Welcome

- Welcome to our public information sessions.
- We are preparing a plan that will guide seashore management over the long term.
- Your thoughts and ideas about the seashore’s future are important to us.
Congress established Assateague Island National Seashore in 1965 as a unit of the National Park System for the purposes of:

...protecting and developing Assateague Island in the states of Maryland and Virginia and certain adjacent waters and small marsh islands for public outdoor recreational use and enjoyment...
The Seashore

- 37 miles of island
- 50,000 acres in two states (Maryland and Virginia)
- boundary up to one-half mile of ocean/bay (less near Chincoteague)
- 2.2 million visitors (about 1.2 million in Chincoteague)
- includes Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge
- includes Assateague State Park
The Seashore’s Boundary

- established by legislation in 1965
- Federal Register Notice, in 1985, updated 1965 map
- clarified with metes and bounds
- boundary moves with island so it is never more than ½ mile from shore
- waters are “subject to the jurisdiction of the United States within... park units... without regard to ownership of the submerged lands (36 CFR 1.2(a)(3))
Virginia Regional Context

- Town of Chincoteague
- Wallops Flight Facility
- Navy Facilities
- VA Spaceport
- Refuge
- NPS-Operated Recreational Beach
All units of the National Park System have a General Management Plan.
Assateague Island’s first plan was completed 34 years ago and it is time to update it.

- Many plan recommendations have been implemented.
- Some recommendations were not implemented and are no longer relevant.
- Old issues have disappeared and new issues have emerged.
What will the seashore’s new GMP do?

Items addressed:

- how resources are managed
- what visitors experience and do
- what kinds of facilities are available
- how visitors get to and move around the seashore
- boundary adjustments
What will the seashore’s new GMP not do?

The new GMP will not:

- resolve all the issues
- provide details about how to manage resources
- provide detailed facility designs
- guarantee funding
How do we decide how to manage the seashore?

To make decisions about managing the seashore...

- We consider the natural forces that shape the island and the needs for protecting its resources.
- We consider what the public wants to have happen on the island.
- We cooperate with our partners who have a stake in the seashore’s future.
Our planning work began with developing a foundation statement, which is the first step in the GMP effort.

- The foundation statement reflects the seashore’s purpose, significance, fundamental resources and values, as well as interpretive themes.

- It helps keep the seashore’s management focused on what is most important about the seashore and the reasons why it was established as a national seashore.
Next, the planning team moved into an analysis of current resource conditions at the park, including:

- identification, mapping, and analysis of current conditions, and existing and potential future threats to the seashore
- gathering information on stakeholder interests, ideas, and suggestions from the public
- identification of data gaps related to the seashore’s fundamental resources and values
In the summer and fall of 2009, we met with you and asked for your ideas for the plan:

- Your comments helped us understand what was important to you and the scope of issues to be addressed in the plan.
What issues are we facing at the seashore?

- responding to natural coastal processes and the effects of climate change/sea level rise
- sustainability of traditional facilities and infrastructure, including vehicle access and need for alternative transportation
- backcountry management—protection of wilderness character
- unresolved legal issues with aquaculture and horseshoe crab harvest
- Chincoteague—plan adopts FWS CCP for beach recreation; climate change impacts to Chincoteague and Wallops
- concentrated recreation on the North End in Maryland
How could natural forces influence future protection and enjoyment of the seashore?

- Assateague Island is a barrier island that extends 37 miles along the coast.
- It is a highly dynamic place in a state of constant change.
- Most climate change models suggest that the island will become much more dynamic over the next few decades.
- A more dynamic island will make it more difficult to maintain traditional recreation access.
- Managers must prepare today for that event.
How does the GMP respond to possible impacts of climate change/sea level rise?

Most of this GMP is about how to manage for island movement and sea level rise in the Maryland portion of the seashore.

The planning team agreed that we must set the stage for future managers to deal with climate change by:

- transitioning to sustainable and limited infrastructure on the island
- preparing to provide alternative access
- preparing to move unsustainable infrastructure to the mainland
- preparing for when the island is breached
What will the seashore be like in years to come?

The new plan describes...

- how park managers will respond to dynamic natural forces that shape the seashore
- how resources will be protected
- how visitors will experience the seashore
- how visitors will travel to and around the seashore
What alternatives are we considering?

We are considering four alternatives for managing the seashore in the future...

1. continuing what we do today
2. maintaining traditional beach recreation
3. sustaining recreation while adapting to climate change
4. letting the seashore evolve naturally with a more primitive island experience
Alternative 1 – Continuation of Current Management

Main Ideas

- traditional beach recreation continues
- access by private vehicle continues – parking demand exceeds capacity on peak days
- driving on beach continues within existing OSV zone (access subject to beach conditions) (KM 16 to KM 35)
- no planning for if and when road access is lost
- uncertain response to breaches and/or new inlet formation
- high risk from storm damage
Alternatives 2, 3 and 4
What is common to the action alternatives that is of interest to Virginia?

- GMP adopts USFWS CCP action on relocation of recreational beach
- work with partners and MACRI to ensure resiliency of Assateague, Chincoteague and Wallops Islands
- develop breach management plan to guide NPS response to future breaches on NPS owned land
- prepare updated wilderness study to address changing conditions and content of management
How does the GMP address aquaculture and Horseshoe Crab Harvest?

**Background**

- as noted in the seashore’s recent *Ethnographic Overview and Assessment*:

  “No enterprise better represents Assateague Island and its waters than does the fishing industry. The traditions of ‘watermen’ and their communities provide the thread for associations that run through the generations.”

- aquaculture history dates to 1860s, with leasing to the turn of the 20th century

- seashore’s boundary includes ocean and bay waters that have been used for generations by watermen
Commercial Shellfishing

Public Law 89-195:

“Provided, That nothing in sections 459f to 459 f-11 of this title, shall limit or interfere with the authority of the States to permit or to regulate shellfishing in any waters included in the national seashore:”
Aquaculture

- Commercial aquaculture is considered “agriculture”
- Plan recommends allowing commercial aquaculture in VA under the historic scene exemption of 36 CFR 2.60(3)b by issuing a special use permit to the Commonwealth of Virginia VMRC.
- Aquaculture permittees should see no difference in permit management.
Horseshoe Crab Harvest

- Horseshoe crabs are arachnids, not crustaceans.
- Therefore, they are wildlife and their harvest is prohibited in national parks (36 CFR 2.2).
- Wind down this use over time.
Commercial Finfishing

- GMP does not consider commercial finfishing.
- No action will be taken by NPS.
- Commercial finfishing will continue as it always has.
What else is common to the alternatives 2, 3 and 4?

- continuation of North End Restoration Project (Sand Bypass)
- Maryland entrance station relocated to mainland (operated as a joint ASIS/Assateague State Park facility) (requires state legislation)
- Maryland visitor capacity limit set at parking capacity—when island parking capacity reached, no additional vehicles; new motor vehicle based alternative transportation (ATS) facilities and infrastructure for use when parking is exceeded
- additional housing for seasonal employees in Maryland and/or Virginia
Alternative 2 – Concentrated Traditional Beach Recreation

Main Ideas

- traditional beach recreation concentrated within a high density developed area accessible by private vehicle
- move sand—dune stabilization, habitat manipulation, and possibly beach nourishment, as needed, to protect developed area for as long as possible
- over time, developed area shrinks due to accelerated sea level rise and greater storm intensity
- property acquired for development of alternative transportation parking in the general vicinity of seashore headquarters
- high density visitor use at the north end of the island not allowed
- shortened OSV Zone
Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

The preferred alternative would expand opportunities for sustainable recreational use of the seashore while preparing for and adapting to climate change over an extended period of time.
Alternative 3 – Sustainable Recreation and Climate Change Adaptation (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

Main Ideas

- decisions regarding visitor access and facility development emphasize sustainability in the context of barrier island processes and climate change

- over time, visitor use infrastructure evolves to more sustainable designs and likely shifts to new, or stable locations both on and off island, depending upon the magnitude of changes

- property acquired to expand mainland developed zone (for relocation of the administrative complex and to allow space for alternative transportation parking) (and possibly a ferry terminal to be operated as a concession)
Main Ideas (continued)

- OSV use managed for maximum flexibility—options include area closures, special seasons, variable density limits, and seasonal closures
- 1 to 3 new points of departure on mainland to support water-based access to the island (including property acquisition)
- 1 to 3 new bayside access points to the island
- North End use allowed only with docking permit
- Support for partner efforts to acquire conservation easements and other legal interests in land within the Chincoteague Bay watershed (to protect water quality and to enhance coastal resilience)
Alternative 4 – Natural Island Evolution and a Primitive Island Experience

Main Ideas

- continued visitor use of existing facilities and infrastructure until such time as they are lost and/or damaged by coastal processes
- lost facilities either not replaced or minimally replaced with sustainable substitutes
- visitor use becomes almost entirely limited to day-use activities, although some primitive camping remains available
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