

Cape Lookout National Seashore

Amendment to
General Management Plan
and Environmental Assessment
2001

Amendment to General Management Plan Environmental Assessment

Cape Lookout National Seashore

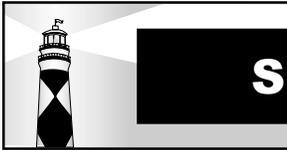
ABSTRACT

The goal of this general management plan amendment is to improve overnight accommodations and transportation services to persons visiting North Core Banks (excluding the Portsmouth Island area) and South Core Banks at Cape Lookout National Seashore. The amendment analyzes a broad range of possible alternative actions and recommends one for implementation. The scope of this amendment encompasses only changes to the current general management plan relative to providing improved overnight accommodation and transportation services to the areas previously noted.

An environmental assessment accompanying the amendment analyzes the effects of the preferred alternative and its alternatives. A Finding of No Significant Impact is attached and serves as the approval document for the amendment and the environmental assessment.

Generally, the National Park Service (NPS) prepares general management plans for units of the National Park System upon establishment and then every 15 to 20 years or sooner if warranted. The NPS expects to develop a new general management plan for Cape Lookout National Seashore within 5 to 7 years.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Southeast Regional Office



Summary

This general management plan amendment examines a range of alternative actions intended to improve overnight accommodation and transportation services for persons visiting North Core Banks (excluding the Portsmouth area) and South Core Banks. The purpose of the amendment is to select and recommend for implementation a preferred action that most improves visitor services while continuing to preserve and protect the seashore's natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

After soliciting input from various Federal/State/local government representatives, organized interest groups, and concerned individuals, four alternative concepts were developed for more detailed public discussion. Of the four alternatives considered, two were identified as viable options for further consideration.

The two viable options were further evaluated by the NPS with careful consideration given to any additional information and recommendations provided during the initial review period. Based on the general management plan (GMP) amendment issues developed during the public participation process, a comparison of the two viable alternatives to a continuation of existing conditions was used to select a preferred plan for implementation.

In summary, the preferred plan is:

1. Negotiate long-term contracts with concessionaires to transport visitors and vehicles from the towns of Davis, North Carolina and Atlantic, North Carolina to Great Island and Long Point, both sites on the Core Banks, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina.
2. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing 30 new cabins.
3. Add 10 new cabins at Long Point.
4. Improve Individual Business Permit (IBP) relationships by issuing biennial IBPs to small craft operators that provide transport services to visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.
5. The number of parking spaces near the Keeper's Quarters would be reduced.

The NPS proposes one alternative plan. In summary, the alternative plan is:

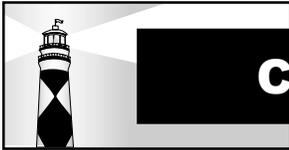
1. Negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point.
2. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island, constructing new 30 units, of which 10 units would be rustic with communal baths;
3. Adding 10 rustic lodging units with communal baths at Long Point; and
4. Improve IBP relationship and issue annual IBPs to small craft operators to provide transport services for visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.
5. The number of parking spaces near the Keeper's Quarters would be reduced. At Long Point and Great Island reduce number of parking spaces from 60 down to 30 during primary nesting/hatchling season.

The Alternative Plan differs from the Preferred Plan in that the 10 units at Long Point would be rustic with communal baths; 10 of the 30 Units at Great Island would be rustic with communal baths; only 30 parking spaces would be available for parking at Long Point and Great Island during the primary turtle and plover nesting/hatchling period; and IBPs would be issued annually instead of biannually.

An Environmental Assessment was undertaken concurrently during this planning process to initiate the administrative processes required by the National Environmental Policy Act and to provide evidence and analysis for determining the path of environmental compliance for the proposed actions.

Environmental impacts to the natural and cultural environments of the national seashore resulting from implementation of either the preferred or alternative plans are anticipated to be insignificant. Under both plans, an emphasis would be placed on monitoring the effects of visitors and visitor use patterns on threatened and endangered species and their habitat and increasing visitor awareness of the island's special resources. Scheduling construction would in part be based upon NPS monitoring and study of ORVs and human interference on these species.

The Environmental Assessment also introduced a no action alternative and assessed the effects of taking "no action".



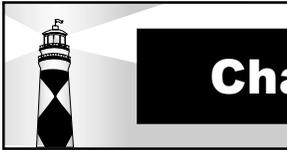
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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SEASHORE

Located 3 miles off the mainland coast and occupying more than 29,000 acres of land and water, Cape Lookout National Seashore protects one of the few remaining natural coastal barrier island systems in the world. While people historically used the barrier islands of the national seashore in many ways, the harsh maritime environment discouraged extensive settling of the area. As a result of its relative isolation, much of the islands' natural environment and ecosystems remain intact and undisturbed.

The barrier islands of Cape Lookout National Seashore are among the most dynamic in the United States. Storm waves periodically sweep over the landscape and are a dominant force in shaping and maintaining their characteristic low profile. A variety of closely associated plant and animal communities exist here and form a unique barrier island ecosystem. Native grasslands located at the national seashore comprise the only remaining natural grasslands in the eastern United States. Cape Lookout National Seashore is part of the northernmost nesting range of the loggerhead turtle — a marine turtle included on the Federal List of Endangered Species. The national seashore also provides the southernmost nesting range for the federally listed piping plover (Rare nesting events occurred in South Carolina in 1991 and 1993). In addition, small populations of the endangered seabach amaranth grow in suitable habitat and conditions within the national seashore.

Excellent opportunities for fishing, shellfishing, hunting, beachcombing, hiking, swimming, and camping in a remote setting are found at Cape Lookout National Seashore. No bridges link the islands to the mainland and overnight accommodations are limited and rustic in nature. Two concessionaire-operated ferries transport visitors, fishermen, and their vehicles to the Core Banks. Small craft operators from Harkers Island bring visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Many day users and campers use personal boats to reach the national seashore. Other operators leave from Beaufort and Moorehead City. Another service travels between Ocracoke and Portsmouth Island.

Thousands of visitors cross the sound annually to walk the beaches and view the Cape Lookout Lighthouse. The lighthouse, which was constructed in 1859, a summer kitchen, keeper's quarters, coal storage building, and woodshed comprise a historic lighthouse complex that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

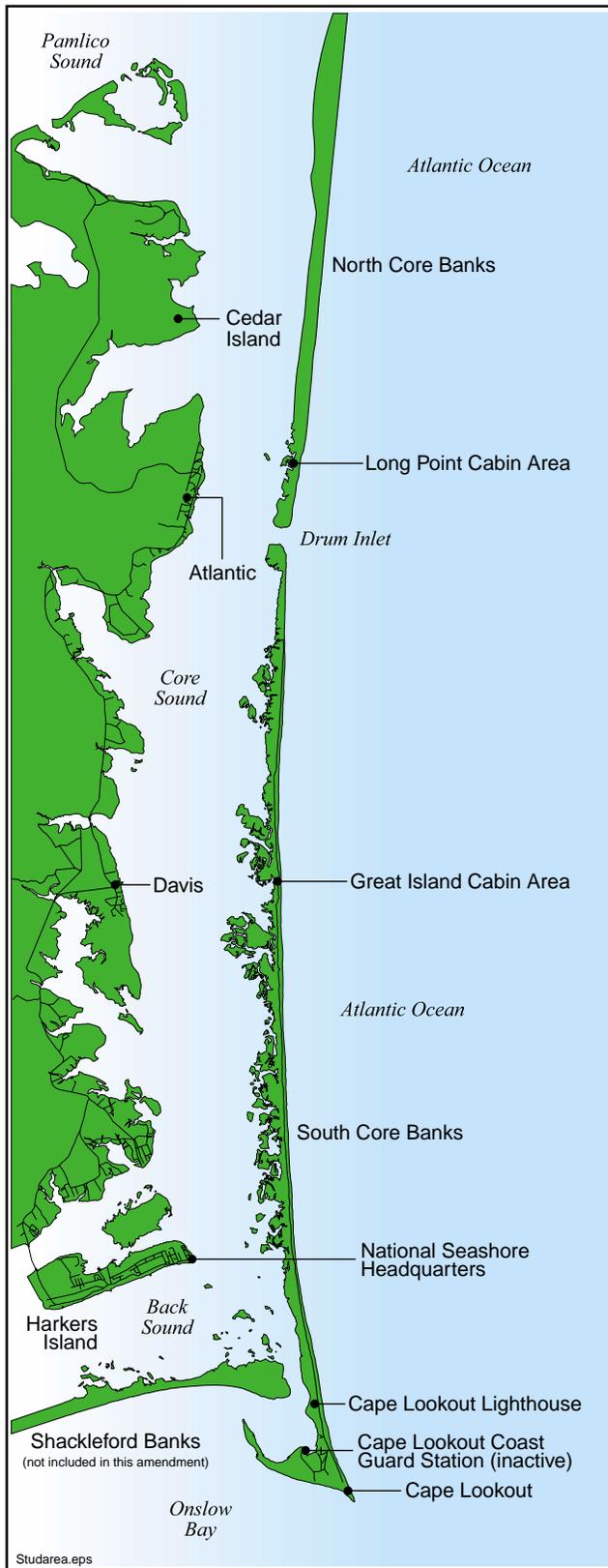
The popularity of the Core Banks as a surf fishing destination precedes establishment of the national seashore by many generations. Hundreds of fishing enthusiasts return each year to fish more than 50 miles of uninterrupted shoreline. Heavy surf fishing activity traditionally occurs during the spring and fall months. Fishermen staying in their own vehicles or in cabins at Great Island and Long Point follow fish migrating along the length of the Core Banks.

Prior to the establishment of the national seashore, clusters of fishing shacks existed and vehicles were driven extensively over the islands. Typically, vehicles that broke down on the islands were abandoned in place. At the time the national seashore was established, over 2,500 abandoned vehicles cluttered the island landscapes. NPS sponsored cleanup efforts have removed nearly all abandoned vehicles over the past several years. The few abandoned vehicles that remain are buried under drifts of sand and visually unobtrusive.

Before the park was established, fishermen constructed more than 400 makeshift cabins and shelters on the barrier islands. Most of these structures were intended to serve only as seasonal fishing shelters and were of questionable structural integrity and safety. Since the creation of the national seashore, all but 25 of the original 400 structures were removed. The 25 remaining cabins are located in a 163-acre area at Great Island on the South Core Banks and, while representing the best of the original cabins structures, are considered of substandard quality by NPS.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARK

Public Law 89-366 (the Act of March 10, 1966) authorized the establishment of Cape Lookout National Seashore "to preserve for public use and enjoyment an area in the State of



Area Map for General Management Plan Amendment

North Carolina possessing outstanding natural and recreation values.” This enabling legislation defined the national seashore to include the outer Banks of Carteret County, North Carolina, between Ocracoke Inlet and Beaufort Inlet, plus adjoining marshlands and waters. A 1974-amendment to Public Law 89-366 authorized the establishment of an administrative site on Harkers Island and NPS rehabilitated the old motel into a headquarters and visitor center at its present location in 1993.

The national seashore includes within its boundaries: (1) the administrative site on the east end of Harkers Island; (2) Shackleford Banks; (3) the Core Banks divided into northern and southern barrier islands by Drum Inlet; (4) scores of small islands; and (5) waters including Core Sound, Back Sound, Pamlico Sound, and the Atlantic Ocean.

MISSION GOALS

Each unit of the National Park System develops mission goals based on those of the National Park Service. The national seashore’s goals enable the staff to focus its activities and resources. Under the general category of “Preserve Park Resources,” the national seashore has developed the following mission goals:

Natural and cultural resources and associated values are protected, restored, and maintained in good condition and managed within their broader ecosystem and cultural context. This goal includes natural and cultural resources at the national seashore. Long-term goals relate to protecting, restoring and maintaining natural areas, threatened and endangered species, archeological sites, historic structures and objects.

Cape Lookout National Seashore contributes to knowledge about natural and cultural resources and associated values; management decisions about resources and visitors are based on adequate scholarly and scientific information. Park managers must be able to use scholarly and scientific information to ensure that decisions that are made will not adversely affect the national seashore’s resources.

Under the general category of “Provide for Public Enjoyment and Visitor Experience,” the national seashore has developed the following mission goals:

Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with the availability, accessibility, diversity, and quality of Cape Lookout’s facilities, services, and appropriate recreational opportunities. Visitors must be able to enjoy and experience Cape Lookout National Seashore safely. Accessibility for special popula-

tions must be provided, where appropriate. Diversity and quality of the national seashore's facilities, services and recreational opportunities must be considered for all visitors without being harmful to park resources or inconsistent with the national seashore's purpose and philosophy.

Park visitors and the general public understand and appreciate the preservation of Cape Lookout National Seashore and its resources for this and future generations. The national seashore's visitor's experience is enhanced from a better understanding of the purpose of the seashore and appreciation of what makes the park special. In addition, park neighbors in surrounding communities understand and appreciate the preservation of the national seashore's resources for this and future generations.



Chapter Two

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

This general management plan amendment examines a range of alternative actions intended to improve overnight accommodation and transportation services for persons visiting North Core Banks (excluding the Portsmouth Island area) and South Core Banks. The purpose of the amendment is to select and recommend for implementation a preferred alternative action that most improves visitor services while continuing to preserve and protect the seashore's natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

The focus of this amendment will only address potential changes to the current general management plan relevant to overnight accommodations and transportation services at the areas previously noted. Generally, NPS prepares general management plans for units of the National Park System upon establishment and then every 15 to 20 years or sooner if warranted. NPS expects to develop a new general management plan for Cape Lookout National Seashore within 5 to 7 years.

NEED FOR A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT

For the past 16 years, NPS has managed Cape Lookout National Seashore according to recommendations made in the 1982 general management plan (1982 GMP). This plan, which was subject to extensive public review and comment at the time of its preparation, outlines actions to address natural and cultural resource protection and recreational use of the seashore. NPS recognizes that the 1982 GMP is nearing the end of its projected life span. While weaknesses in the 1982 GMP have developed over time, the basic concepts of the document are sufficient to guide the management of the park until a new general management plan is completed.

While conditions within the boundary of the national seashore have changed little since the preparation of the 1982 GMP, external influences such as population growth, development trends in neighboring communities, increased visitation to the park, local and regional economic trends, and changes in NPS policy affecting park concession contracts

have significantly influenced how overnight accommodations and transportation services are provided at the park. Given the importance of these services to the park's mission and the need to be responsive to the concerns of its visitors and concessioners, NPS has decided to address these issues by amending the existing GMP rather than waiting until it prepares a new GMP.

Visitor Use Patterns

Visitation to the national seashore has risen noticeably since the park was established. In 1976, approximately 27,000 people visited the park. In 1986, over 100,000 visitors were counted. By 1996, the number of visitors to the national seashore climbed to 380,000. NPS attributes a large percentage of this increase to day-use activities in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Most day-use visitation occurs during the summer months. On particularly busy summer weekends, park staff has observed over one hundred boats anchored in the sound near the lighthouse.

Summer occupancy of cabins has risen nearly 25 percent over the past three years at the Long Point location, while the numbers at the Great Island location have remained fairly constant. The increase in occupancy at Long Point may be attributed to the upgraded facilities. Although Long Point cabins are in no way "deluxe," they do appeal to a wider variety of park visitors who are not willing to stay in less accommodating cabins at Great Island.

Concession Operations

The 1982 GMP authorized a concession operation to provide passenger ferry service from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. NPS issued a concession permit to operate a ferry from the Harkers Island headquarters in 1978. In 1990, that concession permit was not renewed and several small ferry companies were issued Incidental Business Permits to provide interim small boat service to the lighthouse area.

The 1982 GMP also authorized a concession operation to service the Great Island area (located midway on the South Core Banks) and the Long Point area (located on the North

Core Banks) with passenger and vehicle ferry service and overnight accommodations. At the present time, two independent concessioners transport visitors and vehicles to these areas and manage and maintain cabin facilities at each site.

Concession permits/contracts for ferry and cabin operations at Great Island and Long Point expired in 1990. NPS policy regarding long-term concession contracts underwent an extensive review and updating process from 1991 through 1998. During this period of review, all long-term concessioner permits/contracts at Cape Lookout National Seashore were renewed annually or biannually in anticipation of the revised regulations. Now that new NPS policy governing long-term contracts has been issued, Cape Lookout National Seashore would like to negotiate new long-term concession contracts for the ferry and cabin operations. NPS believes that a long-term contract would improve visitor services by enabling concessioners to make needed capital investments in their accommodation and transportation operations and still have a reasonable opportunity to profit.

Description of Long Point facilities

On the North Core Banks, NPS constructed 6 new duplexes containing 12 units in 1995 with funds obtained as a result of a devastating storm. These new cabins supplement four octagonal buildings constructed in the mid-1980s. Additional support facilities have been constructed or refurbished over the years. These facilities include (1) ferryboat docks, shelters, and orientation areas; (2) enclosed camping shelters; and (3) comfort stations. The 1982 GMP authorized the construction of 20 enclosed camping shelters at Long Point, which were never built.

One parking area accommodating approximately 60 vehicles is located adjacent to the cabin area and is full for most of the year. Fishermen often leave their vehicles or campers on the island from April to December.

Description of Great Island facilities

On the South Core Banks, NPS removed all but 25 of the makeshift cabins. Additional support facilities have been constructed or refurbished over the years. These facilities include (1) ferryboat docks, shelters, and orientation areas; (2) enclosed camping shelters; and (3) comfort stations. The 1982 GMP authorized the construction of 20 enclosed camping shelters at Great Island, which were never built.

One parking area accommodating approximately 60 vehicles is located adjacent to the cabin area and is full for most of the year. Fishermen often leave their vehicles or campers on the island from April to December.

Description of Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area facilities

Two parking areas accommodating approximately 60 vehicles each are located in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. These parking areas typically receive little long-term use. Passengers arriving in the commercially operated small craft disembark at a dock just north of the lighthouse.

Endangered species

One avian species (pipin plover) and one plant species (sea beach amaranth) found at Cape Lookout National Seashore were added to the Federal list of threatened and endangered species after the 1982 GMP was completed. Thus the 1982 plan did not assess the affects of its actions on these species and their habitat nor could it recommend actions to monitor the species. As a result, the present planning process must rely on other NPS efforts to assess the affects of proposed actions on the pipin plover and seabeach amaranth. The planning process must also depend upon subsequent efforts to protect and assess affects on the loggerhead turtle.

The national seashore provides the southernmost nesting range of the pipin plover (*Charadrius melodus*). Pipin plovers nest and hatch their young on the Core Banks and are normally present from May through the end of August. They migrate through the park. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of designating critical habitat for wintering pipin plovers. The seabeach amaranth (*Amaranthus pumilus*) presence is elusive but has been found on Shackleford Banks and in open sandy areas of the Core Banks. Along with the sea loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) that inhabit the beaches from late spring through the summer months, these species enjoy special status and NPS has been exercising its legal obligation to protect them and their habitat.

Issues

Following a series of meetings with Cape Lookout National Seashore staff, concessioners, local officials, various interest groups, and the general public, NPS identified the following specific issues to be addressed by the GMP amendment.

Issue 1. Cabin Standards and Cabin Use at Great Island

- All but 25 of the 400 makeshift cabins that existed prior to establishment of the park were removed shortly after the park was created. A concessioner rents 25 of those fishing cabins at Great Island. While the cabins represent the best of the privately constructed buildings, they do not meet current state building codes, Coastal Area Management Agency Act (CAMA) guidelines, and NPS health and safety standards.
- Are these the types of accommodations that should be located in a unit of the National Park System?
- If new cabins were constructed, would the non-fishing public use them during periods when fishing is less popular and cabin occupancy rates are traditionally low?
- What is the feasibility of locating new infrastructure for the cabins (water, sewer, gas, and electricity)?
- Can cabins be constructed to take advantage of prevailing winds and minimize adverse impacts of overwash on water and sewage systems?

Issue 2. Location of Cabins

Cabins are located at the Long Point cabin area on the North Core Banks and at the Great Island cabin area on the South Core Banks.

- Are these the most appropriate locations for permanent accommodations on the Core Banks?
- Are visitors best served and resources best protected by having cabins at these two locations?
- Are there alternative locations that would serve the park visitor better while providing the required level of resource protection?

Issue 3. Location of ferry concession operations

Currently, concessioners provide ferry service for passengers and vehicles to the Core Banks from two locations: Atlantic and Davis.

- Are park visitors best served from these locations?
- Is information sufficiently visible at the present locations to inform park visitors that they are departing from NPS-sanctioned areas?
- Are there alternative places to serve as embarkation points?
- Do the present disembarkation points adequately serve the park visitor?

- Are there alternative locations that would accommodate ferries?
- Would they provide a better experience for visitors?

Issue 4. Incidental Business Permits

Presently, small craft operators, holding Incidental Business Permits, bring day-use visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area of South Core Banks.

- Should this service continue its present arrangement or should a concessioner provide this service?

Issue 5. Changing visitor use patterns

The visitor experience on the Core Banks generally consists of spring and autumn surf fishing, year-round day use in the vicinity of the lighthouse, and a growing summertime use of the cabins.

- Has the pattern of visitor use changed since the 1982 GMP?
- Do facilities on the island adequately meet the needs of the visitor?

Issue 6. Long-term parking for recreational vehicles

Many surf fishermen bring their campers and vehicles at the beginning of the spring fishing season and leave them at one of four NPS long-term parking areas until the end of the fall fishing season. NPS charges modest weekly fees for long-term parking.

- Should NPS continue to permit camper and vehicle storage?
- Does this long-term parking area adversely effect the visitor experience?

Issue 7. Conflicts between different user groups

Given the pattern and location of visitor use:

- Do conflicts occur among the various user groups?
- If cabin and dock locations on the Core Banks change, would conflicts be more likely to occur?

Issue 8. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on natural resources

- What are the effects of present and proposed use and development on natural resources (e.g., turtles

and their nesting habitat, shore birds such as the piping plover, dunes)?

- What steps can be taken to ensure adequate protection of natural resources while accommodating the needs of the visitor?

Issue 9. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on cultural resources

- What are the effects of present and proposed use and development on cultural resources (e.g., the historic zone near the lighthouse)?
- Do the existing cabins or any cultural landscapes associated with them possess potential historic significance?
- What steps can be taken to ensure adequate protection of cultural resources while accommodating the needs of the visitor?

Issue 10. Harkers Island Visitor Center

Most visitors travelling to cabin areas on North and South Core Banks do not visit the NPS visitor center on Harkers Island. NPS misses an opportunity to help visitors learn and understand more about the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the park because they have limited exposure to NPS personnel and programs.

- Can the visitor center play an increased role in telling the park story?
- Are the facilities at the visitor center adequate to serve as a parking and embarkation site for visitors going to the Core Banks?

Issue 11. Effect of proposed changes on park staff and resources

- What effect would any proposed change in visitor services and facilities have on park development, staff, and resources?



ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PREFERRED PLAN

OVERVIEW OF ALTERNATIVES

After soliciting input from various Federal/State/local government representatives, organized interest groups, and concerned individuals, four alternative concepts were developed for more detailed public discussion. Those alternatives are briefly summarized below:

Alternative 1

Relocate ferry operations to federally owned facilities at Cedar Island and Harkers Island. Construct ferry pier at one of three locations in Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from new facilities to Long Point and Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing new cabins at Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.

Alternative 2

Relocate ferry operations to federally owned facilities at Cedar Island and Harkers Island. Construct ferry pier at one of three locations in Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from new facilities to Long Point and Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing new cabins at Long Point, Great Island, and Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.

Alternative 3

Negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing additional new cabins at Long Point and new cabins at Great Island. Continue and improve IBP relationship with small craft operators that provide transport services to visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.

Alternative 4

Negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing new cabins with minimum amenities to preserve the traditional fish camp experience on Great Island. Continue and improve IBP relationship with small craft operators to provide transport services for visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.

DISCUSSION OF NON-FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVES

Of the four alternatives considered, only alternative 3 and alternative 4 were identified as viable options for further consideration. A more detailed analysis by NPS, in consultation with concerned public and private interest groups, indicated alternative 1 and alternative 2 were not feasible for the following reasons:

Both alternatives 1 and 2 would have located all or some of the cabins to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Locating cabins in this area would have concentrated visitor use and vehicles near areas designated for the protection of piping plovers and loggerhead turtles. The potential disturbance of these species and their nesting areas would increase because of the greater number of vehicles, lights from the cabins and vehicles, and increased pedestrian traffic.

Locating cabins in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area would have required the construction or rehabilitation of ferry docking sites. The monetary costs and potential environmental effects of such actions would have been substantial. Using the U.S. Coast Guard dock would have invoked a higher level of licensing and boat requirements for the concessioner because the ferry would have entered open waters instead of operating solely in the sound. An additional drawback to this option was the fact that loading and unloading vehicles at the U.S. Coast Guard dock during periods of heavy seas would have been an extremely difficult and potentially dangerous operation.

Similar disadvantages were identified for all three alternative locations selected as potential construction sites for new cabins. Those disadvantages included: creating a new disturbed area or enlarging an existing disturbed area, possible intrusion on the historic lighthouse scene, and susceptibility to overwash by being located in an inlet hazard area.

Visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area are generally day users and campers without vehicles. Introducing cabin occupants to this area could cause tensions between these different user groups. Potential conflicts could also occur between cabin users and children attending the Cape Lookout environmental education camp that is located in close proximity to all three proposed construction areas.

Unacceptable levels of traffic congestion on Harkers Island may arise if all ferry services leave from the national seashore headquarters building. Locating a vehicle ferry at the headquarters building may greatly complicate the potential traffic problem.

Both alternatives would have relocated the Long Point ferry operation from Atlantic to the Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge in Lola. While providing a base of operations at an existing Federal facility, the move would have engendered several problems including the construction of a ferry dock and dredging and maintaining a new channel in a sensitive environmental area. Furthermore, during periods of inclement weather, travel time between Lola and Long Point would increase to approximately 1.5 hours, significantly longer than the 40 to 45 minutes in normal conditions or from the Atlantic location. In addition, the mainland roadway connecting the Lola facility to the mainland floods occasionally and becomes impassable during severe weather. If required, visitors to Long Point may not be able to be evacuated to the mainland.

DISCUSSION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS, PREFERRED PLAN, AND ALTERNATIVE PLAN

The two remaining viable alternative concepts were further evaluated by NPS with careful consideration given to the information and recommendations provided by Federal/State/local governmental representatives, organized interest groups, and concerned individuals. Based on the GMP amendment issues developed during the public participation process, a comparison of the two viable alternatives to a continuation of existing conditions was used to select the preferred plan for implementation. The existing conditions

documents NPS assessment of how the national seashore operates at present and precedes the explanation of the preferred plan and the alternative plan.

A discussion of existing conditions, the preferred plan, and the alternative plan is presented in both narrative and graphic forms. The narrative portion of the discussion describes as many of the relative advantages and disadvantages of each management action as possible. For ease of understanding, management actions for the Long Point area (North Core Banks), Great Island area (South Core Banks), and Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area (South Core Banks) are discussed separately. In all instances, recommended actions strive to ensure the protection of the natural and cultural environment, including federally listed threatened and endangered species, while allowing appropriate levels and types of visitor use.

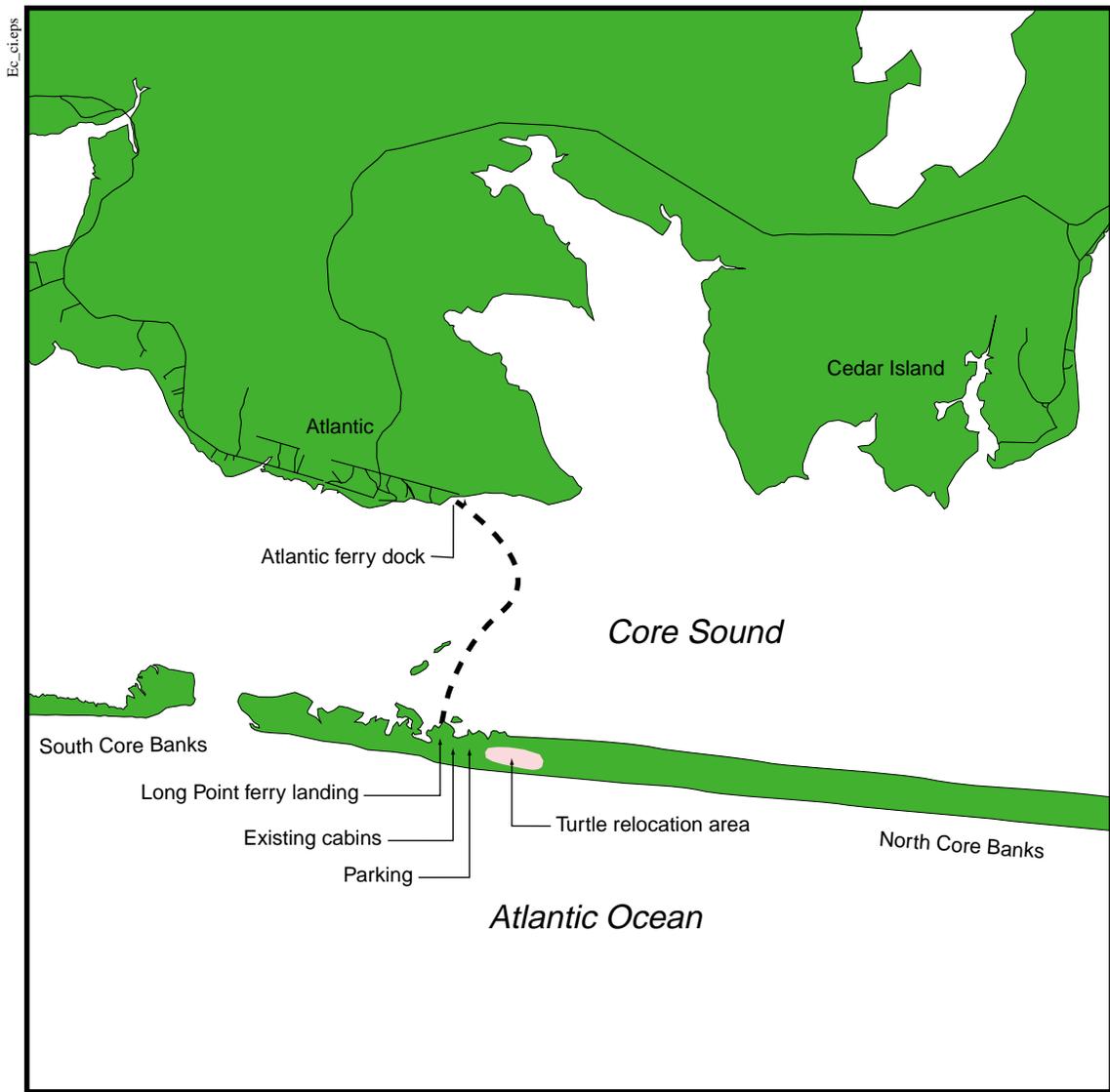
The preferred plan and the alternative plan represent different park management concepts designed to address the specific issues related to providing overnight accommodations and transportation services. The following descriptions are intended to: 1) describe a desired future condition that park administrators will strive to achieve and maintain over time and 2) recommend an array of management actions to promote those desired future conditions. The list of management actions identified for each alternative ranges from those that may be implemented immediately to those whose implementation can be phased in over time.

Existing Conditions

"Existing conditions" describe the current situation in regard to the delivery of overnight accommodations and transportation services. Concessioners, operating on short-term permits/contracts, transport overnight visitors to cabin locations and long-term vehicle storage areas on the Core Banks. Visitors depart from concessioner-run ferry operations in Atlantic and Davis and from several small boat ferry operations on the mainland. Overnight visitors are accommodated in cabins at Long Point or Great Island. Day-use visitors reach the Core Banks via small commercial craft or by private boat.

Long Point Area—North Core Banks

Visitors traveling to the North Core Banks depart the concession-operated facility in Atlantic. The current concessioner has been operating on a series of annual and biannual contracts since 1990. The facility at Atlantic consists of a ferry dock, gravel parking area, and a building containing an office, bar, restaurant game room, and outdoor restroom. The



Existing Conditions - Long Point Area

Atlantic departure location is well known to regular visitors and local citizens and is easily accessible from North Carolina Highway 70.

Most ferry users do not stop at NPS headquarters on Harkers Island before arriving at the departure location. Consequently, visitors often miss an important opportunity to learn and understand more about the natural and cultural resources of the national seashore. The concessioner can and has provided some background information to the uninformed visitor but, generally, cannot provide visitors with the quality interpretive experience commonly available at units of the National Park System.

The channel to the barrier islands is well established and dredging is normally not required. The channel is maintained at the 3-foot depth necessary to accommodate vehicle ferry by “kicking-out” built up sand and silt deposits with the engines of the boat. A one-way ferry trip usually takes approximately 45 minutes. The concessioner is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the ferry and the cabins. These normal Ferry operations are not a new activity and are referenced in the GMP.

The State of North Carolina applied and received a permit to dredge the channel into the Long Point cabin area. This is not a shorebird area. The Long Point cabin area is two miles from the closest piping plover area. The proposed dredge

disposal area is 90 feet long and could not stabilize the Core Banks and negate normal washover practices.

Between 1992 and 1997, the concessioner reports transporting between 10,000 to 12,000 visitors annually. Total visitation has risen approximately ten percent over the last six years. May, October, and November are the most popular months for surf fishing and thus the busiest for the ferry and cabin operations.

The ferry transports passengers to the Long Point dock from April through the end of November. Most ferry passengers are overnight visitors who occupy the cabins, stay in their own ORVs, or camp. Cabin occupants are typically fishermen who come to the area in large numbers during the spring and autumn fish migrations. However, construction of improved cabin units has encouraged many non-fishermen to stay overnight on the island when fishing is less popular. Most non-fishing visitors typically seek a remote beach experience away from the usual beach/hotel/resort experience found extensively along the North Carolina coastline.

The ferry transports vehicles to the barrier island for a fee of approximately \$80.00. Visitors who bring a vehicle to the island can leave it in a long-term parking area for the season. A 60-vehicle long-term parking area is located near the cabins. Vehicles must register with NPS and are subject to a weekly parking charge. Vehicles may remain on the island beginning in April and must be removed by December 31.

Many regular visitors transport ORVs or vehicle campers to the island. They typically use these vehicles for overnight accommodations and stay for periods ranging from several days to several weeks. The availability of long-term recreational vehicle parking provides a low-cost option for people who could not otherwise spend extended periods on the island.

Fishermen use their ORVs to travel up and down the shoreline in search of fish. ORVs must remain on designated transportation corridors that generally follow the beach below the high water mark and an unimproved route located behind the dunes. ORVs may traverse the dunes only at established crossings.

NPS, under the guidance of a wildlife management plan developed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, manages turtle and piping plover habitat. Piping plovers generally start nesting in late April or early May and chicks hatch into August. Turtles start nesting between late May and early August and have been known to hatch into October (nesting and relocation areas are indicated on the Existing Conditions map). NPS also collects data on the federally listed sea beach

amaranth. This species usually is found on Shackleford Banks or in the marsh areas of the Core Banks. NPS marks turtle nesting and relocation areas and piping plover nesting areas. NPS prohibits vehicle traffic in these protected areas. Generally, ORV operators respect these no entry zones although some vehicles enter and pose a threat to the species. In 12 years of monitoring piping plovers (since 1989), the NPS has not documented any piping plover chicks or adults or their nests being run over.

The departure dock at Atlantic and the landing dock at Long Point are in satisfactory condition and adequately serve the needs of the visitor. The infrastructure supporting the cabins at Long Point is sufficient to serve the occupants, however, some of the sewage holding tanks and drainage pipes need renovation.

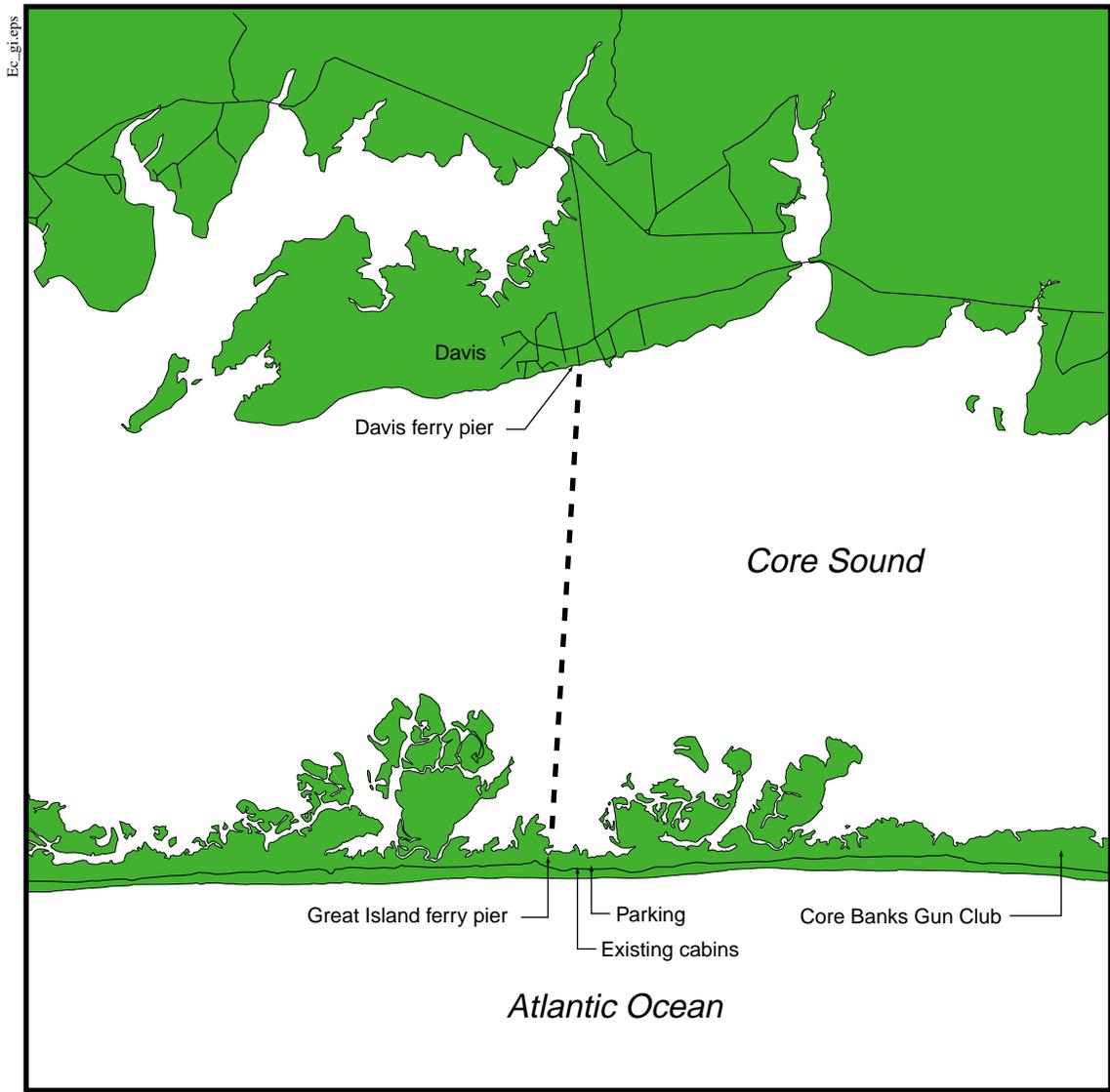
Desired improvements to departure and island facilities have been delayed because short-term contracts provide few incentives for the concessioner to invest capital in the operation. Upgrading of docks, parking areas, mainland office/restaurant structures, equipment, or cabin infrastructure must wait until a long-term contract is consummated.

Great Island Area—South Core Banks

Visitors traveling to the Great Island area of the South Core Banks depart the concession-operated facility in Davis. The Great Island area is located about midway along the South Core Banks. The concessioner has been operating on a series of annual and biennial permits since 1990. The facility at Davis consists of a ferry dock, gravel parking area, and an office/residence. Vehicles turn off North Carolina Highway 70 to a paved road to reach the Davis departure facility.

Most ferry users do not stop at NPS headquarters on Harkers Island before arriving at the departure location. Consequently, visitors often miss an important opportunity to learn and understand more about the natural and cultural resources of the national seashore. The concessioner can and does provide some background information to the uninformed visitor but, generally, cannot provide visitors with the quality interpretive experience commonly available at units of the National Park System.

The channel to the barrier islands is well established and dredging is normally not required. The channel is maintained at the 3-foot depth necessary to accommodate a vehicle ferry by “kicking-out” built up sand and silt deposits with the engines of the boat. A one-way ferry trip usually takes approximately 25 minutes. The concessioner is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the ferry and the cabins.



Existing Conditions - Great Island Area

Between 1992 and 1997, the concessioner reports transporting between 15,000 to 18,400 visitors annually. Total visitation has risen approximately 16 percent over the last six years. May, October, and November are the most popular months for surf fishing and thus the busiest for the ferry and cabins. NPS attributes the increase in cabin use to an upgrade of the structures. The concessioner and members of fishing clubs have worked diligently over the past several years to make the cabins more livable. However, the cabins as a whole fail to comply with State and Federal building, health, and safety codes. The cabins generally attract a specialized clientele (the surf fishing community) and are underutilized during periods when the fishing is slow. Cabin occupancy ranges from 10 to 20 percent during the “off-months.”

The ferry transports vehicles and passengers to the Great Island dock from April through the end of November (limited service is available in March and December). Most ferry passengers are overnight visitors who occupy the cabins, stay in their own ORVs, or camp. Cabin occupants are typically fishermen who come to the area in large numbers during the spring and autumn fish migrations. Most non-fishing visitors typically seek a remote beach experience away from the usual beach/hotel/resort experience found extensively along the North Carolina coastline.

The ferry transports vehicles to the barrier island for a fee of approximately \$80.00. Once on the barrier island, visitors stay at the cabin units at Island or in their ORVs. Visitors who

bring a vehicle to the island can leave it in a long-term parking area for the season. A 60-vehicle long-term parking area is located near the cabins. Vehicles must register with NPS and are subject to a weekly parking charge. Vehicles may remain on the island beginning in April and must be removed by December 31.

Many regular visitors transport ORVs or vehicle campers to the island. They typically use these vehicles for overnight accommodations and stay for periods ranging from several days to several weeks. The availability of long-term recreational vehicle parking provides a low-cost option for people who could not otherwise spend extended periods on the island.

Fishermen use their ORVs to travel up and down the shoreline in search of fish. ORVs must remain on established routes and may traverse the dunes to the beach only on established crossings.

NPS, in a management plan developed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, manages turtle and piping plover habitat. Piping plovers generally start nesting in late April or early May and chicks hatch into August. Turtles nest from late May through early August and have been known to hatch into October (nesting and relocation areas are indicated on the Existing Conditions map). NPS also collects data on the federally listed sea beach amaranth. This species usually is found on Shackleford Banks or in the marsh areas of the Core Banks. NPS marks turtle nesting and relocation areas and piping plover nesting areas; it also marks a colonial shorebird nesting area in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. NPS prohibits vehicle traffic in these protected areas. Generally, ORV operators respect these no entry zones although some vehicles enter and pose a threat to the species.

The departure dock at Davis and the landing dock at Great Island are in satisfactory condition and adequately serve the needs of the visitor. The infrastructure supporting the cabins at Great Island is sufficient to serve the occupants, however, some of the sewage holding tanks and drainage pipes need renovation. A central bathhouse with hot water showers and rest rooms serve day-use visitors to the Great Island area.

Desired improvements to departure and island facilities have been delayed because short-term permits provide few incentives for the concessioner to invest capital in the operation. Upgrading of docks, parking areas, mainland office/restaurant structures, equipment, or cabin infrastructure must wait until a long-term contract is consummated.

Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarter Area —South Core Banks

The Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area is the primary day-use area of the barrier islands and is accessible by private boat or small for-hire craft operated by private businesses. Visitors enjoy the natural and historic resources of the south end of the South Core Banks.

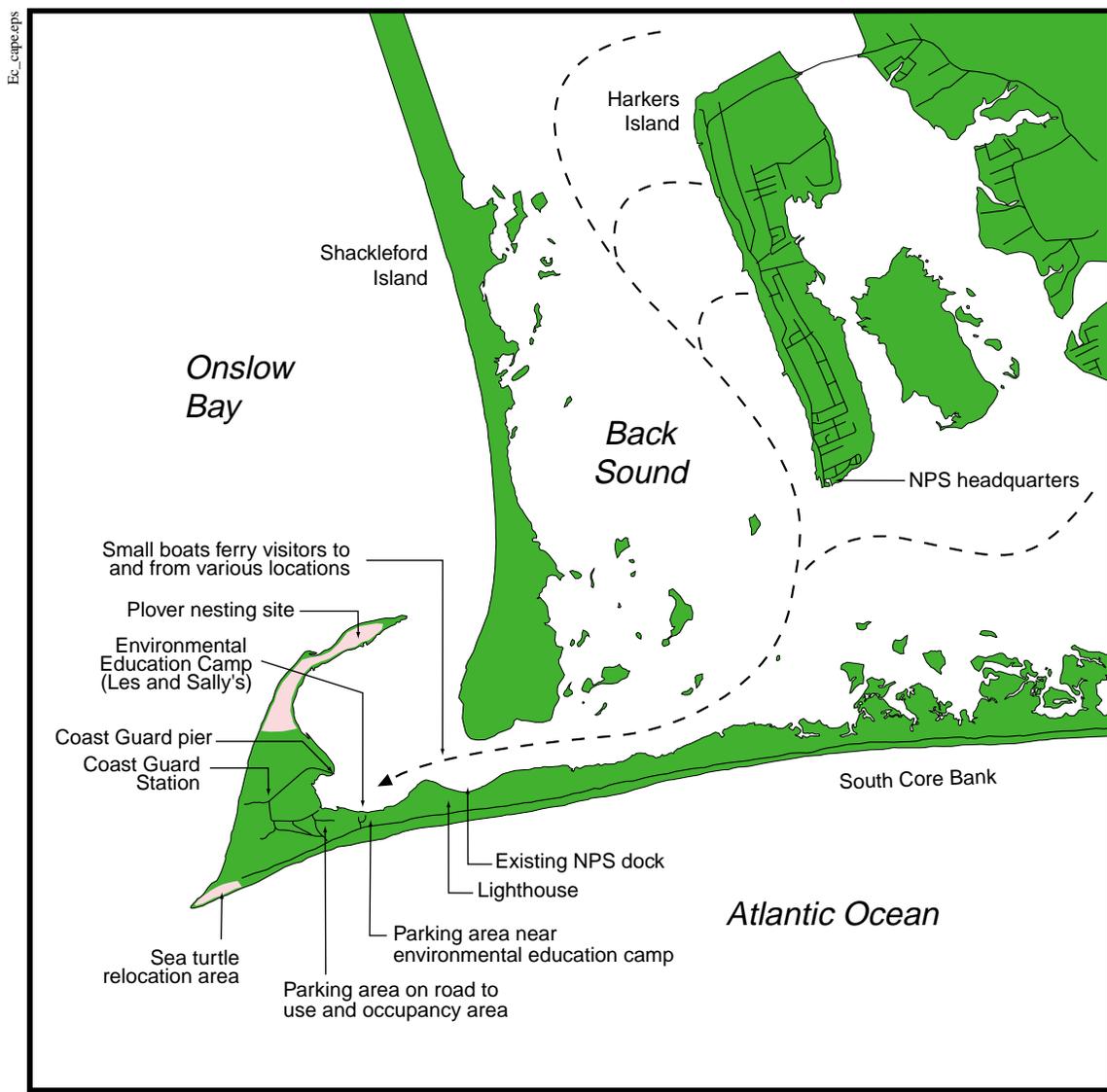
Three businesses provide for-hire transport for visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. These businesses are located near the national seashore headquarters and visitor center on Harkers Island. The boats used by these businesses accommodate six or more passengers and operate on an as-needed basis. They provide flexible and reasonably priced transportation to the South Core Banks. NPS issues Incidental Business Permits to the operators who must meet U.S. Coast Guard safety standards. The permits are issued annually. In general, users are satisfied with the service.

Passengers who use the IBP services seldom come to the Harkers Island visitor center to learn more about the national seashore, and therefore miss an important opportunity to learn and understand more about the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the park. The IBP operators can and do provide some background information to the uninformed visitor but, generally, cannot provide visitors with the quality interpretive experience commonly available at units of the National Park System.

Managing multiple IBP's requires a significant management and administrative commitment by NPS and may not be the most efficient method for managing the operation. NPS has limited influence on the quality of these operations once an IBP is issued.

At times, large groups want to travel to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area and have difficulty finding adequate transportation from Harkers Island. Schools groups in particular find splitting large classes into small groups logistically difficult because of the extra time and supervision required. Consequently, some of the groups that would benefit most from a trip to Cape Lookout National Seashore miss out on the opportunity to experience a truly special resource.

NPS has consummated a cooperative agreement with the Cape Lookout Environmental Center to operate a residential environmental camp for children. The Cape Lookout Environmental Center is upgrading and renovating several structures located approximately three-quarters of a mile south of the lighthouse. The center will provide a valuable service to



Existing Conditions - Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters Area

augment the national seashore's mission goal to increase the public's understanding about the park's cultural and natural resources.

Fishermen use ORVs to travel up and down the South Core Banks in search of fish. ORVs are required to remain within designated transportation corridors that generally follow the beach below the high water mark and an unimproved route located behind the dunes. ORVs may traverse the dunes only at established crossings. Two 60-vehicle parking areas are found in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area: one near the environmental educational center and the other along the road to the use and occupancy area. Both parking areas are infrequently used and seldom contain more than five vehicles at one time.

Summary of how the existing conditions address the issues:

Issue 1. Cabin Standards and Cabin Use

An examination of the remaining 25 cabins by NPS engineers and public health officers concluded that these cabins fail to comply with State and Federal building, health, and safety standards. Continuing this situation would mean that NPS would provide substandard accommodations. Concessioners operating on a short-term contract would have little incentive to make a major capital investment to improve or build new accommodations. The existing cabins would continue to attract a fairly narrow range of occupants; the opportunity to

increase occupancy rates during the “low season” would probably not occur.

Issue 2. Location of Cabins

The cabins at Great Island and Long Point are easily accessible and well known to fishermen and others who wish a remote, somewhat primitive experience on a barrier island. They are separated from the majority of the day-use areas and important threatened and endangered species habitat.

Issue 3. Location of ferry concession operations

The ferry service locations at Atlantic and Davis are well known to park visitors from the local community and those who come from other parts of North Carolina and the nation. Using established channels to the Core Banks precludes the necessity of dredging and maintaining channels in undisturbed areas. However, a wide range of interpretive materials and programs for the national seashore visitor are not available at the Atlantic and Davis locations. The current informational effort is inadequate.

Issue 4. Incidental Business Permits

Three IBP holders transport day-use visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper’s Quarters area in small water craft. The IBP holders provide a reliable, reasonably priced service that eliminates the need, for the immediate future, for a concession ferry service from NPS headquarters on Harkers Island. However, the resources of the IBP holders are limited in regard to providing information or interpretive materials. Also, some school groups are reluctant to ride in the small boats and to split students into small groups.

Issue 5. Changing visitor use patterns

Over the past 15 years the number of people visiting the Core Banks has increased noticeably. Day users visiting the Cape Lookout Keeper’s Quarter Area constitute the largest percentage of the increase. The number of fishermen has increased slightly but has leveled off over the last six to seven years. Occupancy in the cabins reaches 100 percent during the three busiest months, May, October, and November; some noticeable increases during the summer months have been recorded. The new cabins have helped attract new occupants to the Long Point area. However, the existing cabins at Great Island attract a narrower clientele and, correspondingly, a significant number of vacancies occur during the “off season.”

Issue 6. Long-term parking for recreational vehicles

Long-term parking areas serve as a low-cost alternative for people who visit the Core Banks frequently and stay on the islands for a day to several weeks at a time. Some measures have been instituted to regulate the number of vehicles stored on the Core Banks and NPS restricts vehicles to defined routes. However, NPS must take additional measures to ensure that the island’s threatened and endangered species are not adversely affected. NPS’s current actions to protect the species still leave room for improvement while not diminishing the visitor’s enjoyment of the national seashore.

Issue 7. Conflicts between different user groups

Generally, day-use visitors and fishermen occupy different areas. Most day-use visitors frequent the Cape Lookout Keeper’s Quarters area while fishermen generally congregate on the North Core Banks and the Great Island area of the South Core Banks. Mobile fishermen follow the fish up and down the entire length of the islands. The present cabin locations provide separation between overnight visitors and day-use visitors.

Issue 8. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on natural resources

NPS has a legal mandate to protect threatened and endangered species and habitat. Thus, NPS is aware of the possible effects of ORVs and human interference on the turtles, piping plovers, sea beach amaranth and their habitat. NPS carries out its management plans, under protocols developed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for the protection of the species. However, there has not been a concerted effort to monitor the adverse affects of ORVs and human interference (if any) on the species and their habitats. Present interpretive and educational efforts fall short of ensuring that visitors respect NPS responsibility to protect threatened and endangered species.

Issue 9. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on cultural resources

At present, visitors and visitor services and facilities have little if any adverse effect on the historic scene associated with the lighthouse.

Issue 10. Harkers Island Visitor Center

At the present time, NPS has not made a concerted effort to entice visitors who use the ferries and small craft to stop at

the Harkers Island visitor center to learn more about the natural, cultural, and recreational resources at the national seashore.

Issue 11. Effect of preferred changes on park staff and resources

Under the existing conditions, NPS would operate no differently regarding the number of staff, where the staff would be assigned, nor in the development of new interpretive or educational materials.

PREFERRED PLAN

The preferred plan describes NPS proposed actions in regard to providing overnight accommodations and transportation services. Under the preferred plan, NPS's operation would be strengthened through long-term concession contracts providing transportation, accommodations, and information about the Core Banks. Traditional use patterns would continue, but a broad spectrum of overnight visitors could stay at improved accommodations. Holders of IBP's would continue to transport visitors from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. An emphasis would be placed on monitoring the effects of visitors and visitor use patterns on threatened and endangered species and their habitat and increasing visitor awareness of the island's special resources.

Long Point Area—North Core Banks

Under the preferred plan, NPS would enter into a long-term contract with a concessioner to provide ferry service between Atlantic and the Long Point cabin area. NPS would advertise for bidders; the prospectus would reflect the Service's rules and regulations concerning concessions. Generally, NPS would seek bids that would provide reliable ferry service, furnish mainland facilities that would appeal to a broad spectrum of park visitors occupying cabins and visiting the national seashore from April through November, maintain the existing cabins at Long Point, and construct ten additional units. The concessioner would be responsible for the financing, construction, and maintenance of the new units. Cabins would conform with State and Federal building, health, and safety codes, and would be sensitively designed and arranged to comply with the special conditions of a barrier island.

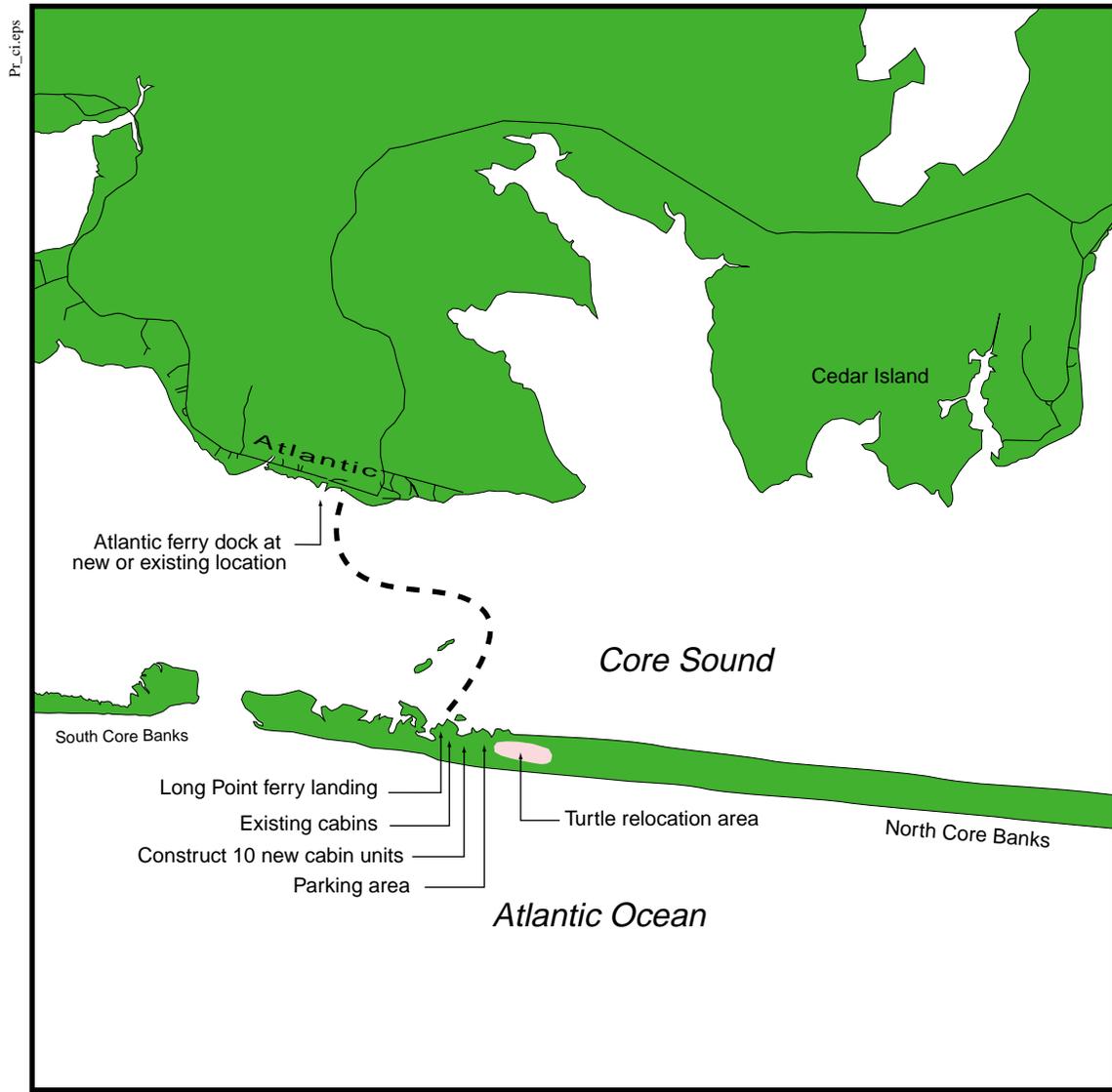
The construction of the cabins would be phased in. Scheduling would in part be based upon NPS's monitoring and study of the effects of ORVs and human interference with the national seashore's threatened and endangered species.

In an effort to enhance visitor understanding of the national seashore's natural and cultural resources, NPS would work closely with the concessioner and user groups. Information would be available at the Atlantic facility prior to visitors' arrival to North Core Banks. Terms of the educational and interpretive effort would be subject to an agreement among NPS, user groups, and the concessioner but may include having an NPS employee stationed at space made available by the concessioner, an annual educational registration program for ORV users and operators, and an organized education program among the user groups. These programs would emphasize the need to respect threatened and endangered species habitat and the history of the Core Banks including the surf fishing culture. Concessioner customers would be encouraged to visit the NPS visitor center on Harkers Island to learn more about the resources of the national seashore.

Visitors would leave Atlantic on a concessioner-operated ferry from a concessioner owned or leased facility. Ferries would transport both vehicles and passengers. In the event no successful bid comes forward, NPS would explore the purchase of property and construction of a departure facility in Atlantic to ensure the availability and administrative control of a departure facility. Purchase of property in Atlantic would necessitate a legislative boundary change. NPS would also explore the use of Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge land in Atlantic for a facility.

The concessioner ferry would land at the dock at Long Point. The concessioner would be responsible for regular repair and upgrading of the piers at both Atlantic and Long Point. The existing facilities consisting of 6 duplexes and 4 octagonal structures containing 20 rental units and associated administrative structures would remain in place. The concessioner would be responsible for upgrading the cabins' infrastructure (water and sewage).

Visitors to the cabins would park their vehicles at the cabins. Other visitors to the national seashore would have the option to bring their vehicles to the Long Point area on the concessioner-operated ferry and to store them at the parking area near the cabins or to bring them back on the ferry. All private vehicles must be removed from the Core Banks over the same three continuous months, primarily during the winter. NPS would allow vehicles on the islands during this period through the issuance of a special use permit. NPS would define the parameters of vehicle use, parking, and storage. The ongoing monitoring of the effects of ORVs on threatened and endangered species would contribute to these parameters.



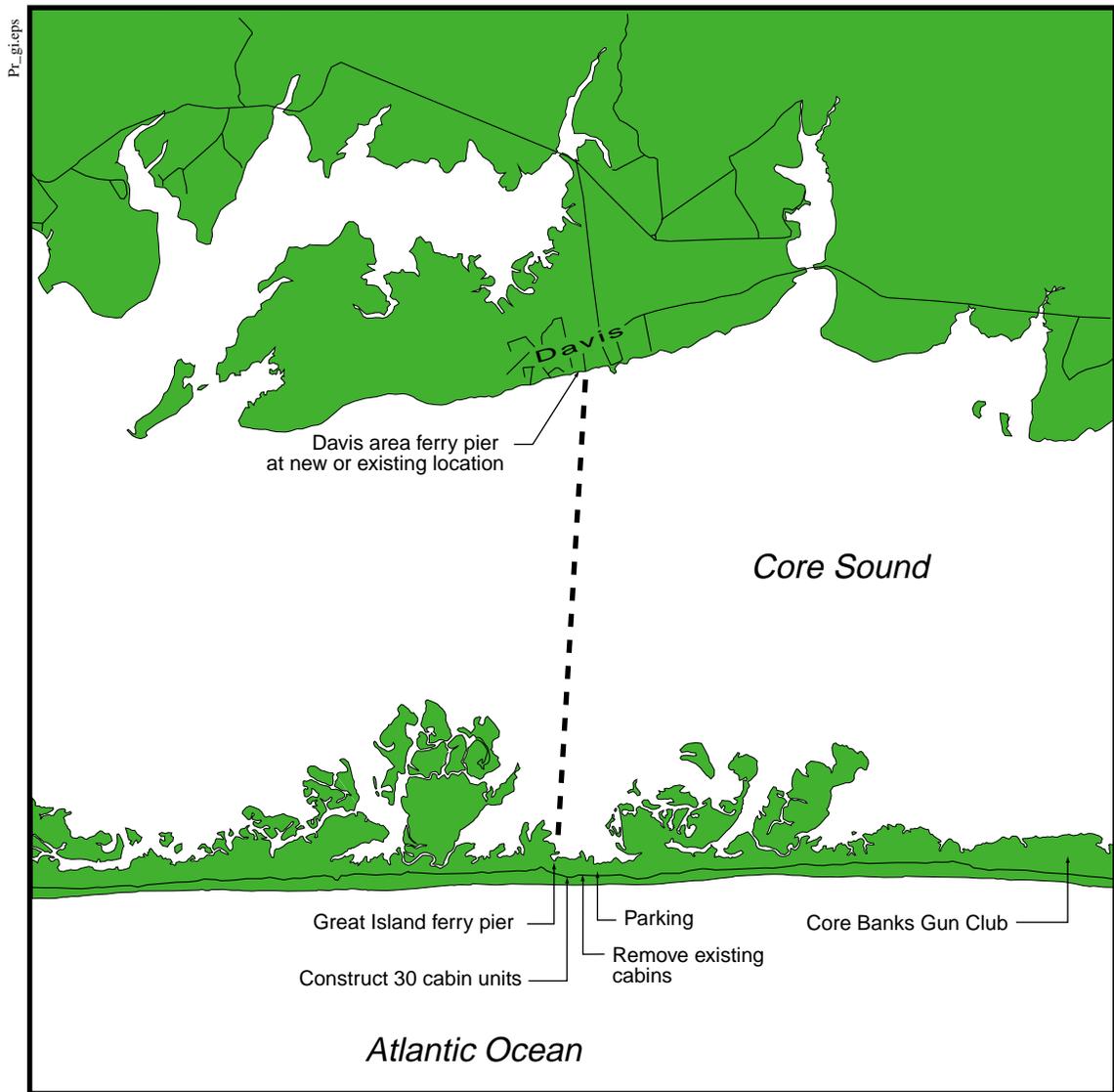
Preferred Plan - Long Point Area

Great Island Area—South Core Banks

Under the preferred plan, NPS would enter into a long-term contract with a concessioner to provide ferry service between Davis and the Great Island cabin area. NPS would advertise for bidders; the prospectus would reflect NPS’s rules and regulations concerning concessions. Generally, NPS would seek bids that would provide reliable ferry service, furnish mainland facilities that would appeal to a broad spectrum of park visitors occupying cabins and visiting the national seashore from April through November, raze and remove the existing cabins at Great Island, and construct new cabin units (approximately 30) accommodating approximately the same number of occupants as in 1998. The concessioner would be

responsible for the financing, construction, and maintenance of the new units, and the razing and removal of the old units. Cabins would conform to State and Federal building, health, and safety codes; they would be sensitively designed to comply with the special conditions of a barrier island.

The removal of the old cabin units and the construction of the new cabin units would be phased in. Scheduling would in part be based upon NPS’s monitoring and study of the effects of ORVs and human interference with the national seashore’s threatened and endangered species. The new cabins would be arranged to allow for social space between cabins and would conform to State of North Carolina Coastal Area Management Agency guidelines regarding the location



Preferred Plan - Great Island Area

and orientation of structures on a barrier island. NPS would work with the concessioner to restore areas, no longer needed for cabins, to their natural conditions.

In an effort to enhance visitor understanding of the national seashore's natural and cultural resources, NPS would work closely with the concessioner and user groups. Information would be available before and when visitors arrive at the Davis facility. Terms of the educational and interpretive effort would be subject to an agreement among NPS, user groups, and the concessioner but may include having an NPS employee stationed at space made available by the concessioner, an annual educational registration program for ORV users and operators, and an organized education program

among the user groups. These programs would emphasize the need to respect threatened and endangered species habitat and the history of the Core Banks including the surf fishing culture. Concessioner customers would be encouraged to visit the NPS visitor center on Harkers Island to learn more about the resources of the national seashore.

Visitors would leave Davis on a concessioner-operated ferry from a concessioner owned or leased facility. Ferries would transport both vehicles and passengers. In the event no successful bid comes forward, NPS would explore the purchase of property and construction of a departure facility in Davis to ensure the availability and administrative control

of a departure facility. Purchase of property in Davis would necessitate a legislative boundary change.

The concessioner ferry would land at the dock at Great Island. The concessioner would be responsible for regular repair and upgrading of the piers at both Davis and Great Island. The concessioner would be responsible for upgrading the cabins' infrastructure (water and sewage).

Visitors to the cabins would park their vehicles at the cabins. Other visitors to the national seashore would have the option to bring their vehicles to the Great Island area on the concessioner-operated ferry and to store them at the parking area near the cabins or to bring them back on the ferry. All private vehicles must be removed from the Core Banks over three continuous months, primarily during the winter. NPS would allow vehicles on the islands during this period through the issuance of a special use permit. NPS would define the parameters of vehicle use, parking, and storage. The ongoing monitoring of the effects of ORVs on threatened and endangered species would contribute to these parameters.

Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area— South Core Banks

NPS would issue biennial renewable Incidental Business Permits (IBP's) to ferry businesses authorizing them to transport visitors from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Operators would comply with all applicable State of North Carolina, U.S. Coast Guard, and NPS laws and regulations regarding health, safety, and insurance. NPS would not authorize the transport of vehicles.

NPS and IBP holders would coordinate a program to enhance the understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the national seashore. Particular attention would be placed on the respect and appreciation of the threatened and endangered species and their habitat and the cultural resources of the Core Banks. Customers of the IBP holders would be encouraged to visit the NPS headquarters on Harkers Island to learn more about the national seashore.

Small craft would leave the mainland from docks owned or leased by the IBP holders and disembark visitors at the dock near the lighthouse. NPS and IBP holders would closely monitor the demand for large group transport from Harkers Island to the Core Banks. If justified, issuance of an IBP would be predicated on providing service by larger craft to accommodate large groups. NPS would retain the option to relocate Harkers Island—Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area transport to NPS headquarters if IBP service proves unsatisfactory. In such case, NPS would enter into a

concession contract to provide this service operating from the Harkers Island headquarters.

NPS would eliminate the parking area located near the Cape Lookout environmental education camp and restore the area to natural conditions. The capacity of the parking area located on the road to the use and occupancy area would be reduced in accord with the findings of the proposed ORV plan; the area no longer used for vehicle storage would be restored to natural conditions.

Summary of how the preferred plan addresses the issues:

Issue 1. Cabin Standards and Cabin Use

An examination of the remaining 25 cabins by NPS engineers and public health officers concluded that these cabins fail to comply with State and Federal building, health, and safety standards. Consummating a long-term contract provides a concessioner the opportunity to make a major capital investment to replace the substandard structures with cabins that will appeal to a broad spectrum of national seashore visitors, yet would retain the flavor of the Core Banks. The improved cabins may attract higher numbers of occupants during the "low season."

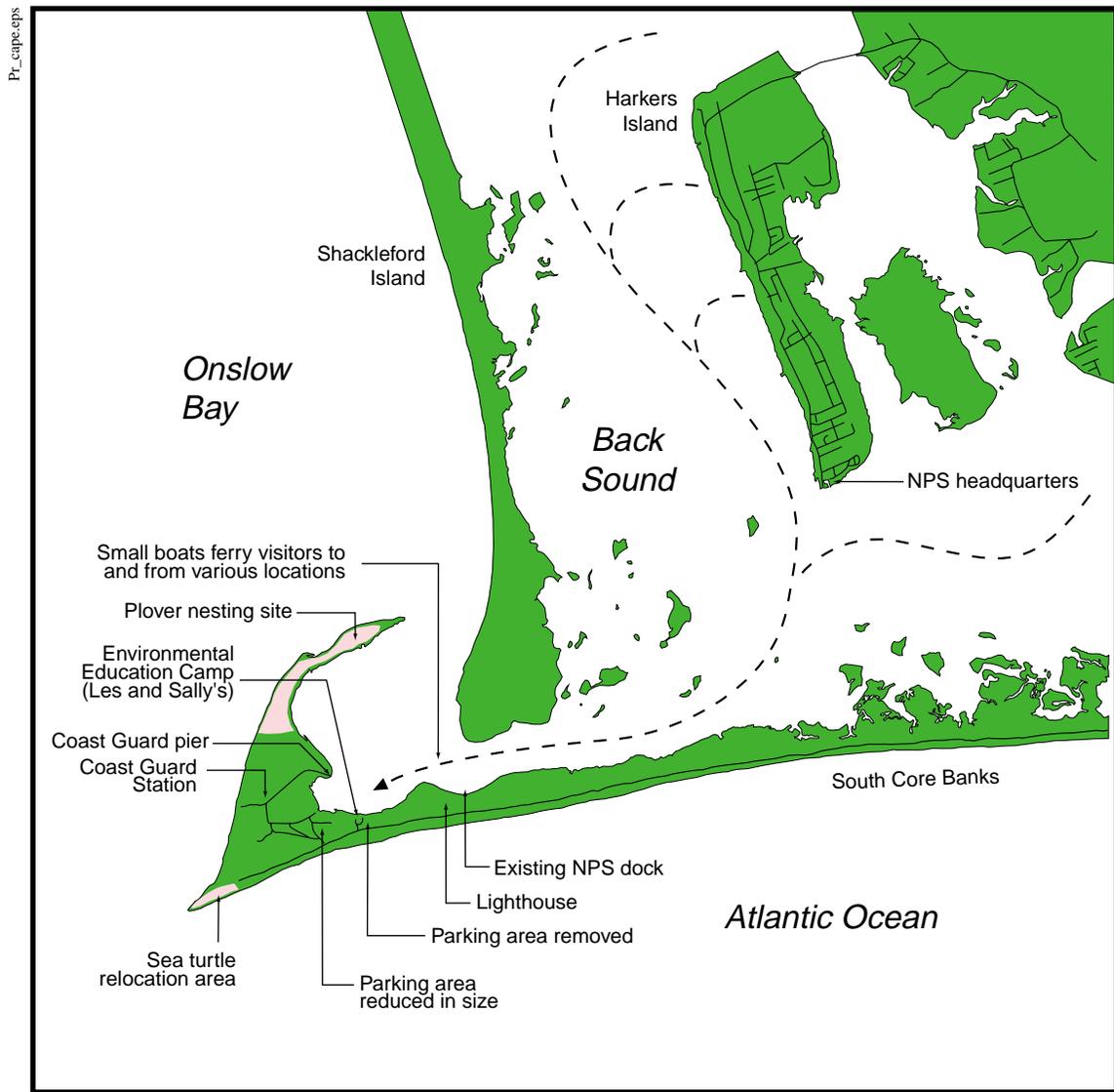
New and upgraded facilities would meet applicable State and Federal building, health, and safety codes and would be oriented to comply with CAMA guidelines. Measures would be taken to ensure that the basic infrastructure would conform to the problems posed by overwash. To retain a rustic appearance and atmosphere, only basic utilities would be provided.

Issue 2. Location of Cabins

The cabins at Great Island and Long Point are easily accessible and well known to fishermen and others who wish a remote, somewhat primitive experience on a barrier island. They are separated from the majority of the day-use areas and important threatened and endangered species habitat. The planning process evaluated alternative locations and concluded that the adverse affects to visitors and natural and cultural resources would increase if cabins were constructed at the other locations.

Issue 3. Location of ferry concession operations

The preferred plan would continue ferry service from Atlantic and Davis. These locations are well known to park visitors from the local community and those who come from other



Preferred Plan - Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters Area

parts of North Carolina and the nation. Using established channels to the Core Banks would preclude the necessity of dredging and maintaining channels in undisturbed areas. NPS evaluated other sites, but these (Lola and Harkers Island) would either cause some environmental degradation or visitors would be subjected to lengthy, and sometimes treacherous, trips to and from the barrier islands.

Services available and the appearance of Davis and Atlantic could be improved to cater to a broad range of park visitors. The preferred plan anticipates that upgraded ferry and cabin construction would attract visitors that would represent the

surf fishing community and others who desire a remote experience in accommodations that meet State and Federal building, health, and safety standards.

The preferred plan seeks a coordinated effort among NPS, concessioners, and users groups to prepare and present a wide range of interpretive materials and programs for the national seashore visitor at the Atlantic and Davis locations, then progressing to the ferries, and at both the Long Point and Great Island cabin locations. The plan also recognizes the need for some NPS presence at both Atlantic and Davis. The current informational effort is inadequate.

Issue 4. Incidental Business Permits

Three IBP holders transport day-use visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area in small water craft. The IBP holders provide a reliable, reasonably priced service that eliminates the need, for the immediate future, for a concession ferry service from NPS headquarters on Harkers Island. Because the resources of the IBP holders are limited in regard to providing information or interpretive materials, NPS would work with these businesses to upgrade the interpretive efforts. Also, some school groups are reluctant to ride in the small boats and to split students into small groups. NPS would work with the IBP holders to determine the need to supply a larger boat to accommodate large groups of day-users. The provision of a larger boat could become a prerequisite for obtaining an IBP to transport visitors to the Core Banks.

Issue 5. Changing visitor use patterns

Over the past 15 years the number of people visiting the Core Banks has increased noticeably. Day users visiting the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarter Area constitute the largest percentage of the increase. The number of fishermen has increased slightly but has leveled off over the last six to seven years. Occupancy in the cabins reaches 100 percent during the three busiest months, May, October, and November; some noticeable increases during the summer months have been recorded. The new cabins have helped attract new occupants to the Long Point area. The preferred plan's emphasis on upgrading the cabin situation at both Long Point and Great Island should attract additional visitation during the off-months. It is beyond the scope of this general management plan amendment to address other facilities on the barrier islands.

Issue 6. Long-term parking for recreational vehicles

The preferred plan recognizes the need to retain long-term parking areas as a low-cost alternative for people who frequently stay overnight on the islands. In an effort to preserve the resources of the national seashore while providing amenities for its visitors, NPS realizes that some areas must be returned to their natural condition if not needed for visitor services. The capacity of the parking area located on the road to the use and occupancy area would be reduced in size and the area no longer used for vehicle storage restored to natural conditions. Even with some reduction in parking capacity, this parking area is sufficient in size to accommodate all vehicle storage needs in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. In order to prevent potential

visitor conflicts, NPS would eliminate the parking area located near the Cape Lookout environmental education camp and restore the area to natural conditions.

Issue 7. Conflicts between different user groups

Generally, day-use visitors and fishermen occupy different areas. Most day-use visitors frequent the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area while fishermen generally congregate on the North Core Banks and the Great Island area of the South Core Banks. Mobile fishermen follow the fish up and down the entire length of the islands. The present cabin locations provide separation between overnight visitors and day-use visitors. The preferred plan would continue this pattern of separating overnight from day-use visitors and avoiding potential user conflicts.

Issue 8. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on natural resources

The preferred plan acknowledges NPS's legal mandate to protect threatened and endangered species and habitat. Thus NPS must be aware of the possible effects of ORVs and human interference on the turtles, piping plovers, sea beach amaranth and their habitat. Under the preferred plan, NPS would continue to carry out its management plans, under protocols developed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for the protection of the species. NPS would pay particular attention to monitoring the adverse affects of ORVs and human interference (if any) and taking measures to mitigate these affects.

As a preventative measure, NPS proposes to join with the concessioner and user groups to develop a threatened and endangered species awareness program aimed at cabin occupants and ORV users. Although most visitors respect the flora and fauna and their habitat, adverse human actions could jeopardize the perpetuation of the species and visitor enjoyment of the national seashore's resources.

Issue 9. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on cultural resources

Under the preferred plan, NPS would not take actions that would intrude on the historic scene associated with the lighthouse. At Great Island and Long Point, NPS would include in its interpretive messages materials exploring the story of surf fishing on the Core Banks.

Issue 10. Harkers Island Visitor Center

Under the preferred plan, NPS would work with IBP holders and concessioners to encourage visitors to stop at the Harkers Island visitor center to learn more about the natural, cultural, and recreational resources at the national seashore. In the event visitors would not stop at the visitor center, NPS would increase its efforts, in cooperation with the IBP holders and the concessioners, to provide interpretive and educational materials and opportunities at Davis, Atlantic, and the embarkation points on Harkers Island.

Issue 11. Effect of preferred changes on park staff and resources

Under the preferred plan, NPS would increase its presence at the concession operations at Davis and Atlantic particularly during May, October, and November. In April, June, July, August, and September, NPS presence would be more limited. The park would increase its efforts at monitoring the effects of ORVs and human interference on threatened and endangered species and their habitat. Additional resources would be needed to enhance interpretive messages and materials.

ALTERNATIVE PLAN

The alternative plan describes a second viable way for NPS to provide overnight accommodations and transportation services. Under the alternative plan, NPS's operation would be strengthened through long-term concession contracts providing transportation, accommodations, and information about the Core Banks. Traditional use patterns would continue, but a broad spectrum of overnight visitors could stay at improved accommodations. The cabins would reflect traditional and more rustic styles, all meeting applicable codes. Holders of IBP's would continue to transport visitors from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. A greater emphasis would be placed on monitoring the effects of visitors and visitor use patterns on threatened and endangered species and their habitat and increasing visitor awareness of the island's special resources.

Long Point Area—North Core Banks

Under the alternative plan, NPS would enter into a long-term contract with a concessioner to provide ferry service between Atlantic and the Long Point cabin area. NPS would advertise for bidders; the prospectus would reflect NPS's rules and regulations concerning concessions. Generally, NPS would seek bids that would provide reliable ferry service, furnish mainland facilities that would appeal to a broad spectrum of park visitors occupying cabins and visiting the national

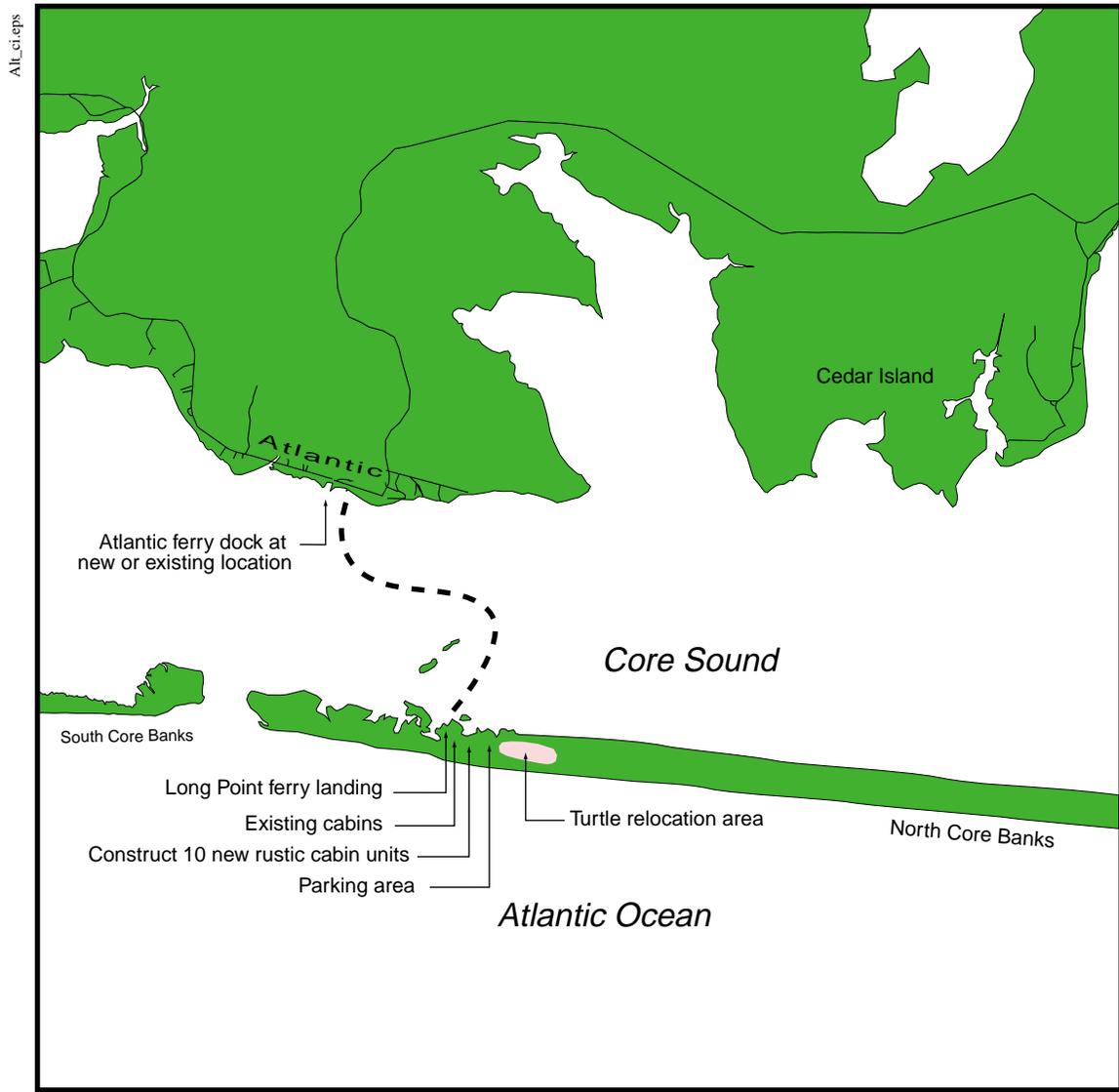
seashore from April through November, maintain the existing cabins at Long Point, and construct ten new rustic units. The concessioner would be responsible for the financing, construction, and maintenance of the new units. Cabins would conform with State and Federal building, health, and safety codes, and would be designed to provide shelter from rain, sun, and insects but would not include electricity or individual bathroom facilities. The concessioner would construct communal restrooms and showers to accommodate the occupants of the rustic cabins.

The construction of the cabins would be phased in. Scheduling would in part be based upon NPS's monitoring and study of the effects of ORVs and human interference with the national seashore's threatened and endangered species.

In an effort to enhance visitor understanding of the national seashore's natural and cultural resources, NPS would work closely with the concessioner and user groups. Information would be available at and before visitors arrive at the Atlantic facility. Terms of the educational and interpretive effort would be subject to an agreement among NPS, user groups, and the concessioner but may include having an NPS employee stationed at space made available by the concessioner, an annual educational registration program for ORV users and operators, and an organized education program among the user groups. These programs would emphasize the need to respect threatened and endangered species habitat and the history of the Core Banks including the surf fishing culture. Concessioner customers would be encouraged to visit the NPS visitor center on Harkers Island to learn more about the national seashore.

Visitors would leave Atlantic on a concessioner operated ferry from a concessioner owned or leased facility. Ferries would transport both vehicles and passengers. In the event no successful bid comes forward, NPS would explore the purchase of property and construction of a departure facility in Atlantic to ensure the availability and administrative control of a departure facility. Purchase of property in Atlantic would necessitate a legislative boundary change. NPS would also explore the use of Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge land in Atlantic for a facility.

The concessioner ferry would land at the dock at Long Point. The concessioner would be responsible for regular repair and upgrading of the piers at both Atlantic and Long Point. The existing facilities consisting of 6 duplexes and 4 octagonal structures containing 20 rental units and associated administrative structures would remain in place. The concessioner would be responsible for upgrading the cabins' infrastructure (water and sewage).



Alternative Plan - Long Point Area

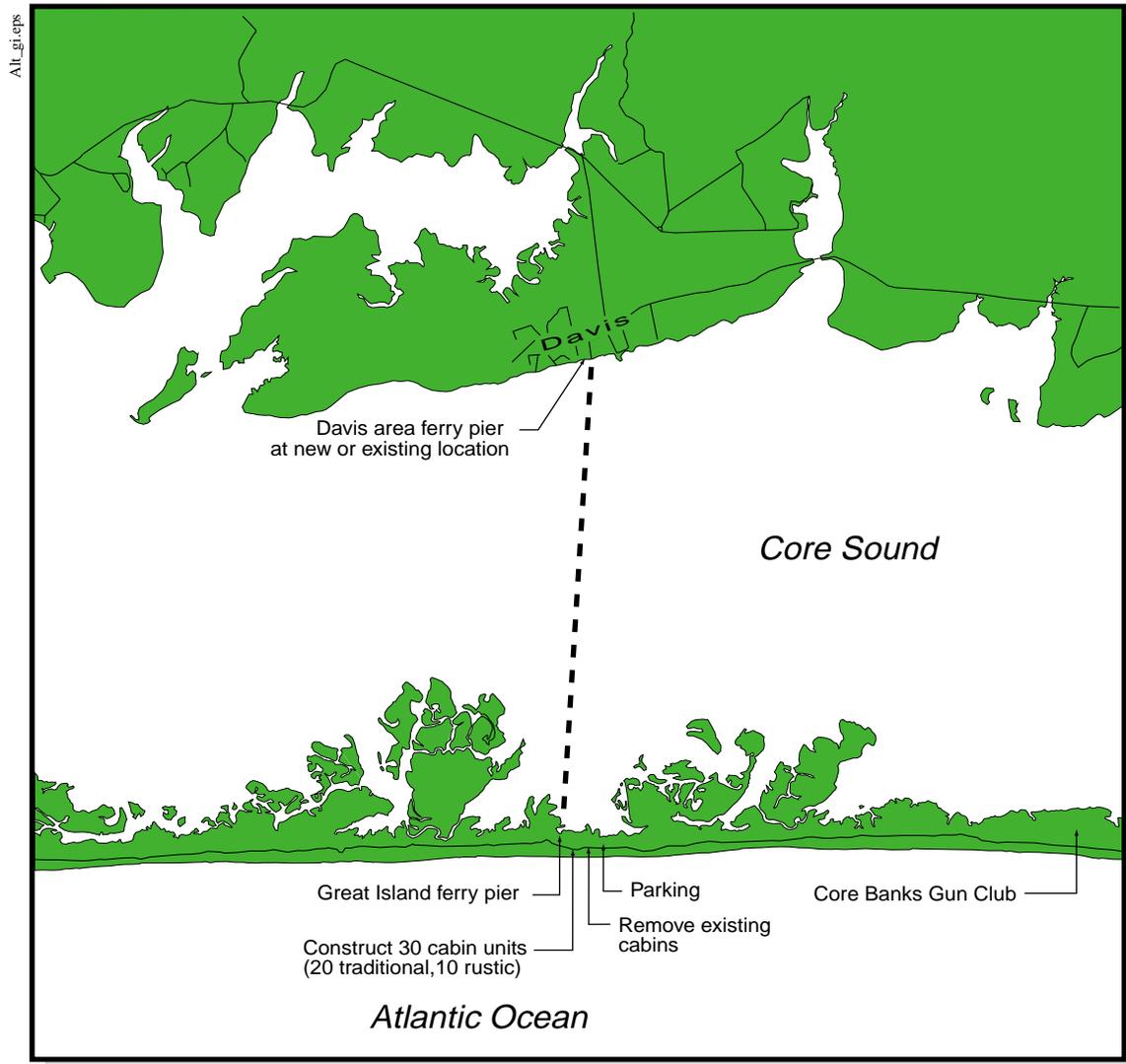
Visitors to the cabins would park their vehicles at the cabins. Other visitors to the national seashore would have the option to bring their vehicles to the Long Point area on the concessioner-operated ferry and to store them at the parking area near the cabins or to bring them back on the ferry.

In an effort to measure the effects of ORVs and human interference on threatened and endangered species, NPS would reduce the capacity of the parking area to 30 vehicles during the primary nesting/hatching period (June 1 through August 31). NPS would monitor closely the effects of fewer vehicles and visitors on the species and their habitat. Based upon the findings of the monitoring effort, the capacity of the parking area would be adjusted.

All private vehicles must be removed from the Core Banks over the same three continuous months, primarily during the winter. NPS would allow vehicles on the islands during this period through the issuance of a special use permit. NPS would define the parameters of vehicle use, parking, and storage. The ongoing monitoring of the effects of ORVs on threatened and endangered species would contribute to these parameters.

Great Island Area—South Core Banks

Under the alternative plan, NPS would enter into a long-term contract with a concessioner to provide ferry service between



Alternative Plan - Great Island Area

Davis and the Great Island cabin area. NPS would advertise for bidders; the prospectus would reflect the Service's rules and regulations concerning concessions. Generally, NPS would seek bids that would provide reliable ferry service, furnish mainland facilities that would appeal to a broad spectrum of park visitors occupying cabins and visiting the national seashore from April through November, raze and remove the existing cabins at Great Island, and construct new cabin units (approximately 30) accommodating approximately the same number of occupants as in 1998. The concessioner would be responsible for the financing, construction, and maintenance of the new units, and the razing and removal of the old units. Cabins would conform to State and Federal building, health, and safety codes, and would be sensitively

designed to comply with the special conditions of a barrier island. Ten of the units would be rustic and be designed to provide shelter from rain, sun and insects, but would not include electricity or individual bathroom facilities.

The removal of the old cabin units and the construction of the new cabin units would be phased in. Scheduling would in part be based upon NPS monitoring and study of the effects of ORVs and human interference with the national seashore's threatened and endangered species. The new cabins would be arranged to allow for social space between cabins and would conform to State of North Carolina Coastal Area Management Agency guidelines regarding the location and orientation of structures on a barrier island. NPS would

work with the concessioner to restore areas, no longer needed for cabins, to their natural conditions.

In an effort to enhance visitor understanding of the national seashore's natural and cultural resources, NPS would work closely with the concessioner and user groups. Information would be available before and when visitors arrive at the Davis facility. Terms of the educational and interpretive effort would be subject to an agreement among NPS, user groups, and the concessioner but may include having an NPS employee stationed at space made available by the concessioner, an annual educational registration program for ORV users and operators, and an organized education program among the user groups. These programs may emphasize the need to respect threatened and endangered species habitat and the history of the Core Banks including the surf fishing culture. Concessioner customers would be encouraged to visit the NPS visitor center on Harkers Island to learn more about the national seashore.

Visitors would leave Davis on a concessioner-operated ferry from a concessioner owned or leased facility. Ferries would transport both vehicles and passengers. In the event no successful bid comes forward, NPS would explore the purchase of property and construction of a departure facility in Davis to ensure the availability and administrative control of a departure facility. Purchase of property in Davis would necessitate a legislative boundary change.

The concessioner ferry would land at the dock at Great Island. The concessioner would be responsible for regular repair and upgrading of the piers at both Davis and Great Island. The concessioner would be responsible for upgrading the cabins' infrastructure (water and sewage).

Visitors to the cabins would park their vehicles at the cabins. Other visitors to the national seashore would have the option to bring their vehicles to Great Island area on the concessioner-operated ferry and to store them at the parking area near the cabins or to bring them back on the ferry. All private vehicles must be removed from the Core Banks over the same three continuous months, primarily during the winter. NPS would allow vehicles on the islands during this period through the issuance of a special use permit. In an effort to measure the effects of ORVs and human interference on threatened and endangered species, NPS would reduce the capacity of the parking area to 30 vehicles during the primary nesting/hatching period (June 1 through August 31). NPS would monitor closely the effects of fewer vehicles and visitors on the species and their habitat. Based upon the findings of the monitoring effort, the capacity of the parking areas would be adjusted.

Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarter Area — South Core Banks

NPS would issue annual renewable Incidental Business Permits (IBP's) to ferry businesses authorizing them to transport visitors from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. Operators would comply with all applicable State of North Carolina, U.S. Coast Guard, and NPS laws and regulations regarding health, safety, and insurance. NPS would not authorize the transport of vehicles.

NPS and IBP holders would coordinate a program to enhance the understanding of the natural and cultural resources of the national seashore. Particular attention would be placed on the respect and appreciation of the threatened and endangered species and their habitat and the cultural of the Core Banks. Customers of the IBP holders would be encouraged to visit NPS headquarters on Harkers Island to learn more about the national seashore.

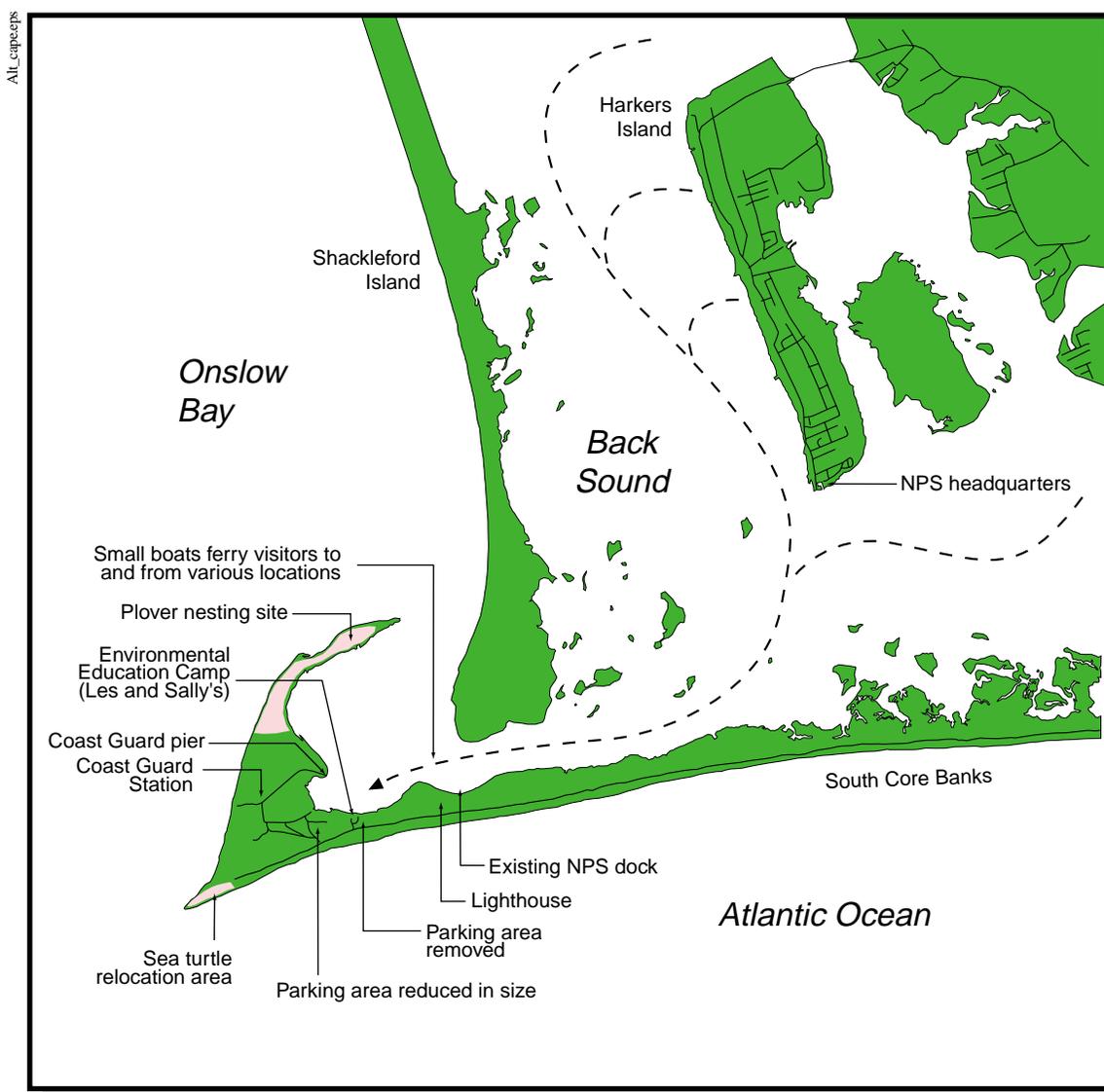
Small craft would leave the mainland from docks owned or leased by the IBP holders and disembark visitors at the dock near the lighthouse. NPS and IBP holders would closely monitor the demand for large group transport from Harkers Island to the Core Banks. If justified, issuance of an IBP would be predicated on providing service by larger craft to accommodate large groups. NPS would retain the option to relocate Harkers Island –Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area transport to NPS headquarters if IBP service proves unsatisfactory. In such case, NPS would enter into a concession contract to provide this service operating from the Harkers Island headquarters.

NPS would eliminate the parking area located near the Cape Lookout environmental education camp and restore the area to natural conditions. The capacity of the parking area located on the road to the use and occupancy area would be reduced in accord with the findings of the proposed ORV plan; the area no longer used for vehicle storage would be restored to natural conditions.

Summary of how the alternative plan addresses the issues:

Issue 1. Cabin Standards and Cabin Use

An examination of the remaining 25 cabins by NPS engineers and public health officers concluded that these cabins fail to comply with State and Federal building, health, and safety standards. Consummating a long-term contract provides a concessioner the opportunity to make a major capital



Alternative Plan - Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters Area

investment to replace the substandard structures with cabins that would appeal to a broad spectrum of national seashore visitors, yet would retain the flavor of the Core Banks. The improved cabins may attract higher numbers of occupants during the “low season.”

New and upgraded facilities would meet applicable State and Federal building, health, and safety codes and would be oriented to comply with CAMA guidelines. Measures would be taken to ensure that the basic infrastructure would conform to the problems posed by overwash. To retain a rustic appearance and atmosphere, only basic utilities would be provided.

Issue 2. Location of Cabins

The cabins at Great Island and Long Point are easily accessible and well known to fishermen and others who wish a remote, somewhat primitive experience on a barrier island. They are separated from the majority of the day-use areas and important threatened and endangered species habitat. The planning process evaluated alternative locations and concluded that the adverse affects to visitors and natural and cultural resources would increase if cabins were constructed at the other locations.

Issue 3. Location of ferry concession operations

The alternative plan would continue ferry service from Atlantic and Davis. These locations are well known to park visitors from the local community and those who come from other parts of North Carolina and the nation. Using established channels to the Core Banks would preclude the necessity of dredging and maintaining channels in undisturbed areas. NPS evaluated other sites, but these (Lola and Harkers Island) would either cause some environmental degradation or visitors would be subjected to lengthy and sometimes treacherous trips to and from the barrier islands.

Services available at and the appearance of Davis and Atlantic could be improved to cater to a broad range of park visitors. The alternative plan anticipates that upgraded ferry and cabin construction would attract visitors that would represent the surf fishing community and others who desire a remote experience in accommodations that meet State and Federal building, health, and safety standards.

The alternative plan proposes a coordinated effort among NPS, the concessioners, and users groups to prepare and present a wide range of interpretive materials and programs for the national seashore visitor at the Atlantic and Davis locations, then progressing to the ferries, and at both the Long Point and Great Island cabin locations. The alternative plan also recognizes the need for some NPS presence at both Atlantic and Davis. The current informational effort is inadequate.

Issue 4. Incidental Business Permits

Three IBP holders transport day-use visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area in small water craft known. The IBP holders provide a reliable, reasonably priced service that eliminates the need, for the immediate future, for a concession ferry service from NPS headquarters on Harkers Island. Because the resources of the IBP holders are limited in regard to providing information or interpretive materials, NPS will work with these businesses to upgrade the interpretive efforts. Also, some school groups are reluctant to ride in the small boats and to split students into small groups. NPS will work with the IBP holders to determine the need to supply a larger boat to accommodate large groups of day users. The provision of a larger boat could become a prerequisite for obtaining an IBP to transport visitors to the Core Banks.

Issue 5. Changing visitor use patterns

Response: Over the past 15 years the number of people visiting the Core Banks has increased noticeably. Day users visiting the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area constitute the largest percentage of the increase. The number of fishermen has increased slightly and has leveled over the last six to seven years. Occupancy in the cabins reaches 100 percent during the three busiest months, May, October, and November, some noticeable increases during the summer months have been recorded. The new cabins have attracted new occupants to the Long Point area. The alternative plan's emphasis on upgrading the cabin situation at both Long Point and Great Island should attract additional visitation during the off-months. It is beyond the scope of this general management plan amendment to address other facilities on the barrier islands.

Issue 6. Long-term parking for recreational vehicles

The alternative plan recognizes the need to retain long-term parking areas as a low-cost alternative for people who frequently stay overnight on the islands. In an effort to preserve the resources of the national seashore while providing amenities for its visitors, NPS realizes that some areas must be returned to their natural condition if not needed for visitor services. The capacity of the parking area located on the road to the use and occupancy area would be reduced in size and the area no longer used for vehicle storage restored to natural conditions. Even with some reduction in parking capacity, this parking area is sufficient in size to accommodate all vehicle storage needs in the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. In order to prevent potential visitor conflicts, NPS would eliminate the parking area located near the Cape Lookout environmental education camp and restore the area to natural conditions.

Issue 7. Conflicts between different user groups

Generally, day-use visitors and fishermen occupy different areas. Most day-use visitors frequent the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area while fishermen generally congregate on the North Core Banks and the Great Island area of the South Core Banks. Mobile fishermen follow the fish up and down the entire length of the islands. The present cabin locations provide separation between overnight visitors and day-use visitors. The alternative plan would continue this pattern of separating overnight from day-use visitors and avoiding potential user conflicts.

Issue 8. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on natural resources

The alternative plan acknowledges NPS's legal mandate to protect threatened and endangered species and habitat. Thus NPS must be aware of the possible effects of ORVs and human interference on the turtles, piping plovers, sea beach amaranth and their habitat. Under the alternative plan, NPS would continue to carry out its management plans, under protocols developed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for the protection of the species. NPS would pay particular attention to monitoring the adverse affects of ORVs and human interference (if any) and taking measures to mitigate these affects. As an initial step, NPS would reduce the capacity of the vehicle storage areas during the primary nesting and hatching months (June 1 through August 31). As information is collected, NPS would adjust the number of vehicles allowed in the storage areas.

As a preventative measure, NPS proposes to join with the concessioners and user groups to develop a threatened and endangered species awareness program aimed at cabin occupants and ORV users. Although most visitors respect the flora and fauna and their habitat, adverse human actions could jeopardize the perpetuation of the species and visitor enjoyment of the national seashore's resources.

Issue 9. Impacts of visitors and visitor service infrastructure on cultural resources

Under the alternative plan, NPS would not take actions that would intrude on the historic scene associated with the lighthouse. At Great Island and Long Point, the Service would include in its interpretive messages, materials explaining the story of surf fishing on the Core Banks.

Issue 10. Harkers Island Visitor Center

Under the alternative plan, NPS would work with IBP holders and concessioners to encourage visitors to stop at the Harkers Island visitor center to learn more about the natural, cultural, and recreational resources at the national seashore. In the event that visitors would not stop at the visitor center, NPS would increase its efforts, in cooperation with the IBP holders and the concessioners, to provide interpretive and educational materials and opportunities at Davis, Atlantic, and the embarkation points on Harkers Island.

Issue 11. Effect of proposed changes on park staff and resources

Under the alternative plan, NPS would increase its presence at the concession operations at Davis and Atlantic particularly during May, October, and November. In April, June, July, August, and September, NPS presence would be more limited. The park would increase its efforts at monitoring the effects of ORVs and human interference on threatened and endangered species and their habitat. Additional resources would be needed to enhance interpretive messages and materials.



Chapter Four

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING NO ACTION

Proposed Action

Cape Lookout National Seashore, a unit of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, proposes to improve overnight accommodations and transportation services to persons visiting North Core Banks (excluding the Portsmouth Island area) and South Core Banks at Cape Lookout National Seashore, Carteret County, North Carolina. In summary, the Preferred Plan is:

1. Negotiate long-term contracts with concessionaires to transport visitors and vehicles from the towns of Davis, North Carolina and Atlantic, North Carolina to Great Island and Long Point, both sites on the Core Banks, Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina.
2. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island and constructing 30 new cabins.
3. Add 10 new cabins at Long Point.
4. Improve IBP relationship by issuing biennial IBPs to small craft operators that provide transport services to visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.
5. The number of parking spaces near the Keeper's Quarters would be reduced.

Background

The purpose of this document is to initiate the administrative process required by the National Environmental Policy Act to provide evidence and analysis for determining the path of environmental compliance for the proposed action.

The need is to improve overnight accommodation and transportation services for persons visiting North Core Banks (excluding the Portsmouth Island area) and South Core

Banks. The amendment facilitates the process for selecting and recommending the implementation of a preferred alternative action that most improves visitor services while continuing to preserve and protect the seashore's natural and cultural resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

In a 20-year span, visitation to the national seashore rose from approximately 27,000 people to over 380,000. A majority of these persons are day-use visitors. Visitation is greatest during the summer months and concentrated on the southern end of South Core Bank. Consequently, summer occupancy of cabins has risen nearly 25 percent over the past three years at the Long Point location, while the numbers at the Great Island location have remained fairly constant. The increase in occupancy at Long Point may be attributed to the upgraded facilities. Cabins at Long Point are primitive and appeal to a wider variety of park visitors who prefer that type of experience.

The NPS permits the operation of three small ferry companies that provide passenger (no vehicles) ferry service from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. These service providers are issued Incidental Business Permits (IBP) on an annual basis to provide interim small boat service to the lighthouse area. Other operators leave from Beaufort and Morehead City. Another service travels between Ocracoke and Portsmouth Island.

Two independent concessionaires operate services to the Great Island area and the Long Point area (located on the North Core Banks) with passenger and vehicle ferry service and overnight accommodations. They transport visitors and vehicles to these areas and manage and maintain cabin facilities at each site. Concession permits/contracts for ferry and cabin operations at Great Island and Long Point expired in 1990. National Park Service policy regarding long-term concession contracts underwent an extensive review and updating process from 1991 through 1998. During this period of review, all long-term concessionaire permits/contracts at Cape Lookout National Seashore were renewed annually or biennially in anticipation of the revised regulations. Now that new NPS policy governing long-term contracts has been issued, Cape Lookout National Seashore wants to negotiate new long-term concession contracts for the ferry and cabin operations. The NPS believes that a long-

term contract would improve visitor services by enabling concessionaires to make needed capital investments in their accommodation and transportation operations and still realize a reasonable profit.

The focus of this amendment will address potential changes to the current general management plan relevant to overnight accommodations and transportation services at the areas previously noted.

Alternatives

The National Park Service proposes one Alternative Plan. In summary, the plan is:

1. Negotiate long-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point.
2. Improve overnight accommodations by removing old cabins at Great Island, constructing new 30 units, of which 10 units would be rustic with communal baths;
3. Adding 10 rustic lodging units with communal baths at Long Point; and
4. Improve IBP relationship and issue annual IBPs to small craft operators to provide transport services for visitors to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area.
5. The number of parking spaces near the Keeper's Quarters would be reduced. At Long Point and Great Island reduce number of parking spaces from 60 down to 30 during primary nesting/hatchling season.

The Alternative Plan differs from the Preferred Plan in that the 10 units at Long Point would be rustic with communal baths; 10 of the 30 Units at Great Island would be rustic with communal baths; only 30 parking spaces would be available for parking at Long Point and Great Island during the primary turtle and plover nesting/hatchling period; and IBPs would be issued annually instead of biennially.

No Action

In summary, the no action alternative is:

1. Maintain short-term contracts with concessioners to transport visitors and vehicles from Davis and Atlantic to Great Island and Long Point.
2. Maintain overnight accommodations at Great Island.
3. Maintain the current number of cabins at Long Point.

4. Maintain annual IBPs to small craft operators to provide transport services for visitors to Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters.
5. Maintain the number of spaces at all parking areas on the island.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

Non-living Components

Cape Lookout National Seashore is located in the central coastal area of North Carolina between Beaufort and Ocracoke Inlets. The seashore consists of three islands that make up a portion of the North Carolina Outer Banks. South Core Banks, the major portion of Cape Lookout National Seashore, arcs northeastward from Cape Lookout Bight for 25 miles to Drum Inlet. Drum Inlet separates South Core Banks from North Core Banks (which extends northeastward for another 22 miles). Another island located at the southern end of the Core Banks, Shackleford Banks, is 9 miles long and has an east-west orientation with a higher dune system (due to prevailing winds) and larger areas of vegetation. Barden Inlet separates it from South Core Banks. The area of the national seashore encompasses 28,400 acres, including 91-acre site on Harkers Island. More than one-third of the total seashore acreage is comprised of small, scattered islands on the sound side of Shackleford Banks and Core Banks/Portsmouth Island and in the nearshore water surrounding the barrier islands. Approximately 18,400 acres of emergent land compose the barrier islands. No roads connect Core Banks to neither the mainland nor each island with another.

The width of the islands range from 600 feet to 1.75 miles. The ocean is the dominant force of change and the forces of wind and wave action are constantly altering the islands' landscape. The landscape is comprised of low sand dunes (generally not exceeding ten feet on the Core Banks), strips of grassland behind the dunes with shrub thickets and a few hammocks scattered along its length, and an extensive salt marsh between the barrier island and mainland. Sand movement changes the appearance of the island, sometimes accreting, but more often eroding the shoreline. The predominately southwest littoral or along-the-shore currents, daily wave action, high waves and wind during storms are constantly moving the sand.

One of the most significant processes of the ocean is overwash, whereby storm waves from the ocean side penetrate or overtop the foredunes at various locations along the shoreline. This process usually transports large amounts

of sand. When the sand is dropped, deposits known as overwash fans or terraces are created. Sometimes the waves and their deposits extend across the island to the sound side. This sand movement plays an important role in marsh formation.

Summers are warm and humid with normal temperatures averaging in the high 70's (F.) and an average relative humidity of 76 percent. Winter temperatures can go below freezing but average is in the mid to upper 40's (F.). Annual snowfall is 1.9 inches. Fall and spring have lower humidity and are generally mild. Rainy periods occur throughout the year and precipitation averages about 4.67 inches a month. Annual rainfall averages 56.04 inches. Prevailing winds blow from the northeast in the autumn and winter and from the southwest at other times of the year. Wind speeds are lowest (12 to 13 miles per hour) during the summer months and slightly greater during the winter (14 to 15 miles per hour). The area can be hit by severe electrical storms, northeasters (extratropical storms), and hurricanes. Hurricanes in North Carolina generally occur from August to October.

The national seashore is designated as a Class II area for the prevention of significant deterioration in air quality. Even though it seems that most air pollutants are dispersed by maritime winds, the NPS believes that industrial pollutants are lowering the pH values of freshwater bodies in the Southeastern United States. Acid rain effect of freshwater ponds, vegetation and historic resources at Cape Lookout National Seashore are unknown and are not being monitored.

Ocean water temperatures along the Core Banks are 48 to 50 degrees (F.) during January and reach their warmest readings (79 to 80 degrees F.) in August.

Soils for the entire seashore are mapped and discussed in detail in the Soil Survey of the Outer Banks, North Carolina (USDA, SCS, 1977). They are characterized by having poor bearing capacity, instability due to wind and water activity, and high water tables. Therefore, all have severe limitations for development.

There are no known toxic or hazardous waste sites on the Core Banks and there is no evidence that underground tanks have been located in the developed areas. Leaks or spills from abandoned vehicles (later removed) and vehicles of recent and current users are the only known potential source for hazardous materials.

Living Components

The barrier islands that comprise the North Core and South Core islands support various species of small animals and a variety of vegetation ranging from salt marsh grasses to shrubs and trees. Vegetation is critical in maintaining what little stability exists on the barrier islands. Extensive root systems of maritime grasses help to stabilize sediments, whether windblown or waterborne. The grasses themselves tend to trap windblown sand. In this way, dunes build naturally and the topography is elevated just enough so that other forms of plant life can take root. Vegetation forms distinctive ecological zones across the barrier islands.

Flora

The Core Banks is fairly uniform with a wide berm, low dunes, grasslands and extensive salt marshes. The latter are a dominant landscape feature on the sound side and their function in maintaining a healthy ecosystem, values for wildlife habitat, and benefit to humans is well documented. They generally exist in the intermittently flooded area between mean sea level and the average spring high tide. The predominant vegetation is composed of dense stands of smooth cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora*. Salt marshes are dependent upon the cyclic inundation to accumulate peat, sediments, and nutrients. Tidal action also prevents the invasion of upland species and therefore maintains monotypic stands of the cordgrass.

Vegetation on Core Banks forms distinctive ecological zones across the island and have characteristic vegetation as follows:

- Beaches - void of vegetation except unicellular algae.
- Berms - sea oats and other plants trap enough sand at the driftline to form small dunes.
- Tidal flats - a few strands of cordgrass is all that inhabits this area at inlets.
- Dunes - sea oats help form low, scattered dunes in overwash areas. The backsides of the dunes may be heavily vegetated with vines such as Virginia creeper.
- Open grasslands - salt meadow cordgrass and pennywort sparsely grow through sand deposited in overwashes.
- Closed grasslands - dominated by denser stands of salt meadow cordgrass, pennywort, broomsedge and hairgrass. Rushes grow in areas with a higher water table.

- Woodlands - on higher and protected lands, population of live oak, southern red cedar, and American holly form maritime forests. Also, wax myrtle, yaupon, live oak, and marsh elder form shrub thickets.
- High salt marshes - are flooded in spring and during storm tides and are dominated by black needlerush and salt meadow cordgrass.
- Low salt marshes - dominated by salt marsh cordgrass and are flooded at mean low tide.
- Subtidal marine vegetation - extensive stands of eelgrass and widgeon grass can be found in protected, shallow waters.

Fauna

Marine animals inhabit the intertidal zones of the beaches and tidal flats. Burrowing mole crabs (*Emerita talpoida*) ghost crabs (*Ocypode quadrata*), and coquina clams (*Donax variabilis*) are found on the ocean beaches, and crustaceans and worms on the tidal flats. Many species of commercially valuable invertebrates and fish are supported by the food chain of the seashore's salt marshes and the marshes and tidal creeks serve as extremely productive nursery grounds.

The barrier islands provide habitats for a diversity of birds as well as terrestrial and marine animals. Birds are by far the most numerous with over 275 species identified within the seashore boundaries. Their abundance is due to the seashore's location on the Atlantic Flyway and to lack of development and human disturbance. Of special importance are the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucophalus*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), and piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*). The endangered bald eagle and peregrine falcon use the seashore in limited numbers for feeding and resting. The piping plover is threatened along the Atlantic coast and a 1994 survey showed that Cape Lookout had 39 nesting pairs on its beaches. This represents at least two-thirds of the nesting plover pairs in North Carolina. Great numbers of least terns (*Sterna antillarum*), gull-billed terns (*Sterna nilotica*), common terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and black skimmers (*Rynchops niger*) also nest in colonies on the beach/berm, among scattered low dunes, and on tidal flats.

Even though the harsh environment precludes large numbers and diversity, other animals found on the islands include amphibians and reptiles—tree frogs, toads, turtles, and snakes; freshwater fish in the isolated freshwater ponds; mammals—shrews, raccoons, and rabbits—in the shrub thickets; and mosquitoes and other insect pests in wet areas of the dunes, grasslands, and marshes. The ring-necked

pheasant, which is a favorite with some hunters, is an exotic species that exists in the shrub thickets on Core Banks.

Endangered species

The loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*), a threatened species, is a regular summer visitor to the Cape Lookout area. Cape Lookout is on the northernmost nesting range of the loggerhead turtle and provided the largest undeveloped coastline in North Carolina for nesting. The female turtles nest at night on berms of wide, sloping beaches or near the bases of dunes. Since 1989 the park has documented an average of 90 to 100 nests laid each year. The park adopted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Index Beach Program which requires seven days a week monitoring of sea turtle nesting activities between June 1 and August 15. This program requires a considerable amount of effort from park staff, Student Conservation Association personnel, and volunteers. Nests and hatchlings are protected from vehicles and park visitors through education and beach closures.

The NPS erects vehicle barricades around all relocated and non-relocated sea turtle nests. ORV traffic is routed around the back sides of the nests to prevent vehicle ruts in front of the nests. Some vehicles will illegally drive around these barricades particularly at low tide. Increased educational efforts targeted at the ORV user may reduce or eliminate this type of driving.

Field rangers and resource specialists at the park have been monitoring marine turtles, especially the loggerhead, since 1976. Extensive studies from 1978-1983 have been done whereby nesting turtles were tagged and nests marked during nightly patrols. Since 1984 the park has continued its monitoring activities, documenting strandings, protecting nest sites, relocating endangered nests, and protecting hatchlings. A report, Cape Lookout National Seashore 1998 Sea Turtle Monitoring Program, (Cordes and Rikard, 1998) consolidated data from monitoring activities since 1976 and reported four management recommendations. They included continuing patrols and relocation efforts, screens or cages to prevent raccoon predation, staff training in current monitoring procedures, and education for park visitors. The park also documented a nest laid by a leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and a nest by a green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) in 1994, both endangered species. The park reports regular strandings of loggerhead, green, Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), and leatherback sea turtles.

Along with the loggerhead sea turtles that inhabit the beaches from late spring through the summer months, piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) enjoy special status and the

NPS has been exercising its legal obligation to protect them and their habitat. The national seashore provides one of the southernmost habitats of the piping plover. On average 35 pair of piping plovers (approximately two-thirds of nesting pairs in North Carolina) nest and hatch their young on the Core Banks and are normally present from May through the end of August. Monitoring efforts include locating all nests, erecting predator barricades around the nests, and attempting to determine factors affecting productivity. Cape Lookout National Seashore continues to meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife guidelines to protect piping plover especially by closing nesting and foraging areas for chicks. Since 1989, the NPS has not documented any plovers or nests being run over by ORVs.

Cape Lookout National Seashore supports one threatened plant, seabeach amaranth (*Amaranthus pumilus*), of which over 2000 individuals were counted in 1994. The population of this annual plant varies greatly from year to year due to storm influences. Park staff conducts an annual survey of sea beach amaranth. At the present time the park foresees no feasible protection efforts necessary for this plant.

The park has not documented any disturbance of this plant by ORVs. Should the park determine that plants occurring in areas that may be affected by ORVs, those areas would be closed to ORV use. Recently, the park placed a turtle enclosure cage over one plant.

All proposed sites for construction are in areas that have been altered by human activities. The impacts anticipated will be no greater than the past impacts which have led to the development of this area. This site has historically been used for lodging and vehicle storage. The immediate impacts associated with construction are: disturbed earth, dust, noise above the ambient, and disarray. These are short-term impacts that will be gone at the conclusion of the construction phase of this project. The short-term impacts may be mitigated through construction site best management practices. Regularly sprinkling the roads and vehicle circulation routes with water will reduce dust. Regular pick up and disposal of litter and construction debris will reduce the litter problems. Noise and disarray are functions of a construction site and will disappear at the conclusion of construction. Remaining for the long term will be cabins, roads and fewer parking areas.

State-listed Species

These species are located at various places in the park. The little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*), snowy egret (*Egretta thula*), glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), and tricolored

heron (*Egretta tricolor*) are residents of the marsh. Roseate terns (*Sterna dougallii*) rarely visit the park and do not nest on the national seashore. Gull-billed terns (*Sterna nilotica*) nest in colonies on the beach/berm, among scattered low dunes. Loggerhead shrikes (*Lanius ludovicianus ludovicianus*) are occasional visitors that are found inland. Brown pelicans (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) fly up and down the coast and feed off shore; they do not nest in the park. The Outer Banks kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*) may be found in shrub thickets behind the dunes, while the Carolina diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin centrata*) and Carolina salt marsh snake (*Nerodia sipedon williamengelsi*) are salt marsh residents. The American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) rarely visits the Core Banks; it has been sighted once on the beach. The NPS has not documented and does not anticipate adverse impacts on State-listed species.

ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING NO ACTION

Environmental Impacts and Possible Mitigating and Enhancing Measures

Air Quality

Under this plan, there should only be minimal impacts on ambient air quality. There may be increases in vehicular emissions associated with temporary increases in vehicular traffic used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment needed for structure removal and construction of the additional lodging units. Long-term impacts to air quality would be associated with increased traffic due to an expected increase in visitation to the debarkation areas and the national seashore. There is no monitoring or baseline data on air quality that could be used to determine impacts.

Under the no action alternative, emissions associated with vehicular traffic involved in the construction or removal of cabins would not occur. Long-term impacts to air quality would continue as a result of vehicular traffic in the debarkation areas and the national seashore.

Water Quality

Based on current guidelines and best available information, project engineers will design sewage systems sufficient in size and loading to handle the calculated design flow associated with expected visitation levels. Under both plans, the concessioners would be responsible for maintaining the cabins' sewage and water systems. This would reduce the

potential impacts to ground water supplies and meet health and safety standards.

Additional withdrawals of ground water will result in more saltwater intrusion. Mitigation efforts focus on instituting water conservation practices such as low-gallon usage systems (showers, toilets), automatic shutoff control on all outdoor faucets, and education of visitors on water conservation measures. Monitoring of salt-water intrusion could be implemented to determine if water-use restrictions need implementing.

Under no action, project engineers and concessioners monitor sewage and water systems to ensure compliance with health and safety standards. Because the concession contracts would be short term, there would be little incentive to make substantial improvements to water conservation practices.

Wetlands and Floodplain Assessment:

The barrier islands are within the 100-year floodplain and the coastal high hazard area. North Carolina's Coastal Area Management Act provides additional protection to coastal wetlands and the cabins will be constructed in accordance to existing guidelines and regulations. Only minimal impact due to construction in the floodplain is expected from either proposal.

There is no proposed filling or dredging of the marsh wetlands at this site nor is there any intention to maintain or enhance existing marsh wetlands. Using established channels to the Core Banks precludes the necessity of dredging and maintaining channels in undisturbed areas. Therefore, implementing either plan or continuing no action should cause no impact to wetlands and no mitigation is deemed necessary. However, the wetlands could be interpreted in the efforts to increase visitor understanding of the seashore and marsh habitats. Interpretation efforts could be included in the interpretive program that is planned to occur before and when visitors arrive at the Davis facility. At the lodging sites, the NPS will provide printed interpretive materials, erect bulletin board, and present monthly programs.

Under no action, no impact in the floodplain would occur. As no changes to the interpretive program would take place, visitor understanding of the seashore and marsh habitats would not increase.

Prime and Unique Farmland

No prime or unique farmland is located on the Core Banks therefore there are no impacts or mitigation measures needed to address.

Geology and Soils

The proposed construction would affect undisturbed topsoils. Overall impacts would be minor as this soil is already disturbed and the geology of the Outer Banks is one of shifting sands that are constantly being moved. Because of the geomorphological nature of barrier islands, any increase in sea level rise could greatly influence these islands. All new structure construction will meet State building codes. Overall, new developments under both proposals would allow for the restoration of a 60-space parking area and reduction of the size of another. The total area would be less than that on which development would occur.

Construction impacts of dust, litter, and potential public hazard may be mitigated through construction site best management practices (BMP) and onsite construction inspection. Watering, site fencing and BMPs should mitigate these common construction site impacts. Vigilant inspection should control construction problems.

Under no action, topsoils would remain undisturbed. Because all parking areas would remain as is no restoration of disturbed sites would take place. In that no construction would occur, short-term impacts, such as dust and litter, would not happen.

Fish, Shellfish, Wildlife and their Habitat

Since parking in the area of the Cape Lookout Environmental Education Center would be closed and another one would be reduced, the remaining portions would be restored to natural conditions. Minimal impacts are expected in the areas of development. Vehicle use would continue using designated travel corridors. No additional impacts to environmentally sensitive areas such as salt marshes, shore bird colonies and sea turtle nests are anticipated.

Under no action, parking areas would not be closed, hence areas would not be restored.

Federally-listed Species

Under both plans, an emphasis would be placed on monitoring the effects of visitors and visitor use patterns on threat-

ened and endangered species and their habitat and increasing visitor awareness of the island's special resources. Scheduling construction would in part be based upon NPS monitoring and study of ORVs and human interference on these species. The increasing popularity of Cape Lookout National Seashore will result in greater visitation however, NPS has a legal mandate to protect threatened and endangered species and habitat and is aware of the possible effects of ORVs and human interference on the turtles, piping plovers, seabeach amaranth and their habitat. Although, the operation of motor vehicles on turtle and piping plover nesting beaches for recreational purposes is permitted on the Core Banks, during the nesting season beaches designated for nesting and nest relocation are closed to vehicle access. The NPS follows the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's protocol for the protection and management of these three species. None of the areas designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as critical habitat for wintering piping plovers are in the same locations as the cabins, ferry landings, or parking areas. The NPS documents its adherence to the recommended protocol in an annual report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The only documented disturbance by ORVs is illegally driving around turtle enclosures.

The beach environment is where most of the endangered and threatened species are located. Nesting sea turtles, piping plovers and the sea beach amaranth plant can be found in this environment. The actions under each proposal will not occur in the beach area and specific location of individuals and nests. Although the peregrine falcon migrates through Cape Lookout in the summer, none of the actions in these plans are expected to be affected. There may be juvenile bald eagles in the region, although probably not in the areas of the existing development therefore they should not be affected.

Under both plans the NPS would cooperate with user groups and concessionaires to develop a threatened and endangered species awareness program. This program would be directed at cabin occupants and ORV users. Increased interpretive and educational efforts would go toward ensuring visitors respect the NPS responsibility to protect threatened and endangered species.

The proposals are not expected to impact any threatened and endangered species.

Under no action, steps would not be taken to monitor the effects of visitors and visitor use patterns on threatened and endangered species. The NPS would follow the Fish and Wildlife Service's protocol to protect and manage them. No special visitor awareness programs would be developed.

State-listed Species

Both plans would emphasize increasing visitor awareness of the island's special resources, including State-listed birds and reptiles. Construction of new cabins in the Long Point area would be mindful of avoiding shrub thickets, habitat for the Outer Banks king snake. Reducing the size of the cabin area on Great Island would increase the opportunity for restoring the habitat of these creatures. The NPS is aware of the possible effects of ORVs and human interference on nesting and resting shorebirds and their habitat. Motor vehicles are prohibited from entering sections of the beach designated for nesting.

Several of the State-listed species are located in the beach environment and the marsh. Nesting, migrant, and feeding birds may be found in or near this environment. The actions under each proposal will not occur on the beach, near specific locations of individuals and nests, or in the marsh.

Under both plans, the NPS would work with the concessionaires and user groups to heighten the awareness of visitors toward these special resources. This program would be directed at cabin occupants and ORV users. Increased interpretive and educational efforts would help ensure visitor understanding of the responsibility to protect important species.

The proposals are not anticipated to adversely affect any State-listed species.

Under no action, interpretive programs would not go forward to heighten visitor awareness of State-listed species. Nesting areas would continue to be cordoned off from human interference and ORVs. Restoration of habitat for reptiles would not take place in the Great Island area or in parking areas. No direct adverse impacts would occur to species that inhabit the marsh areas.

Exotic Dune and Beach Vegetation

Non-native vegetation is present on the Core Banks. The invasion of more aggressive and competitive non-native vegetation could occur in areas where soil surfaces are disturbed by demolition, construction, and human activity. Invasive exotics may out-compete native species like sea oats and destabilize dunes or shorelines. The implementation of an exotic vegetation management plan to prevent their introduction, establishment, or spread would mitigate their negative impacts. Under the plan, efforts to restrict soil disturbance, identify invasive species, and provide recommendations for management would be identified.

The NPS is not aware of any research regarding the spread of exotic vegetation by ORVs in coastal habitats. Considering the effects of saltspray and the inhospitable nature of the island habitats, it is unlikely that non-native plant species could easily become established and survive without being intentionally planted and maintained.

Under no action, no special efforts would go forward to identify invasive species and provide recommendations for management.

Areas of Historic or Archeological Value

Actions under neither plan or no action affect or intrude on the historic scene associated with the lighthouse. Areas where construction will occur have previously been disturbed so any activities associated with this plan are not expected to impact any historical or archeological resources. To increase the knowledge of visitors to the Core Banks, the NPS would include in its interpretive message materials exploring the story of surf fishing on the Core Banks to visitors arriving at Great Island and Long Point.

Under no action, the story of surf fishing would not be explored.

Native American Values and Uses

There are no prehistoric sites at Cape Lookout National Seashore considered eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. No traditional Native American values and uses have been identified and therefore no impacts are anticipated.

Visitor Experience

The cabins at Great Island and Long Point are easily accessible and well known to fishermen and others. Upgrading these would mean that the NPS is in compliance with State and Federal building, health, and safety standards. Improving these would ensure that visitors would not have substandard accommodations any longer. Also, the NPS expects to attract a broader range of visitors to these facilities.

Concessioners would have a stronger commitment to maintain the structures and feel less risk to make major capital investments into the facilities with long-term contracts. Recreational values for a majority of visitors would be improved by offering improved lodging and dependable access to the core banks. Some visitors who seek the solitude and quietness so readily available at the Core Banks may object to increased visitation. However, due to the size of the

banks and the concentration of most day users in the vicinity of the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters and the lighthouse, the impacts are expected to be negligible.

One of the two parking areas for vehicles would be reduced in size and another would be eliminated. Since the former is rarely used and the later used even less, the NPS expects this action would not detract from the visitor experience. In fact, the visitor experience should improve because no vehicles will blight visitor views and the area will be allowed to return to a natural state and most likely become suitable habitat for island wildlife.

Implementing either plan or no action should not increase conflicts between user groups since most of the day-use users and fishermen generally occupy different areas. These alternatives do not put these groups in greater contact with each other. No mitigative measures are expected to be necessary.

Under no action, substandard cabins would continue to exist and not appeal to a broad range of visitors. Without a long-term contract concessioner commitment to maintaining structures and making capital improvements would be lacking. Taking no action would have a negligible effect on improving the experience of those seeking solitude and quiet on the Core Banks. Not removing parking areas and restoring natural conditions would have an adverse impact on the visitor experience.

Scenic and Recreational Areas

There would be no adverse effects to scenic values or recreational areas.

Noise Levels

Noise levels would probably be increased during the demolition and construction phases. Afterwards, noise levels would return to current levels. No long-term noise impacts are anticipated.

Under no action, noise levels would continue at current levels.

Visitor Use and Park Operations

Under both plans, the NPS would increase its presence at the concession operations at Davis and Atlantic particularly during May, October, and November. In April, June, July, August, and September, NPS presence would be more limited. Increasing NPS activities at concession operations would

require a reassignment of workstations and may require additional resources and travel time. The park would increase its efforts at monitoring the effects of ORVs and human interference on threatened and endangered species and their habitat

Traditional use patterns would continue if either plan or no action were implemented. NPS operations would be strengthened through long-term concession contracts providing transportation, accommodations, and information about the Core Banks. Both the ferry concessioners and the NPS desire long-term contracts. If the NPS staff issues and manages multiple IBPs biennially, this may reduce the amount of management and administrative time required by NPS personnel. The Preferred Plan would thus have slightly fewer impacts on employee time than issuing IBPs annually as called for in the Alternative Plan.

Using the existing ferry locations, which are familiar to local and frequent visitors, would not disrupt the continuum.

Mitigating the effects of refocusing visitor arrival and IBP operations may be done through demonstration of the advantages to the IBPs. The concentration of informed and prepared visitors is advantageous for educating visitors of the park's resources.

Improving the cabins may attract more visitors to visit the Core Banks during the "low season" and would have minimal impact on most visitors' experience. On the contrary, visitors, who have refused to go for overnight visits because of lodging conditions, would now be served. Maintaining but upgrading the cabins at Great Island and Long Point would meet health and safety standards but not have any adverse impact on traditional uses, cultural resources or natural resources.

Under no action, NPS presence at concessions operations at Davis and Atlantic would be limited year-round. Traditional use patterns would continue. By not improving the cabins, a more diverse audience would not be attracted to stay overnight on the island. Because interpretive efforts would not be expanded, visitor understanding of the island's dynamics would not be enhanced. Issuing IBPs annually would involve greater demands on NPS staff time than proposed by the plan or its alternative.

Introduction of Toxic Substances (Compliance with CRCLA and RCRA)

There are no known reasons or proposals for the use of hazardous materials under either of the plans or no action.

The proposed sites have no history of use as an industrial site or dump and no impacts are anticipated. If any hazardous or toxic waste sites are identified during construction, response plans and remedial actions will be undertaken.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Impacts to social issues are often resolved through the subtle understanding reached through discussion, education and personal agreement of the major issues identified. Having the commitment of concessionaires to invest in boats that accommodate school and large groups would benefit these user groups since some of these groups are now reluctant to visit because present operations require extra time and supervision when groups are split. Accommodating school groups would also benefit the Cape Lookout Environmental Education Center efforts and augment the park's goal to increase the public's understanding about the park's cultural and natural resources. Implementing either plan would have no negative impacts on the public.

Community values adjacent to Cape Lookout are greatly affected by recreational opportunities that the park offers. Local economics are heavily influenced by park visitation: fishing, boating and day-use activities within the park's boundaries. If services are improved and park visitation increases, probably only minimally as a result of either action, businesses within the community should also see an increase of spending in their establishments.

There is a constituency of visitors who value the Core Banks for the native plant and animal communities and natural barrier island processes. They would prefer the barrier islands to revert to natural processes and want no development on the islands. It can be argued that removing parking areas and consolidating the planned construction supports their desires. However, and although aesthetics is subjective, the additional cabins could reduce the aesthetic values of the island to these visitors.

As tourism in Carteret County grows, vandalism and other crimes are likely to increase, too. Although the seashore is difficult to access and visitation is limited, the NPS expects to see an increase in visitation and vandalism/crimes associated with that increase. Some laws will be difficult to enforce because of the length of the park, its remoteness from the mainland, and limited patrol personnel assigned the park. Through an addition to the Superintendent's Compendium in 2000, the park has lowered the speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph. This action was taken to reduce the opportunity for birds to avoid contact with oncoming vehicles. Some

vehicles drive around enclosures; however, there has been no documentation of a “taking” of endangered species.

Under no action, continuing the current arrangement for transportation to the Cape Lookout Lighthouse area would not include provisions to accommodate school and large groups. Public understanding of the park’s cultural and natural resources would not be enhanced. Maintaining the current cabin situation would not result in an increase for the local economy.

Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources

The changes in the natural contours of the land, the fuels and energies expended in construction on this site and the manufacture and transport of construction materials to this site are irretrievable. The resources effected are renewable and the changes this action causes may be mitigated. The majority of the construction materials used are recyclable. The channels used by the ferries to transport visitors to the Core Banks were established prior to the creation of the National Seashore. No “taking” of an endangered species has been documented. Reasonably, there is no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

Because the function of this site is dependent upon its close proximity to water, construction in a hurricane prone area is required and the licensing, guidelines, and restrictions required in the North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Guidelines will be adhered to. Mitigation of action in this coastal zone will be fulfilled by implementation of the requirements set forth in the guidelines.

Under no action, there is no irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

Residual Impacts

The residual impact of presence will persist at this site once construction is completed. The existing cabins at Great Island are spread out over approximately 163 acres but new buildings and structures will actually be situated on a much smaller area. Structures and human activity are a continuation of long-term effects to an already human-affected area. The additional lodging does not increase the number of lodgers; it only relocates them from another area and will, with time, become a part of the human scene of the island.

The site is an area of existing impacts. It may be argued that the proposed action is an improvement over the existing conditions.

Under no action, the cabins would continue to be spread out over a vast area; one that is much larger than proposed by the plan and its alternative.

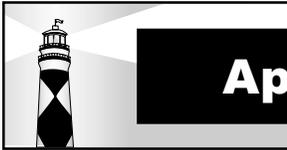
RECORDATION OF PERSONS, GROUPS, AND GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES CONSULTED

The park’s mailing list of potentially interested individuals including businesses, agencies, organizations, and media names will be used as an initial means of consultation for the draft copy of this document. Agencies contacted included the North Carolina Coastal Zone Management, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other pertinent Federal, State, and local agencies. In addition, other interested groups will be notified. General notice of the opportunity for public comment on this draft environmental assessment for this proposal will be announced through the local newspapers of record and through a news release to the local media.

INTENSITY OF PUBLIC INTEREST

The size and location of this proposal relative to the area and population of the area is enough to make the proposed development one of general public interest.

Specific interest of individuals associated with the fishing clubs is recognized, as is the business and personal interest of the residents of Harkers Island. Public meetings were held in Beaufort, North Carolina in July and September 1998 to gather input from interested parties and individuals on the development of these alternatives. These meetings were announced by Public Notice in newspapers of general circulation, posting of the notice of meeting in public places, announcement of meetings on local radio stations, and a television program of the proposed project was aired on the local television station during 1998. A record of Public Hearing Minutes and an Attendance Record were kept for this effort at public information and involvement. Public meetings on the draft GMP Amendment and Environmental Assessment were held in September 1999.



Appendix A

LEGISLATION

8. Cape Lookout

An Act to provide for the establishment of the Cape Lookout National Seashore in the State of North Carolina, and for other purposes. (80 Stat. 33)

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in order to preserve for public use and enjoyment an area in the State of North Carolina possessing outstanding natural and recreational values, there is hereby authorized to be established the Cape Lookout National Seashore (hereinafter referred to as "seashore"), which shall comprise the lands and adjoining marshlands and waters on the outer banks of Carteret County, North Carolina, between Ocracoke Inlet and Beaufort Inlet, as generally depicted on the map entitled "Proposed Boundaries—Proposed Cape Lookout National Seashore", dated April 1964, and numbered NS-CL-7101-B, which is on file in the Office of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior: *Provided, however,* That such seashore shall not include those lands and interests in lands which are bounded on the north by the southerly boundary of the Cape Lookout lighthouse property, on the east by a line located seven hundred and fifty feet inland from the mean high water line of the Atlantic Ocean, on the south by the northerly boundary of property now owned or leased by the United States Coast Guard and other Federal agencies, and on the west by the easterly boundary of property of the Thomas Gold heirs (as shown on a map prepared by J. G. Hassel in October 1961 and recorded at page 4 of Map Book Numbered 6 in the office of the Register of Deeds, Carteret County, North Carolina) and the waters of Lookout Bight.

SEC. 2. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, Federal property located within the boundaries of the Cape Lookout National Seashore may, with the concurrence of the agency having custody thereof, be transferred to the administrative jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior for the purposes of the seashore. Such transfer shall be made without transfer of funds. Non-Federal lands, marshlands, waters, or interests therein located within the authorized seashore may be acquired by the Secretary of the Interior only through donation, except that he may purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or may acquire by exchange, the lands, marshlands, and waters or interests therein comprising the Shackleford Banks. Land donated by the State of North Carolina pursuant to this subsection shall constitute consideration for the transfer by the United States of 1.5 acres of land that is to be used as a site for a public

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health facility in the village of Hatteras, Dare County, North Carolina.

(b) When acquiring lands by exchange, the Secretary may accept title to any non-Federal property within the boundaries of the seashore and convey to the grantor of such property any federally owned property in the State of North Carolina under his jurisdiction which he classifies as proper for exchange or other disposition. Failing to effectuate an exchange of properties of approximately equal fair market value, the Secretary may accept cash from or pay cash to the grantor in such an exchange in order to equalize the values of the properties exchanged.

(c) Any person who on January 1, 1966, owned property which on July 1, 1963, was developed and used for noncommercial residential purposes may reserve for himself and his assigns, as a condition to the purchase or acquisition by exchange of such property by the Secretary, a right of use and occupancy of the residence and not in excess of three acres of land on which the residence is situated, for noncommercial residential purposes for a term ending at the death of the owner, or the death of his spouse, or the death of either of them, or, in lieu thereof, for a definite term not to exceed twenty-five years: *Provided*, That the Secretary may exclude from such reserved property any marsh, beach, or waters, together with so much of the land adjoining such marsh, beach, or waters as he deems necessary for public access thereto. The owner shall elect the term of the right to be reserved. The Secretary is authorized to accept donations of property for purposes of the seashore in which a right of use and occupancy for noncommercial residential purposes is reserved for the period stated in this subsection if the land on which the residence is situated and to which the right attaches is not in excess of three acres and there is excluded from the reserved property such marsh, beach, or waters and adjoining land as the Secretary deems necessary for public use and access thereto.

(d) A right of use and occupancy reserved in lands that are donated or otherwise acquired pursuant to this section shall be subject to termination by the Secretary upon his determination that such use and occupancy is being exercised in a manner not consistent with the purposes of this Act and upon tender to the holder of the right of an amount equal to the fair market value of that portion of the right which remains unexpired on the date of termination.

(e) The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or acquire by exchange, not to exceed one hundred acres of lands or interests in lands at or near Beaufort, North Carolina, as an administrative site, and for a landing dock and re-

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lated facilities that may be used to provide a suitable approach or access to the seashore.

SEC. 3. When title to the lands and interests in lands which under section 2(a) of this Act may be acquired for the purposes of the seashore by donation only is vested in the United States, the Secretary shall declare the establishment of the Cape Lookout National Seashore by publication of notice thereof in the Federal Register. Such notice shall contain a refined description or map of the boundaries of the seashore as the Secretary may find desirable and such exterior boundaries shall encompass, as nearly as possible, the area generally described in section 1 of this Act. Copies of said description or map shall be furnished to the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate not less than thirty days prior to publication in the Federal Register. Following such establishment, and subject to the limitations and conditions prescribed in this Act, the Secretary may, subject to the provisions of section 2 hereof, acquire the remainder of the lands and interests in lands within the boundaries of the seashore.

SEC. 4. The Secretary shall permit hunting and fishing, including shellfishing, on lands, marshlands, and waters under his jurisdiction within the Cape Lookout National Seashore in accordance with the laws of the State of North Carolina and the United States, to the extent applicable, except that the Secretary may designate zones where, and establish periods when, no hunting or fishing shall be permitted for reasons of public safety, administration, fish or wildlife management, or public use and enjoyment. Except in emergencies, any rules and regulations of the Secretary pursuant to this section shall be put into effect only after consultation with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development.

SEC. 5. The Secretary shall administer the Cape Lookout National Seashore for the general purposes of public outdoor recreation, including conservation of natural features contributing to public enjoyment. In the administration of the seashore and the administrative site, the Secretary may utilize such statutory authorities relating to areas administered and supervised by the Secretary through the National Park Service and such statutory authorities otherwise available to him for the conservation and management of natural resources as he deems appropriate to carry out the purposes of this Act.

SEC. 6. The authority of the Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army, to undertake or contribute to shore erosion control or beach protection measures within the Cape Lookout National Seashore shall be exercised in accordance with a plan that is mutually acceptable to the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the

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Army, and that is consistent with the purposes of this Act.

SEC. 7. There are hereby authorized to be appropriated not to exceed \$3,200,000 for the acquisition and development of the seashore in accordance with the purposes of this Act.

Approved March 10, 1966.

Legislative History

House Report No. 1278 accompanying H.R. 1784 (Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs).

Senate Report No. 509 (Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs).

Congressional Record:

Vol. 111 (1965): July 27, considered and passed Senate.

Vol. 112 (1966):

Feb. 16, considered and passed House, amended, in lieu of H.R. 1784.

Feb. 23, Senate concurred in House amendment with an amendment.

Feb. 28, House concurred in Senate amendment.

4. Cape Lookout

An Act to provide for increases in appropriation ceilings and boundary changes in certain units of the National Park System, to authorize appropriations for additional costs of land acquisition for the National Park System, and for other purposes. (88 Stat. 1445) (P.L. 93-477)

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

TITLE IV—MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

* * * * *

CAPE LOOKOUT NATIONAL SEASHORE

SEC. 406. The Act of March 10, 1966 (80 Stat. 33; 16 U.S.C. 459g) providing for the establishment of Cape Lookout National Seashore in the State of North Carolina is amended as follows:

(1) Section 1 is amended by deleting “‘Proposed Boundaries—Proposed Cape Lookout National Seashore’, dated April 1964, and numbered NS-CL-7101-B,” and substituting in lieu thereof “‘Boundary Map, Cape Lookout National Seashore’, dated March 1974, and numbered 623-20,009,” and by changing the colon to a period and deleting the remainder of the section.

(2) Subsection 2(a) is amended by deleting the third sentence and inserting in lieu thereof the following: “Lands owned by the State of North Carolina or any political subdivision thereof may be acquired only by donation, but the Secretary may, subject to the provisions of section 7 of this Act, acquire any other non-Federal lands, marshlands, waters, or interests therein which are located within the boundaries of the seashore by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or exchange. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary may accept any lands donated by the State of North Carolina subject to a provision for reversion to the State conditioned upon continued use of the property for national seashore purposes.”

(3) Section 3 is amended by revising the first sentence to read as follows: “When title to lands and interests in lands in an amount sufficient to constitute an efficiently administrable unit for the purposes of this Act is vested in the United States, the Secretary shall declare the establishment of the seashore by publication of notice thereof in the Federal Register.”

(4) Section 7 is amended to read as follows:

“SEC. 7. On or before January 1, 1978, the Secretary shall review the area within the seashore and shall report to the President, in accordance with section 3 (c) and (d) of the Wilderness Act (78 Stat. 891; 16 U.S.C.

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1132 (c) and (d)), his recommendations as to the suitability or nonsuitability of any area within the seashore for preservation as wilderness, and any designation of any such areas as a wilderness shall be accomplished in accordance with said subsections of the Wilderness Act.”

(5) Add a new section 8 to read as follows:

“SEC. 8. There are hereby authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act, not to exceed \$7,903,000 for acquisition of lands and interests therein, of which no more than \$1,000,000 may be expended for acquisition of lands owned by Core Banks Club Properties, Incorporated. For development of essential public facilities there are authorized to be appropriated not more than \$2,935,000. On or before January 1, 1978, the Secretary shall develop and transmit to the Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States Congress a final master plan for the full development of the seashore consistent with the preservation objectives of this Act, indicating—

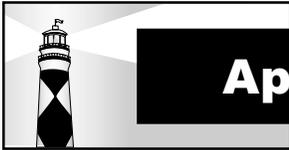
“(1) the facilities needed to accommodate the health, safety and recreation needs of the visiting public;

“(2) the location and estimated cost of all facilities; and

“(3) the projected need for any additional facilities within the seashore.”

* * * * *

Approved October 26, 1974.



Appendix B

PREPARERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

National Park Service Planning Team

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Appendix C

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Compliance Requirements

Cape Lookout National Seashore must comply with the following laws.

1. North Carolina Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) of 1974. Regulated by Division of Coastal Management. Cape Lookout National Seashore is an Area of Environmental Concern (AEC) and the proposed development will require review by the Coastal Resources Commission.
2. Water Resources Development Act of 1976 (P.L. 94-587)
3. Water Quality Considerations - no Section 401 water quality certification is being requested for the proposed project.
4. Flood Plain Management. The proposed action is located in the flood plain and has been evaluated for adherence to the requirement of the order. No practicable alternative to the project being located within the floodplain exists. The action will be in compliance with State/local flood plain protection standards and Executive Order 11988, Flood Plain Management.
5. Protection of Wetlands, Executive Order 11900. This project will not affect wetlands.
6. Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment, Executive Order 11593. The proposed plan does not affect any known National Register criteria.
7. Threatened and Endangered Species Act. Informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been conducted the determination that no threatened or endangered species will be adversely affected by the proposed action.
8. Executive Order 11988, "Floodplain Management" (42 U.S.C. 4321)



COMMENTS AND RESPONSES FOR JULY 1999 DRAFT PLAN

Comments and Responses

This appendix responds to comments about the Draft GMP/EA issued in July 1999.

Comment: The GMP of 1982 was outdated, inadequate, and incomplete; specifically, it failed to assess the effects of its actions on listed species. Thus the NPS violated its own policies by amending the GMP rather than developing a new one.

Response: The NPS did not violate its own policies by choosing to amend the GMP. Director's Order #2 requires that the GMP be reviewed every 10 to 15 years; it may be amended, rather than revised, if conditions and management prescriptions over most of the area covered by the GMP remains essentially the same. In this case, the changed conditions do not necessarily require a complete revision of the GMP. The added consideration of two listed species—the sea beach amaranth and piping plover—does not constitute enough of a change in conditions or management prescriptions to trigger the revision requirement. These species are not located in “most of the area” covered by the GMP. NPS has put other efforts in place to assess the effects of the GMP on these species, even if they are not discussed in detail in the Amendment. The proposed actions to protect these species are generally the same as those proposed to protect the loggerhead turtle, the status of which was addressed in the original GMP. The seashore meets guidelines established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for protection of plovers, turtles, and seabeach amaranth and provides them with an annual report on each species.

The Amendment recognized one significant change from the original GMP, namely an increase in day-use visitation in the lighthouse area, and identified specific management prescriptions to address this phenomenon.

Comment: NPS should have prepared an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Response: One of the categories of actions that the NPS has identified for which an EIS is normally is prepared is a GMP for a major unit of the National Park System. This can be read

as meaning preparing, rather than amending, a GMP. In any case, the NPS may decide, to evaluate an action for which an EIS is normally required, to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) and make it available for public comment. In other words, NPS policies and procedures do not actually require that an EIS be prepared for a GMP amendment, as long as the NPS uses the EA to take a hard look at the possible impact of the proposed action.

Comment: The Amendment failed to provide sufficient information about the ferry concession contract, such as the term, the level of service, and conditions to ensure conservation of the Seashore. Moreover, the EA failed to address the environmental impacts of the ferry operations.

Response: The ferry concessions are not new operations, but are continuations of two routes that have been in place since 1982. The only recommended change to the ferry concessions proposed plan and alternative is increasing the duration of the contracts from annual or biannual to long term. The location of the ferry piers would not change. The level of service would not change; traditional use patterns would continue. Concessioners would have to upgrade and maintain docking facilities and work with the NPS and other groups to develop interpretive programs and listed species awareness programs.

A GMP is a general planning document. Details such as terms and conditions of contracts are more appropriately discussed in an implementation-planning document or in the contracts themselves. The only environmental impact of the proposed extensions to the ferry concessions contract per se is discussed in the EA, and the conclusion is that such impacts will be “negligible.” The increase in visitors due to an improved infrastructure would be minimal, compared with the significantly larger numbers of day visitors that do not use the ferries.

Comment: The Amendment failed to provide sufficient information about the proposed cabins, such as their ability to withstand storm conditions. Construction of the cabins might violate the Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA). The EA did not evaluate sufficiently the environmental impact of the cabins, including the resulting increase in visitation on

wildlife, or discuss the mitigation measures that would accompany construction.

Response: The Amendment makes clear the NPS' commitment to ensure that the cabins will satisfy requirements relating to construction in hurricane-prone areas. Construction of cabins on the Seashore is not, in and of itself, illegal, and the Amendment states that the Service will build the new cabins to comply with all applicable laws.

Construction of these cabins is not subject to CBRA, which applies only to the Coastal Barrier Resources System (System). Not only does the definition of "undeveloped coastal barrier" under CBRA expressly exclude barrier islands that are "included within the boundaries of an area established under Federal law primarily for wildlife refuge, sanctuary, recreational, or natural resource conservation purposes," but the Seashore is located in an area designated as "otherwise protected," i.e. outside of and not subject to the requirements applicable to the System.

We believe that the EA contains an adequate discussion of potential new effects of cabin construction. The cabins would still be separated from important threatened and endangered species habitat. Construction would not occur in the beach area or specific locations of the listed species. The general nature of these impacts, and of the proposed mitigation activities, is consistent with the nature of the Amendment as a general planning document and of the EA as a brief and concise environmental analysis.

Comment: The Amendment did not evaluate adequately the effects of the proposed actions on state-listed sensitive species, by failing to list those species at all, and on endangered or threatened species. The EA failed to address the possible effects of ferry and small craft activities on the piping plover and the seabeach amaranth, species that were not listed when the original GMP was finalized.

Response: The discussions of the effects of the proposed actions on Federally listed species is sufficiently specific for an EA, especially when the conclusion of the EA is that the proposal will not have a significant impact. The Amendment and the EA both discuss numerous potential impacts and how they are or will be addressed. This includes the discussion of the effects of the proposal on the piping plover and seabeach amaranth. Many of the actions that are proposed to protect the loggerhead turtle will protect these species as well.

The Amendment acknowledges that some documented human interference with turtle and plover nests have

occurred, but that it has not been demonstrated that they have had a significant effect on either species. Nonetheless, additional mitigation measures will be taken in response to this interference, along with the continuation of current mitigation. No new impacts on listed species are contemplated.

We acknowledge that the Amendment and EA did not address or mention the impact of the proposals on state-listed sensitive species. The revised Amendment/EA will do so.

Comment: The Amendment did not sufficiently address concerns about the effects of ORVs and other recreational vehicles.

Response: The Amendment is not an entirely new GMP. It discusses only specific changes; accordingly, the EA would address the environmental effects only of those changes. The EA is not required to address the effects of ORV and recreational activity already contemplated by the original GMP. The only possible environmental effects related to ORVs and recreation associated with proposal apparent in the Amendment are indirect, namely related to an increase in recreational activity due to an increase in visitors that would flow from additional cabins. The Amendment and the EA clearly address the potential impacts of the proposal as related to ORV and recreational activities and the way the NPS can address those impacts. The documents acknowledge that the NPS has not yet systematically monitored the effects of ORVs, if any, on listed species, and that NPS has committed to perform such monitoring before scheduling construction of the cabins. Note that two proposed alternatives were rejected because of the likelihood that they would increase ORV and recreational use.

Comment: The EA failed to review an adequate range of alternatives and did not evaluate a true "no action" alternative.

Response: The basic policy objectives behind the Amendment are stated succinctly at several places: "to ensure the protection of the natural and cultural environment, including federally listed species, while allowing appropriate levels and types of visitor use;" and to select an action that "most improves visitor services while continuing to preserve and protect the seashore's natural resources." Alternatives that are wholly inconsistent with these policy objectives, or are wholly infeasible or ineffective, need not be considered. For instance, no alternatives were proposed that involved the elimination of cabins or ORVs. One of the key features of the Seashore is the availability of its 50-mile shoreline for surf-

fishing, it is reasonable to conclude that a proposal to eliminate overnight sleeping facilities and use of ORVs that would greatly reduce accessibility to such a feature would be considered inconsistent with those policy objectives. Omitting such an alternative from the Amendment and the EA was reasonable.

Arguably, the “no action” alternative—the continuation of existing conditions—would be inconsistent with basic policy objective or would be infeasible or ineffective. However, we also acknowledge that an EA should contain a discussion of a “no action” alternative. The revised document contains such a discussion. Note that the no action alternative would continue existing conditions, and would not provide for the elimination of all cabins and ORVs.



Appendix E

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES FOR DECEMBER 2000 DRAFT PLAN

Comments and Responses

This appendix responds to comments about the Draft GMP/EA issued in December 2000.

Comment: The statement that Cape Lookout National Seashore marks the northernmost edge of the range of the Loggerhead turtle is incorrect.

Response: Cape Lookout National Seashore is part of the northernmost nesting range of the Loggerhead sea turtle. They nest at Cape Hatteras National Seashore and occasionally in Virginia.

Comment: The statement that Cape Lookout National Seashore provides one of the southernmost habitats for the federally listed piping plover is incorrect.

Response: Cape Lookout National Seashore is the southernmost nesting range of the piping plover. Rare nesting events (one nest each time) occurred in South Carolina in 1991 and 1993.

Comment: We question the use of adventitiously to describe seabeach amaranth growth at Cape Lookout National Seashore.

Response: Seabeach amaranth is an annual that reproduces by seeds and adventitiously takes advantage or appears in suitable habitat and conditions. To avoid further confusion we have substituted the term “in suitable habitat and conditions” for the word adventitiously in the revised document.

Comment: While May through the end of August may reflect breeding dates, it does not accurately reflect piping plover use during spring and fall migration, nor does it reflect those plovers that winter, or spend a portion of their wintering range use, at the seashore.

Response: Some piping plovers migrate through the seashore. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of designating critical habitat for wintering piping plovers. It does not appear at this time that the cabins, ferry landings, or

parking lots will be located in those critically designated areas.

Comment: The plan contends that seabeach amaranth are found in the marsh areas of the Core Banks. What does this mean? The species has been only observed in sandy, beach flats, that one would not normally associate with being a marsh.

Response: Seabeach amaranth occurs in open sandy areas, not the marsh.

Comment: Concern over the channel being maintained at the 3-foot depth necessary to accommodate vehicle ferries by kicking-out built up sand and silt deposits with engines of the boat. What compliance review of this activity has occurred? Have state and federal permits been issued that authorize this dredging activity?

Response: This comment is referring to normal passage of the ferry, not prop dredging. This is not a new activity and is referenced in the 1982 GMP. The State of North Carolina applied for and received a permit to dredge the Channel into the Long Point cabin area. This is not a shorebird nesting area and the closest possible piping plover nesting area is two miles away. The proposed dredge disposal area is only 90 feet long and in no conceivable manner could stabilize a 22-mile long island and negate normal washover processes.

Comment: Do existing ORV levels harm the piping plover? And, has the NPS complied with relevant procedures in assessing harm and jeopardy to the plover?

Response: The NPS follows U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines for posting nesting areas and close off the beach if any piping plover chicks venture on the beach. In 12 years of monitoring, the NPS has not documented any piping plover chicks or adults being run over by vehicles or any nests being run over. There may have been some mention of vehicles entering closed areas in the 1989 report by McConnaughey, by no such instances have occurred in the last several years.

Compliance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife guidelines does not mean that the species will flourish. In 12 years of monitoring

the piping plover population on the Core Banks, the NPS has not detected an adverse impact on piping plovers.

Comment: The NPS discusses long-term parking of vehicles at the seashore. Are the ORVs leaking fuel, oil, coolant, or other hazardous substances?

Response: Direct and indirect impacts that may be attributed to ORVs, such as indicated above, will be addressed by the park's upcoming ORV plan.

Comment: The bald eagle is not listed as endangered. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service downlisted the eagle to threatened in 1995. Likewise, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted the peregrine falcon.

Response: The comments are correct; the bald eagle is presently threatened and the peregrine falcon has been delisted.

Comment: Concerning ORV threats to turtles, in some instances ORVs have driven through closed areas. Thus, while the NPS does undertake protection efforts, ORV drivers do not always comply with these efforts.

Response: The NPS erects vehicle barricades around all relocated and non-relocated sea turtle nests. ORV traffic is routed around the backside of the nests to prevent vehicle ruts from occurring in front of these nests. Some vehicles will illegally drive around these barricades particularly at low tide.

Comment: Additional detail should be provided about the status of the piping plover (including threats) and efforts to conserve the plover at the seashore.

Response: The park continues to meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines for protection especially in closing nesting areas and foraging areas for chicks. Since 1989, the NPS has not documented any plovers or nest being run over by ORVs.

Comment: In discussing the seabeach amaranth, the NPS states that it foresees no feasible protection efforts necessary for this plan. This sentence should be clarified.

Response: The seashore has not documented any disturbance of this plant by ORVs. Should the park determine that plants are occurring in areas in which ORVs may affect them

then those areas would be closed. The NPS placed a turtle enclosure cage over one plant in 2000.

Comment: What are the effects of the proposed activity on the state-listed species?

Response: The park has not documented or does it anticipate any adverse impacts on state-listed species or species already occurring in protected areas.

Comment: The proposals, properly considered, unquestionably would adversely affect listed species. Likewise, we question whether the seashore is adequately complying with U.S. Fish and Wildlife protocols for managing piping plovers.

Response: The NPS coordinates its plover protection program through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (978-443-4325). The NPS prepares an annual report on piping plovers to that agency and participates in their annual conference. ORVs illegally driving around turtle closures constitutes the only documented disturbance to threatened and endangered species at the seashore.

Comment: In discussing exotic vegetation, the NPS should address whether ORVs are capable of spreading exotics in beach habitats.

Response: The NPS is not aware of any research regarding the spread of exotic vegetation by ORVs in coastal habitats. Considering the effects of salt spray and the unstable nature of the islands, most vegetation that is not native to such conditions would not survive unless planted and maintained.

Comment: We question the conclusion that additional protective measures are not warranted, either under the existing situation or under the proposal. How can the NPS ensure that vehicles do not "take" federally protected species?

Response: In the summer of 2000, under the authority of the superintendent's compendium, the park lowered the speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph. Although vehicles drive around turtle closures there has been no documented "take." The NPS sends annual report on turtles, piping plovers, and seabeach amaranth to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Comment: The proposed action will irreversibly or irretrievably commit resources; once a channel is dredged, for example, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to undo. Finally, taking a listed species is an irreversible act.

Response: The channel existed prior to the establishment of the park. Again, there has been no documentation of a “taking” of a listed species.

Comment: The NPS states that the piping plover and the seabeach amaranth are not located in most of the areas covered by the GMP. According to the NPS piping plover records, breeding is distributed throughout the seashore beach area of the Core Banks, including Portsmouth Flat, Whalebone Inlet, Old Drum Inlet, New Drum Inlet, and Power Squadron Spit Point. Sea turtles nest along the entire length of the seashore. The comments also reflect a need to revise the GMP.

Response: None of the piping plover nesting areas sited in the comment are in the same areas as the cabins or the ferry landing sites. Sea turtle nest anywhere on the beach. The park takes protection measures for turtles that are reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In accord with NPS policies and procedures, the park has requested funding to initiate a new GMP.

Comment: The park’s protection efforts for seabeach amaranth and piping plover ignore many critical ways in which these species and their management differ.

Response: Again, the park meets U.S. Fish and Wildlife guidelines for the protection o plovers. Seabeach amaranth, and turtles and provides the agency with an annual report on each species.



As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has the responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering wise use of our land and water resources, preserving the environment and cultural values of our national parks and historic places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to insure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The department also promotes the goals of Take Pride in America campaign by encouraging stewardship and citizen responsibility for the public lands and promoting citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.