

Fire Island

NATIONAL SEASHORE • NEW YORK

For your safety, swim at protected beaches. Watch your children at boat landings and the beach.

Please wear footgear on all boardwalks. Splinters are the most common first aid problem.

Watch for poison ivy, easily identified by its clusters of three leaves, and common everywhere on the island. Be careful not to touch any part of the plant.

The sea and the land gave birth to this island; wind and waves shaped the sand into beach and dunes. Then the wild things—plants and animals—came to live. Today, of all the coastline around New York City, Fire Island alone remains relatively wild, roadless, and isolated.

Some say that many years ago islanders built huge fires here, either to warn ships or to lure them aground for looting. Others say whalers built fires to render blubber, extracting precious oil from the fat. However, the favorite story of how Fire Island was named tells of a myopic clerk in a tax office who copied—in error—the original name of “Five Islands.”

THE ISLAND SCENE

Here are miles of beach, wind-twisted pines, and a patchwork of seaside plant communities spread over the rolling swales and knolls of the interdune lands. Hidden hardwood groves take visitors by surprise. Long-legged herons stiffly stalk in grassy wetlands; wild geese and brant fly over the salt marsh; and occasionally a startled deer dashes off through tangled thickets.

Fire Island National Seashore is something more than the usual public beach. Here you have a chance to explore a scene formed by nature, rather than by man. The undeveloped portions of the island will give your children the opportunity to see a remnant of the unspoiled seashore that our fathers saw. To help preserve this valuable resource for all to enjoy forever, please do not disturb, remove, or destroy any plants, protected animals, or other natural objects. Above all, do not walk on the dunes; their fragile vegetation is easily destroyed by human feet.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

You may enjoy fishing, clamming, swimming in the surf, strolling through Sunken Forest, or leisurely walking along the beach. Guided nature walks are offered in summer. Talks are presented many evenings at Watch Hill and Sailors Haven. Ask a park ranger about these activities.

Facilities at the Sailors Haven facility include a marina, guarded swimming beach, ferry terminal, snack bar, visitor center with information and exhibits, picnic area, nature trail, interpretive activities, restrooms, change rooms and showers, pay phone, and dog walk area. Similar facilities are available at the Watch Hill facility, as is a 20-unit campground (reservations required). The Smith Point West facility features a small visitor center with information and exhibits, interpretive activities, and a nature trail.

NATURAL HISTORY

The barrier beach of Fire Island, extending 32 miles from Democrat Point on the west to Moriches Inlet on the east, serves as a storm buffer for Long Island communities. On the Atlantic shore the beach is naturally wide. Fine-grained quartz sand is dominant. Beds of dark red garnet and black magnetite sand form as wind and waves sort these heavier particles.

The plant communities of the barrier beach are especially important. They alone hold the sand against erosion by wind and water. Beach grass, beach plum, wild rose, and poison ivy are plants of the dunes. The fine maritime Sunken Forest thrives immediately west of Sailors Haven. Here picturesquely gnarled holly, sassafras, red maple, and shadblow form the forest canopy, and vines of catbrier, poison ivy, and wild grape climb from the forest floor toward the sun.

The marsh is a habitat for birds and other animals. Rose mallow blossoms in August; stands of the giant reed, *Phragmites*, dwarf other marsh plants.

Wildlife abounds at this national seashore. In the surf, you can cast for striped bass, bluefish, mackerel, weakfish, and fluke. Great South Bay has bluefish, striped bass, winter flounder, kingfish, weakfish, and many others. The bay is also famous for clams and scallops.

The protected waters hold rafts of waterfowl during migration in spring and autumn. Small populations of ducks and geese remain and nest here, and common and least terns form nesting colonies on sandy, barren islands and on sandspits. Black-crowned night herons—called “quawks” by old-timers—startle visitors who sit pensively watching lights twinkle on and across Great South Bay.

In the shelter of darkness, whitetail deer and red foxes, cottontails, and other small mammals are active. Wander away from other visitors and explore this barrier beach—you will find beauty in the wildness of the natural scene.

PLEASE LEAVE THE WILDFLOWERS FOR OTHERS TO ENJOY. Do not disturb, remove, or destroy any plants, animals, or other natural objects. And most important of all, do not walk on the dunes. The fragile vegetation protects the existence of the entire island.

WHAT IS A NATIONAL SEASHORE?

As a unit of the National Park System, a national seashore possesses outstanding qualities of natural history and opportunity for recreation. In the case of Fire Island, the President signed a bill authorizing the purchase of lands so that these outstanding natural features and recreational values will be protected. The National Park Service, under the U.S. Department of the Interior, is responsible for managing the seashore to meet these objectives.

A superintendent, whose address is 120 Laurel Street, Patchogue, NY 11772, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.



