National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Transportation Fact Sheet

Water-Based Transportation Systems

Access to and within the National Park System has been a defining experience for generations of visitors.

The National Park Service (NPS) coordinates the planning and implementation of transportation systems that improve the visitor experience and care for national parks by:

- Preserving natural and cultural resources.
- Enhancing visitor safety and security.
- Protecting plant and animal species.
- Reducing congestion.
- Decreasing pollution.

NPS is committed to being a leader in pursuing strategies that can help make park units more enjoyable, cleaner, quieter, and more sustainable for present and future generations.

For more information, visit **nps.gov/transportation**

Transportation Program
Mark Hartsoe, Coordinator
1201 Eye St. NW
Washington, DC 20005
202-513-7025
mark_h_hartsoe@nps.gov

National Park Service
Jonathan Jarvis, Director

U.S. Department of the Interior
Sally Jewell, Secretary

June 2009

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Many of the 300 million annual visitors to national park units arrive by ferries, canal boats, water taxis, small tour boats and other systems. There are currently 37 NPS units that offer some type of water-based transportation, eight of which are only accessible by water transportation.

What is the role of water-based transportation?
Water transportation alternatives improve visitor access to attractions inside NPS units and surrounding gateway communities. Many visitors come to enjoy the variety of water recreational opportunities that many NPS units provide, including fishing, boating, and swimming. Park staff can also use water transportation to provide interpretive tours and other educational services.

Water transportation alternatives help relieve traffic congestion in and around NPS units, offering visitors the option of leaving their cars behind. This helps lessen the number of vehicles on park and community roads. Water transportation also provides visitors the opportunity to enjoy the scenic beauty of NPS units from outside their personal vehicles.

Stewardship
As visitation to national park units increases, the resulting traffic congestion causes air and noise pollution, haze, and impacts to cultural and natural resources including dunes, beaches, marshes, and freshwater areas. Water-based transportation alternatives help further NPS sustainability efforts.

Water-based transportation systems provide access and protect air quality
NPS has taken positive steps to alleviate the problems of access and pollution emitted by cars by implementing water-based alternative transportation systems in the form of passenger ferries, water taxis, and canal boats at many parks. These include units for which water-based transportation is the sole mode of access, such as the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area in Massachusetts, and also other units for which ferries and other boats provide a more pleasant visitor experience and an environmentally-friendly alternative to car travel.

Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area

Water-based transportation systems

NPS units located near bodies of water have taken advantage of the opportunity to provide water-based transportation. These systems grant visitors the chance to explore remote units, many of which are otherwise inaccessible. Below are examples of just some of the 37 park units that benefit from these transportation alternatives.

Fort Sumter National Monument in South Carolina

Located in historic Charleston Harbor, Fort Sumter is the site of the beginning of the American Civil War. Ferries operate from the Fort Sumter Visitor Education Center, a new state-of-the-art facility located in downtown Charleston, as well as from the town of Mount Pleasant at Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum. Tours operate six times daily during peak season, and the 30-minute cruise through Charleston's historic harbor out to Fort Sumter is fully narrated.

A tour guide welcomes park visitors on the Fort Sumter ferry.

Ferries provide access to the "Guardian of the Gulf."

Dry Tortugas National Park in Florida

70 miles west of Key West lies a cluster of seven islands called the Dry Tortugas, best known for its famous bird and marine life, its legends of pirates and sunken gold, and its military past. Two operators provide daily ferry service to the park, and upon arrival visitors are treated to a guided tour and an opportunity to explore the park's amazing camping, snorkeling, birdwatching, and fishing opportunities.

Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area in Massachusetts

The Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area includes 30 islands located throughout Boston Harbor. Three islands have direct ferry service from five different locations along the mainland. An interisland shuttle provides access to four additional islands. There are over 15 different ranger-led tours to choose from, providing educational opportunities to visitors of all ages.

A successful federal/state/private partnership has led to the expansion of Boston Harbor Islands ferry service.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area in California

Golden Gate National Recreation Area has undertaken a water shuttle planning effort to assess the desirability of water access to park sites in San Francisco Bay. This effort is building upon past park plans for ferry service access and recent interest in increasing alternative access to park sites. A critical element of this planning effort is to link water-based transit service with future land transit service in the Bay Area. Currently, ferries operate to both Alcatraz and Angel Islands.

Alcatraz Island provides visitors a mix of cultural, military, and natural history.