Regional Director Robert Baker told the *Atlanta Journal* that “Paul understands that his personality is part of the issue” and removed him in the last days of July. After two months with an acting superintendent, the regional



Map 7.5. The Table Point and South Cut fires

office opted to appoint an experienced crisis-management team to lead the seashore. William Harris, former superintendent of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, took over in mid-September. Another veteran official, Wallace Hibbard, became assistant superintendent. The Park Service hoped these two old pros could lead it out of the quagmire of resource protection and planning crises that plagued the seashore.⁶⁷

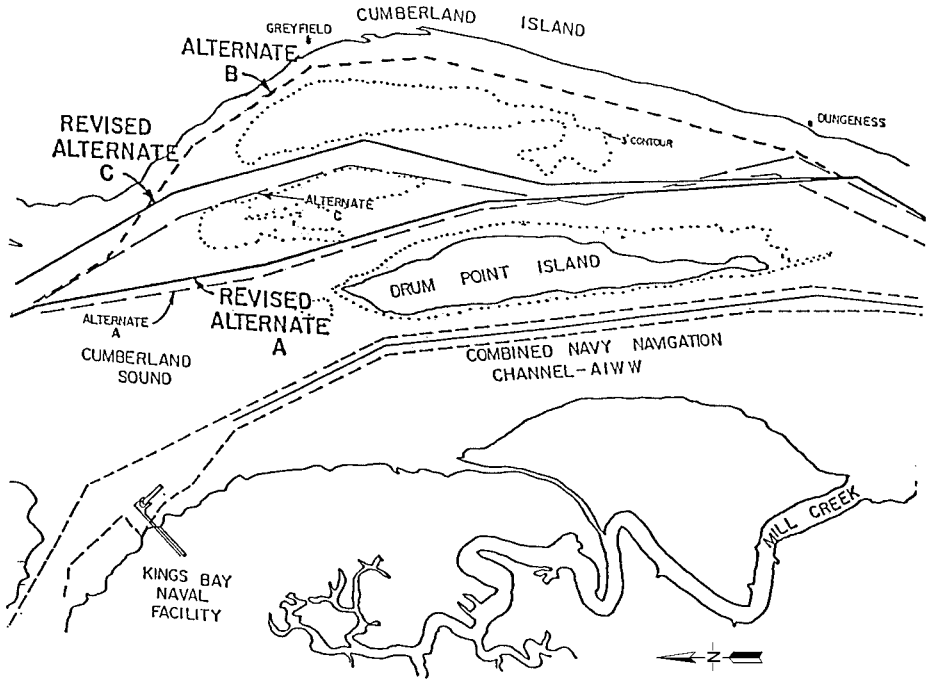
The final outcome of the South Cut Fire was an agreement between the National Park Service and Georgia Forestry. The federal and state agencies would keep in constant communication and instantly cooperate in the event of another fire on Cumberland Island. Furthermore, the Park Service moved onto the island the very fire equipment it philosophically opposed. The agency pursued a modest program of prescribed burning until the political outfall from the massive 1988 fire at Yellowstone National Park brought total fire suppression to the entire system. Ironically, studies by fire ecologists and archaeologist John Ehrenhard showed no significant damage from the South Cut Fire.⁶⁸

Monitoring Natural Processes on Cumberland

Coastal erosion continued to be one of the most worrisome issues that the seashore faced. In early summer 1980 the U.S. Navy released an environmental impact statement for its proposed nuclear submarine base at Kings Bay. Both the National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife were invited to evaluate it. On July 9 Superintendent McCrary wrote to Park Service officials in Washington that the navy gave only cursory attention to environmental effects like water pollution, danger to threatened species, and destruction of wetlands. Shortly thereafter, Assistant Secretary of the Interior James Rathesberger notified the navy that his office opposed the Kings Bay plan.

Navy planners subsequently amended the environmental impact statement to satisfy Interior officials but also suggested that they might widen the ship channel from 400 to 500 feet. Rathesberger wrote to complain that this would require a new environmental impact study. The navy then flatly turned down the call for a new study, claimed that the original one was adequate, and informed Rathesberger that it would monitor the impacts after construction.⁶⁹

The Department of the Interior was unable to stop this particular action, but a few years later it did escape a much more intrusive proposal for Cum-



Map 7.6. The Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway Channel and proposed changes to its course. (Michael J. Harris, July 1986, "Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report on Reroute of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, Cumberland Sound, Georgia," U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Southeast Region, Atlanta, CINS Library, 24)

berland Sound. In 1985 the navy announced that in order to adapt the Kings Bay base for its new, large Trident submarines, it would have to separate its military ships from commercial vessels. Navy planners claimed that traffic on the Intracoastal Waterway was too heavy to allow for safe and unrestricted passage by Trident submarines. They proposed that the commercial waterway be moved eastward toward Cumberland Island. Seashore officials believed that the worsening erosion of archaeological sites and the Plum Orchard estate was caused by wakes from passing ships, and therefore movement of the waterway closer to Cumberland Island would exacerbate the problem.⁷⁰

The navy offered three alternative routes for the new waterway that would lie 300, 1,200, or 1,500 feet closer to Cumberland (map 7.6). However, all three routes were east of Drum Point Island, which served as a buffer against ship wakes for the area from Greyfield to Dungeness. Once again the navy offered its assessment of the potential environmental costs, and once

again the Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife called it inadequate and poorly researched. Georgia Department of Natural Resources and respected coastal engineer Robert Dolan also found the proposal disturbing. Soon environmental organizations took up the campaign. They found the project objectionable not only because it passed through the boundaries of the national seashore but also because it intruded into a zone designated by the Coastal Barrier Resources Act of 1982 as a protected coastline. The navy answered that this project was a “military activity essential to national security” and thus exempt from the Coastal Barrier Resources Act.⁷¹

As the agency charged with evaluating and, if approved, executing the channel shift, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers undertook a review of the project. After examining the navy’s proposal, the corps narrowed it to two alternatives: one midway between Drum Point and Cumberland and the other only 100 to 200 feet off the shore of the bigger island. The corps also suggested the possibility of depositing dredge spoils on Drum Point Island. After a review, the Fish and Wildlife Service recommended the route closest to Cumberland Island as the lesser of the evils because it would have less impact on benthic communities.⁷²

Meanwhile, the environmental groups’ campaign against the project mounted. Hans Neuhauser told the Corps of Engineers that the legislation establishing the national seashore required that a project such as this one must be “mutually acceptable to the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the Army.” In his mind this meant that the project required full compliance with NEPA. He opposed dumping spoils on Drum Point Island, and if a new channel would have to be chosen, he would reject the route immediately adjacent to Cumberland Island. The Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club agreed and announced in a press release that the corps’s environmental assessment “has failed to evaluate so many aspects of the project that it has been, in effect, a wasted exercise.” Soon the Georgia Conservancy announced not only that it opposed the new waterway route but that the Department of Defense should transfer Drum Point Island and Raccoon Keys to the national seashore. Finally, the Conservancy engaged the Southern Environmental Law Center to challenge the corps’s quick approval of the project. This action plus continued bad publicity soon had both the navy and the corps on the defensive. In early March 1987 the navy announced it would scrap plans to establish a new channel because of “a lack of hard requirement and the controversial nature of the project.”⁷³

Despite the defeat of this serious threat, erosion along the western shore



Fig. 7.1. Riprap at the Sea Camp Visitor Center protects it and its archaeological relics from coastal erosion.

of Cumberland continued to expose and then sweep away archaeological resources (fig. 7.1). Once the huge Trident submarines began to ply the waterway, they became the focus of suspicion from Park Service scientists and environmental groups. During the debate over rerouting the Intracoastal Waterway, the navy agreed to fund a program for monitoring Cumberland Island. Research and monitoring began in 1988 and resulted in a number of useful reports. In July 1993 the *Florida Times-Union* reported that the navy-funded study of erosion showed that the submarines were not the cause. Other experts remained unconvinced, and research continued to seek the reasons for the accelerated erosion that they measured.⁷⁴

One additional concern about the Kings Bay submarine base was the impact of deepening the ship channel on the aquifer that supplied Cumberland Island wells. Development along the mainland coast had already reduced the supply of groundwater to the national seashore. In 1887 the Carnegies dug a deep well to the Florida Aquifer that flowed at an estimated 800,000 gallons per day and had an estimated head of fifty-one feet above sea level. By the 1990s water barely reached the surface. Many of the wells for

campground use were shallow ones that accessed the Pliocene-Miocene aquifer. Scientists worried that deepening the ship channel would lead eventually to saltwater intrusion into this aquifer.⁷⁵

Ecological Resources

The richness of Cumberland Island's biotic assemblage received another mantle of recognition during the mid-1980s when it was designated an "international biosphere reserve." Scientists and diplomats gathered at a 1970 conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had conceived the Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB) to coordinate research and management of representative terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems. These biosphere reserves function as examples and scientific monitoring sites for surrounding regions. Each unit must meet criteria based on its ecology, history, land use, and management. A reserve fulfills three complementary functions: preservation in the core area, sustainable development, and education. Each reserve contains one or more core units, such as a national park, that are securely protected and monitored, an adjoining buffer area of compatible use, and a transition area of other uses like agriculture that cooperate with the core unit(s). The United States unilaterally established units in 1974 while UNESCO scientists developed the conceptual framework. In 1996 the United States boasted 47 reserves encompassing 99 legally protected sites. In addition, eighty-four other countries protected 290 reserves.⁷⁶

In 1981 William Gregg, Park Service ecologist and cochair of the U.S. chapter of MAB, coordinated a research project by Yale graduate student Judith Gale to identify potential sites for a Carolinian–South Atlantic Biosphere Reserve. After several years of study, the team recommended three units: the Outer Banks and continental shelf at Cape Lookout, North Carolina; the Santee Delta–Cape Romain area of South Carolina; and the Georgia Sea Islands. The latter unit focused on Sapelo Island. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, however, balked at the idea of cooperative management with other states, so the U.S. committee shifted its Georgia core unit to the federal property at Cumberland Island. In April 1986 UNESCO added the Carolinian–South Atlantic reserve to the system.⁷⁷

International biosphere reserve status brought no change to Cumberland Island or its management, however. Incompatible land use in the South Carolina and North Carolina portions of the reserve and a bizarre

rise in the public's xenophobic paranoia about internationalism stymied any action. Cumberland Island's inclusion in a biosphere reserve was quietly forgotten, except as a vague recognition of its superior resources. In response to a National Parks and Conservation Association questionnaire sent in 1997, Cumberland Island ranger Newton Sikes answered ten questions about the MAB status the same way: "To our knowledge tourism [or any other aspect of the seashore] has not been affected in any way due to the park being a biosphere reserve. There has been no activity at all regarding biosphere matters. No publicity. Nothing."⁷⁸

In spite of inactivity in the biosphere program, research continued at Cumberland Island. Susan Bratton of the cooperative studies unit at the University of Georgia conducted or directed much of it. Botanists looked at vegetation dynamics, response to fire, and exotic species. Among the latter were tung trees, which had begun to spread from their original two agricultural plots. Wildlife biologists focused on sea turtles, turkeys, armadillos, manatees, deer, pigs, horses, wood storks, and a variety of seabirds. Of particular concern were the effects of feral animals and deer on dune vegetation and stability. Monitoring programs in conjunction with the navy erosion studies or as independent projects were established for sea turtles and most of the higher mammals.⁷⁹

Three animals drew not only intense scientific study but also considerable public attention. Despite up to five annual hunts per year, the population of white-tailed deer continued to overbrowse the vegetation on Cumberland Island. Elsewhere in the park system, resource managers sought to reintroduce predators that would correct ecological imbalances. Soon Cumberland's managers also began to investigate this possibility. In a 1984 study Edward B. Harris proposed the reintroduction of bobcats to the island to restore ecological balance. According to Harris's research they had been extirpated in 1907. The reintroduction attempted in 1972-73 had failed. Harris noted that the chief prey of bobcats were rabbits, rodents, and the occasional old or injured deer. A few years later Robert J. Warren of the University of Georgia took charge of the program to reintroduce the bobcats.⁸⁰

Before any reintroduction could take place, however, NEPA required that the Park Service issue an environmental assessment for public comment. In August 1988 the agency released the assessment and received seventeen written comments. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources and all the major environmental groups supported the plan. However, opposition came from hunters who were afraid the competition would dras-

tically reduce deer numbers, from some island residents and others who worried about the fate of the wild turkeys, and from the St. Marys City Council, which regarded the scheme as “inhumane.” The Park Service issued a “finding of no significant impact” a few months later and began introducing fifteen bobcats per year. Subsequent studies showed that the predators had established themselves, reproduced, and were affecting the deer herd primarily by taking fawns. Research on the impact of bobcats on the turkey population is still inconclusive. Although the controversy died down in the press and among animal enthusiasts, some Camden County and island residents still fume over what they believe was an irresponsible and destructive action.⁸¹

Feral Animals

Unfortunately, the reintroduction of bobcats had no impact on the population of feral pigs, nor did most other actions. Each general management and resource plan advocated complete extermination of the pigs, citing all the familiar reasons. They dug up and ate turtle eggs, destroyed endangered plant species, took resources away from native animals, and caused a nuisance by rooting around on the private estates. By early 1982 the national seashore had conducted thirty-five trapping operations and removed 1,346 pigs in seven years. Rangers began shooting them thereafter, which, added to the hunts, led to a significant reduction in their numbers.

In 1984, in an ironic twist, Cumberland’s resource management chief ordered rangers to stop killing pigs because they had been so successful. The pigs had become so shy that Robert Warren could not find enough to conduct research on feral hog ecology. In 1988, four years after the cessation of shooting, Warren’s study reinforced the common beliefs of the seashore staff. The pigs were healthy, ate mostly plant material, and were descended from domestic stock. Despite their addition to the list of animals taken by hunters, their numbers had grown. Warren recommended that rangers return to shooting them on sight to control the population. Even with that, he did not think it was possible to eradicate them.⁸²

In 1992 the Park Service escalated its war on feral pigs by bringing professional trappers with dogs to the island. For five days the trappers used “bay dogs” to corner pigs so they could be removed from the island. One man brought a pit bull trained to attack the swine. Island residents and environmentalists alike reacted with alarm. Carol Ruckdeschel, Bill Mankin

of the Sierra Club, and others worried especially about attacks on visitors and residents by packs of dogs. According to Superintendent Rolland Swain, some complained that the hog catchers were “good old boys who wanted a chance to hunt hogs and have fun in the park.” The Park Service also received letters from backpackers who were frightened when they met the trappers and their dogs in the wilderness area. Soon the Camden County Humane Society complained about the methods that trappers used to load the pigs for transport to the mainland. Negative publicity did not take long to appear in local and Atlanta newspapers.⁸³

The Park Service responded to the complaints by reiterating the reasons for pig removal and allowing the trappers to continue without using dogs. Concerned letters continued to arrive and included one from a senior professor of biology who claimed that damage and disruption by the dogs was itself unacceptable. Some letters did support the Park Service and included one from Thornton Morris. In 1993 the Park Service added a “pigs only” public hunt to the four annual hunts for deer and pigs. The following year rangers renewed the practice of shooting them whenever possible. In spite of all this effort, the swine population continued to rise and expand its range southward from the wilderness.⁸⁴

The difficulty of managing the pig population under public scrutiny was insignificant compared to that of horse management. Concern about the environmental impact of the feral horses continued to grow as research results arrived. Censuses taken by University of Georgia researchers and seashore personnel estimated 114 horses in 1981, 154 two years later, and 220 by 1990 despite the brief appearance of eastern equine encephalitis. A study of the effect of horses on salt marshes showed a reduction of the vegetation of up to 98 percent in heavily grazed areas (fig. 7.2). The author suggested that the carrying capacity for horses on Cumberland Island was between 45 and 73 individual horses. Research on the health and mortality rate of the island horses determined that 30 percent of the foals died in an average year. A study at Assateague Island National Seashore and the adjacent Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge showed a similar mortality rate at the national park unit but a much lower one at the refuge where a local fire department removed horses each year to sell.⁸⁵

In 1985 Robert Warren and Susan Bratton of the University of Georgia proposed that the Cumberland horse population needed to be reduced and then controlled. They suggested a brand new drug that would prevent conception for two years. Bratton noted that this approach could use “a



Fig. 7.2. Horses are one of the major attractions for visitors, but they are responsible for destruction of dunes and marshes throughout the island.

biodegradable bullet” to administer the drug which would reduce both the possibility of injury to the animals and protests from animal rights groups. The following year one of Warren’s graduate students, Robin Goodloe, began formal research on the efficacy of contraception for feral horses. Over the next five years, Goodloe and other researchers reached two conclusions from their work. First, genetic testing showed that the wild horses on Cumberland were descended primarily from stock released during the Carnegie period. Little genetic evidence of the “marsh tackies” of romantic lore appeared in the tests. The second conclusion was that the new drug did not work. Even a population of treated mares kept in Florida continued to foal. Subsequent research showed that “booster shots” of the drug were necessary every four weeks for at least the first few months in order to make the drug effective.⁸⁶

As Goodloe’s project neared its conclusion, the National Park Service grappled with the feral horse issue not only at Cumberland but also at Assateague Island, Cape Lookout, and Cape Hatteras National Seashores. New immunocontraceptive drugs tested at Assateague proved more effective.

Goodloe's annual census showed that the horse population on Cumberland continued to increase partly due to releases of new horses by island residents to "improve the stock." Another outbreak of equine encephalitis in 1991 killed at least one and probably five horses, but it had little impact on the population increase.

Finally in 1992 the Park Service decided to develop a horse management program. New resource management specialist Jennifer Bjork had experience from the other seashores with horses and headed the planning team. In spite of the agency's formal scientific position that horses should be entirely removed, the seashore planners chose to reduce the herd to a small number, perhaps forty, and distribute them on the south end of the island so that at least 66 percent of the visitors would see them. In order to maintain such a herd, Warren and others recommended that the Park Service heavily manipulate the water sources and forage at the south end of the island, especially around the Dungeness estate. The Cumberland Island staff then turned to developing an official horse management plan for the NEPA process. Finally the Park Service appeared ready to take planned and coordinated action on one of the most troubling natural resource issues.⁸⁷

Cultural Resources

Like natural resource protection, cultural resource management advanced during the 1980s and early 1990s. Park Service historic preservation officials completed a multiple-resource nomination to the National Register for three more historic districts, two individual historic sites, and two archaeological districts. Maintenance continued on the many preservable structures around the island, and several more were adapted for use by seashore personnel. Important historical research took place, and development concept plans were drawn up for Plum Orchard and Dungeness. In addition, the Park Service completed new plans for managing the "historic landscapes" of Dungeness and the Stafford plantation. The agency finally tackled some overdue management issues such as establishment of a proper facility for storing furnishings and other objects from the island's history. Finally, cooperation with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office improved by the end of the 1980s.⁸⁸

The accomplishments in cultural resource management did not always come easily, however. The Georgia office rejected several management plans before the Park Service could satisfy its standards. Charles Hauser

once again threatened important historic resources on the reserved estate that he rented. The debate over management of historic resources in the wilderness intensified. Finally, the care and use of Plum Orchard proved a constant source of frustration. Ultimately, island residents and other interested parties formed an organization to search for a solution. Friction between this group and the Park Service grew when the residents claimed that the agency did not care about the mansion.

Once again most of the trouble came during planning processes. In September 1981 the Park Service met with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Council of State Historic Preservation Officers in Washington, D.C. They amended an earlier cooperative agreement to improve interagency communications during historic resource planning and nominations to the National Register. In spite of this leadership, Cumberland continued to have problems securing approval for its historic preservation programs. As part of a draft of the general management plan in 1982, the seashore staff submitted a cultural resource plan which ran into immediate trouble. Elizabeth Lyon of the state office wrote that while the plan appeared to provide for adequate protection of historic structures, it did not have a timetable for preservation actions. She added that the Park Service was still remiss in keeping the state office informed. Two months later the Advisory Council said the plan was “vague in describing proposed actions and leaves open possibilities for adverse effect.”⁸⁹

The agency also encountered difficulties in preparing a multiple-resource nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Southeast Region officials sent the nomination to Washington in early 1984. This time the Park Service’s own chief historian, Edwin Bearss, rejected part of the document. He accepted the sections on the Dungeness district, Main Road, Duck House, and Rayfield archaeological area. However, he returned the portions on the Plum Orchard and Stafford historic districts and the Table Point archaeological district. After revisions, both the cultural resources management plan and the National Register nomination finally were approved in 1984. Cumberland Island boasted six discrete historic or archaeological districts plus the isolated Duck House and the Main Road (see map 6.1). The seashore’s list of classified structures totaled sixty-four. Over the next decade new surveys and corrections to the list increased the number to eighty-two structures despite destruction of the Duck House by an illegal camper’s fire (fig. 7.3). Those surveys also more than doubled the number of identified archaeological sites.⁹⁰

Aside from the planning and register nominations, the Park Service



Fig. 7.3. The Duck House was listed on the National Register in 1984, but an unidentified illegal camper burned it down a few years later.

faced a difficult task in maintaining the cultural resources on the island. From 1980 through 1994 most of the structures received some maintenance. At Dungeness seashore workers, Youth Conservation Corps volunteers, U.S. Navy Seabees, and contractors hired for specific jobs restored and remodeled the carriage house, dairy manager's house, carpenter shop, ice house, and one of the dormitories for adaptive use. They also repainted and reroofed other buildings at Dungeness and Plum Orchard. The Park Service rebuilt all the government docks and restored several seawalls as well. After a line-item appropriation of \$800,000 for historic maintenance in fiscal year 1981, Plum Orchard received extensive rehabilitation. Almost every year thereafter the mansion received further attention. In addition, landscape clearing, especially at Dungeness, removed encroaching vegetation from the many historic buildings.⁹¹

Despite this program, annual inspections showed that the Park Service was falling behind. A briefing statement in January 1988 reported:

Some of the cultural resources at Cumberland Island have received attention in the last few years, but there are still many unmet needs in this area. Our ongoing monitoring program has revealed that National Register-listed archaeological sites on the west side of the island are being eroded by wave action to the point that substantial cultural material is beginning to be lost. Other sites suffer from wind erosion and damage caused by an exotic animal species, the armadillo. The curatorial collections on the island include about 15,000 uncataloged objects ranging from furnishings to architectural ele-

ments to prehistoric artifacts, scattered through a variety of substandard storage areas. Cataloging these objects and providing safe storage for them remains a pressing need. Most of the 74 [at that time] historic structures on the island need some sort of work to slow their progressing decay, though some work has been done on Plum Orchard, the old Carnegie mansion. . . . No NPS monies are currently available to restore the interior of Plum Orchard so a local friends group is trying to raise money to restore the house room by room.⁹²

The retained-rights estates on the island occasionally complicated resource protection. In the 1970s the Park Service removed a decaying and dangerous water tower from a retained estate held by Nancy Butler. A similar water tower at Stafford began to lean in 1982, and retained-right holder Franklin Foster requested that the Park Service remove it. Enmeshed in expensive repairs to Plum Orchard, the Park Service told Foster that maintenance of structures on reserved estates was the responsibility of the landholder. The Carnegie heir responded that the Park Service had done some work on a tabby wall on his estate, and he did not understand why it would not act now. The ensuing debate soon involved the regional solicitor, who informed Cumberland Island officials that unlike other agreements with the National Park Foundation, Foster's did not include a statement that he was responsible for the maintenance. In the end, the seashore staff not only had to remove the water tower but also had to fix the roof and replace 40 percent of the stucco on the Stafford mansion and instigate a continuing maintenance program for all the historic structures on the Stafford estate.⁹³

A more troubling question of historic preservation arose when Charles Hauser decided to renovate an old stable on the estate he rented. In 1983 he began to modify the building into a group of small rental apartments. During the course of the work, he bulldozed part of his estate to clear a vista for the new units. Although seashore personnel had questioned the regional office about the legitimacy of these actions, the issue blew up when agency archaeologist John Ehrenhard came upon the scene while on his way to another site. According to Ehrenhard, Hauser had pushed trees more than 150 years old plus other brush and a substantial amount of soil into the marsh. Ehrenhard entered the property and found that the cleared area included part of a known Indian midden as well as a foundation dating from the early plantation period.

A flurry of correspondence followed as Hauser filed a complaint about Ehrenhard's trespass, and seashore officials appealed to the regional solicitor.

tor for help. In this case, Hauser did not get his way. The retained-rights agreement with Thomas Johnston clearly spelled out the prohibition against the sort of commercial activity Hauser intended with his apartments. Furthermore, the Park Service determined that it could enter an estate and stop actions that were blatantly destructive to archaeological resources. Superintendent Morgan later wrote that Hauser “has been put on official notice that future action would put the life estate in jeopardy.”⁹⁴

Of all the buildings on Cumberland Island, the most difficult and expensive to maintain was the Plum Orchard mansion. By 1983 the 21,724-square-foot house suffered from leaks in the roof, old and potentially dangerous electrical wiring, and rapid deterioration of the cement plaster on the outer walls. The interior also needed rehabilitation, especially the wallpaper. The public tours of the house had been running for four years, and they too contributed to the problems. Rangers reported incidents of theft and petty vandalism. The cost of maintaining the big house could easily consume the bulk of the seashore’s historic preservation budget for a number of years.⁹⁵

On March 11, 1983, a group gathered on Cumberland Island to search for a long-term solution. The Park Service had secured a \$355,000 appropriation for the most necessary work that summer. However, everyone recognized that even this large amount was a mere Band-Aid. Several Carnegie heirs, other island residents, and historic preservation advocates joined Park Service officials from the seashore and the regional office. Conspicuously missing were environmentalists, although Jane Yarn had been invited. The star of the meeting was William Penn Mott, former director of California’s state park system and future director of the National Park Service. The California system included the gigantic William Randolph Hearst estate with its magnificent mansion at San Simeon. Hearst Castle had threatened to bankrupt the golden state’s park system until it was made into a lavish tourist site. According to Mott it netted \$500,000 profit per year for the California parks. Clearly he could give some advice on what to do to save Plum Orchard.⁹⁶

After some introductory discussion Mott took the floor and delivered a lengthy lecture on the island’s visitor carrying capacity, wilderness, historic resources, and the way things were done at Hearst Castle. He also introduced a number of interesting ideas to secure money for Plum Orchard’s maintenance. First, he suggested that a foundation be established to get around the bothersome bureaucracy that the Park Service had to follow.

Such a group could raise money and contract for repairs without going through the tedious bidding process. He also suggested that the foundation could hold a gala on the mansion grounds to attract donors. This had worked quite well at Hearst Castle. Finally, Mott suggested that the price to visit the house be raised substantially in order to keep the house in highest-quality condition. Only then would people pay to see it. As an afterthought he added that the Park Service needed to fight environmentalists who wanted to restrict visitor numbers both within and outside the wilderness.⁹⁷

The discussion that followed resurrected various ideas for using the mansion, including a lease to a corporation, a research facility, and a museum. Participants also raised a number of related questions. Access by boat or horse-drawn buggy was feasible for visitors but not for maintenance. Others, including Janet “GoGo” Ferguson of Greyfield, suggested that the limit on visitors needed to be raised, countering the island residents’ long insistence on keeping island visitation to an absolute minimum. Fred Storey, owner of the Point Peter land, thought that “the 300 limit could be varied and easily overcome.” However, Thornton Morris warned that increasing the visitor capacity to ensure more tourists at Plum Orchard would not be “politically expedient.” One island resident, Cindy McLauchlan, stressed that interpretation at the mansion must include all of the history of the area. To her, the island was “not a Carnegie shrine! . . . [There is] so much more here than just Carnegie.”⁹⁸

Everyone left the meeting with an enthusiastic sense of hope. The following September many of the same people gathered to form the Cumberland Island Historic Foundation. Soon many historic preservation officials joined along with more island residents and some environmentalists. The foundation began to seek money for repairs to the interior of the house while working with the seashore officials to compose a development concept plan (DCP) for the mansion.

The Park Service released its draft DCP for Plum Orchard in November 1984. Because the plan required a full NEPA process, the public had a chance to review the ideas for Plum Orchard. The Park Service proposed three alternatives. The agency preferred a plan to lease the mansion to a corporation or organization. Under this arrangement the lessee would assume the burden of maintenance costs while the government retained the right to bring visitors through the ground-floor rooms. Optimistic seashore planners even projected that the payments would help defray other historic preservation costs on the island. A second alternative called for the Park

Service to rehabilitate the house room by room as funds became available and keep the first two floors open for visitor tours. In the final option seashore officials would mothball the mansion until a more propitious time for leasing.⁹⁹

Coming on the heels of the contentious general management plan, the reaction to the Plum Orchard plan was subdued but nevertheless negative. Some who wrote opposed the preferred alternative because it would bring more people and cars into the wilderness and because visitors to Plum Orchard would count against the 300-per-day limit on island visitation. After this response, the Park Service reconsidered the options and soon cobbled together a new plan. It called for the agency to delay leasing the mansion until it became financially feasible, to perform minimum maintenance but no historic restoration unless unexpected funds became available, and to continue the very limited visitor tours. Seashore officials also decided to refurbish part of the house for a ranger residence in order to protect the property. In May 1995 the regional office issued a “finding of no significant impact” officially adopting the development concept plan.¹⁰⁰

Putting the house on low-maintenance hold shifted the burden of financing its rehabilitation to the Cumberland Island Historic Foundation. Many in the organization expressed concern over what appeared to be a dereliction of duty by the government. In response to their criticism, the Park Service repeatedly tried to explain how the mansion fit into the program of historic preservation in the region. Robert Baker told the foundation at one meeting: “There are some globally significant resources in the Southeast that are in danger of being destroyed. This group needs to understand on an overall basis what [the] NPS is trying to do—that is to preserve the cultural and natural fabric of America. I don’t think there is enough money on the face of the earth to do everything everyone would like to do in terms of preservation of natural and cultural resources for everyone’s interest.”¹⁰¹ What Baker left unsaid was that the Park Service classified the mansion as a building of only “local significance” while other parks in the Southeast Region contained scores of structures of national or even international importance.¹⁰²

The historical foundation began a two-pronged campaign to save the house. Acting upon Mott’s advice, the group held a “Plum Orchard Gala” at the mansion in 1988 that raised more than \$7,500. A second gala followed in 1989 and was called a success although it drew fewer people than the first one. Over the decade from 1984 to 1994, the Cumberland Island Historic

Foundation raised more than \$700,000 for the house and various out-buildings. At the same time, the Cumberland historical group refused to accept the Park Service's inaction. Various members approached major corporations like Coca-Cola seeking both donations and a potential lessee for the estate. In 1994 GoGo Ferguson led an effort to create a Carnegie-Cook Center for the Arts. This organization planned to secure funding from corporations and foundations to lease and refurbish Plum Orchard as a retreat for "education and research in the broad field of American fine and performing arts." Supported activities would include seminars, workshops, classes, and symposia as well as full support for artists in residence for specified periods of time.¹⁰³

The National Park Service, especially Superintendent Rolland Swain, enthusiastically greeted this proposal. The Carnegie-Cook group readily accepted the requirement that seashore visitors would still tour the first floor. In addition, the arts group agreed to restore the nearly disintegrated Plum Orchard carriage house for additional rooms. In turn it wanted permission to house 30 staff members and long-term guests plus bring over up to 300 additional people four times per year for colloquia and other meetings. Swain seemed amenable to excusing these operations from the 300-person visitor capacity. Finally, the Park Service seemed to have a solution to the emotion-charged Plum Orchard problem.¹⁰⁴

As 1995 began, the future for Cumberland Island National Seashore looked better than at any time in the past. The Park Service was established in St. Marys with several pieces of property and plans for plenty of office and parking space. New horse and fire management plans were in the review process while seashore officials were ready to fashion one for wilderness management. Seashore personnel and cooperating university scientists had established robust research and monitoring programs for coastal erosion, turtles, horses, bobcats, and many other elements of the natural resources. Park Service leaders in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., promised funds to eliminate pigs and control the horse population. The possibility of leasing the Plum Orchard mansion gave reason to hope that money might be freed to maintain the many other historic structures and archaeological sites. Perhaps most surprising, Andrew Rockefeller and the Fergusons at Greyfield expressed tentative interest in selling portions of their private lands to the Park Service.