

WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PLAN
FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE
NOVEMBER 1983

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Wilderness Management Plan is to provide management guidelines to achieve the requirements of the Wilderness Act and the specific legislative history applicable to the Fire Island Wilderness.

The Fire Island Wilderness will be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such a manner as will leave the area unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, including "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." The preservation of wilderness character and values is the prime administrative responsibility of the National Park Service and activities to achieve other legal purposes of the area within the designated wilderness will be administered so as to preserve the wilderness character and thereby enhance the quality of the human environment.

II. INTRODUCTION

On December 20, 1980, the Congress of the United States passed Public Law 95-585 which established the Fire Island Wilderness encompassing some 1,360 acres of the National Seashore.

The establishment of the Fire Island Wilderness is the culmination of previous legislative and management direction to preserve and maintain this section of the Seashore in a primitive and natural state.

On September 3, 1964, Congress passed the "Wilderness Act" which established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas "...to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." Congressional designation of wilderness areas assures the long term protection of wild or undeveloped federal lands. A copy of the Wilderness Act is included in Appendix A.

On September 11, 1964, eight days after the passage of the Wilderness Act, Congress passed Public Law 88-587 establishing the Fire Island National Seashore "for the purpose of conserving and preserving for the use of future generations certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes, and other natural features. "...which possess high values to the Nation as examples of unspoiled areas of great natural beauty in close proximity to large concentrations of urban population."

Section 7(b) of this Act refers specifically to the "8 mile zone" and states "access.....shall be provided by ferries and footpaths only..... no development or plan for the conveniences of visitors shall be undertaken therein which would be incompatible with the preservation of the flora and fauna or the physiographic conditions now prevailing and every effort shall be exerted to maintain and preserve this section of the Seashore,.....in as nearly (its) present state and condition as possible." A copy of the Seashore's establishing legislature is included in Appendix B.

The emphasis throughout this Act is clearly on the perpetuation of the values of unspoiled natural areas within proximity of one of the largest and most highly urbanized regions in the world.

The General Management Plan (GMP) for the Seashore was approved in 1978. The General Management Plan, reflecting the conservation and preservation mandate of the Seashore's authorizing legislation, placed most of the lands within the "8 mile zone" in a special land use category.....Class 1A Environmental Protection/Primitive Zone and in addition, created the High Dune Management Unit (which encompasses most of the lands in the "8 mile zone") with the intent of preserving the unique values found in this section of the Seashore. The General Management Plan also stated the National Park Service's commitment to initiate by 1980, a review of lands within this area to determine their suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Accordingly, in June of

1979, the National Park Service began, as a continuation of the general management planning process, a wilderness review of lands within the High Dune Management Unit. Intensive onsite investigation, a thorough review and analysis of the Wilderness Act, Department of the Interior and National Park Service Wilderness policies and practices, an evaluation of Park Management requirements (including environmental compliance) and frequent consultations with various agencies, groups, and individuals resulted in the development of a preliminary Wilderness proposal.

In the spring of 1980, the preliminary Wilderness Proposal was released for public review and a public hearing was held, in Patchogue, New York.

In recognition of this unique and outstanding area, the Congress of the United States on December 20, 1980 established the Fire Island Wilderness, the first federal wilderness in New York State.

III. WILDERNESS DESCRIPTION

The Fire Island Wilderness is located in the eastern portion of the Fire Island National Seashore, Suffolk County, New York. It extends between the Smith Point County Park, on the east, and the National Park Service's Watch Hill development on the west. A parcel of non-federally owned land, Bellport Beach, lies roughly in the middle of the Wilderness area (a Wilderness Map is included in Appendix F).

A. General Boundary Description

Western Segment: The western boundary of the Wilderness extends along the easternmost edge of the Watch Hill Campground and boardwalked nature trail. The western boundary connects to the southern boundary, legislatively defined as "the toe of the primary dune" which in turn runs along the beach until it intersects the eastern boundary. The eastern boundary coincides with the western boundary of Bellport Beach, a village owned facility excluded from Wilderness designation. This mutual boundary extends from the toe of the primary dune to the shore line of the Great South Bay at mean high water. The northern boundary extends along the Great South Bay at mean high water and intersects the western boundary previously described.

Eastern Segment: The western boundary of this segment of the Wilderness area coincides with the eastern boundary of Bellport Beach and extends from the Great South Bay at mean high water on the north to the toe of the primary dune on the south. The southern boundary extends along the toe of the dune from this point until it generally coincides with the western boundary of the Smith Point County Park. The eastern boundary of the Wilderness extends along the western boundary of Smith Point County Park between the toe of the primary dune on the south and the Great South Bay at mean high water on the north, except that it excludes the existing Smith Point West Visitor Center and the land surrounding it, for a distance of 100 feet around the perimeter of the building. The northern boundary extends along the Great South Bay at mean high water from the Smith Point County Park on the east until it coincides with the eastern boundary of the Bellport Beach, previously described.

For a more precise description of the Fire Island Wilderness, please refer to the detailed boundary map and description of the Fire Island Wilderness, Appendix F and the technical boundary description and map of Bellport Beach, Appendix D.

B. Physical Description

The southern boundary of the Fire Island Wilderness is characterized by massive primary dunes, some nearly forty feet high, which are thickly blanketed with beach grass. Beyond these dunes lies the island swale and, in some areas, a line of secondary dunes is apparent. A variety of plant communities are found in the dune and swale zones

including scrub and grasslands, high thickets, pine woodlands and occasional patches of broadleaf forest. Interspersed among the dunes are unique freshwater bogs and marshes. Vast expanses of reed grasslands and tidal marsh stretch beyond the swale and secondary dunes, extending into Great South Bay.

Although the Wilderness encompasses only 1,366 acres, its apparent size is amplified by the facts that it is isolated from the mainland by the bay, that it is a linear area stretching over six miles in length and that, in many cases, even visual access to the mainland is completely cut off by the secondary dunes or by phragmites and high thicket vegetation. The physical character of the island and its vegetation often combine to create, in a visitor to this area, a feeling of isolation and enclosure.

Inhabiting the study area are mammals, reptiles and amphibians, insects and birds. The island's largest concentration of whitetail deer is found within this area where human intrusions are minimal. Other mammals here include cottontail rabbits, muskrats, meadow voles, and red foxes. Turtles, snakes and toads inhabit the dunes and marshes and numerous species of birds nest, feed, migrate through and/or live within the Wilderness area. No threatened or endangered species are known to breed in the area, although the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon, both federally endangered species, have been observed at Fire Island. Three species of birds which frequent and breed in the area have been proposed for inclusion on the New York State Endangered Species List. These include the Least Tern, Roseate Tern and Piping Plover.

The Diamondbacked Terrapin, a species which is declining in many areas of New York State, and the Black Crowned Night Heron are common within the Wilderness area, and the Ipswich Sparrow occasionally overwinters along the secondary dunes.

C. Exclusions from the Wilderness

As mentioned in the general description of the Fire Island Wilderness, Public Law 96-585 specifically excluded two areas from Wilderness designation. The following is a brief description of these two areas and the management intentions of the Fire Island National Seashore.

1. Bellport Beach

Bellport Beach is a parcel of property approximately 17 acres in size which lies roughly within the middle of the Fire Island Wilderness. Although it lies within the authorized boundaries of the National Seashore (Public Law 88-587), it is not owned by the National Seashore.

The Beach, owned and managed by the Village of Bellport, is a seasonal, low density recreational site compatible with the

planning premise of the approved General Management Plan. Existing facilities include: a dock and ferry slip, bathhouse, restrooms, boardwalk and protected beach.

The National Seashore will work closely with the Village of Bellport to encourage only minimal development of this area (a boundary description and map of Bellport Beach is included in Appendix D).

2. Smith Point West Visitor Center

The Smith Point West Visitor Center and an area of 100 feet surrounding this structure has been excluded from the Wilderness. This facility presently provides public information, a ranger station, restrooms and regulation of the off-road vehicle system. This structure will remain and regular repairs and improvements to this structure, such as the installation of a handicapped elevator, will be implemented. Major expansion of this facility will not be permitted.

D. Potential Wilderness Additions

There are several areas within the Fire Island Wilderness which, because of existing facilities or use, are presently incompatible with Wilderness designation. These areas have been classified Potential Wilderness Additions and will be added to the designated Wilderness after all prohibited uses have ceased and upon notification in the Federal Register by the Secretary of the Interior.

These Potential Wilderness Additions, as depicted on the Wilderness Map (Appendix F) will be managed by the National Seashore so as not to preclude their eventual inclusion into the Wilderness.

The following is a brief description of the location and management intentions of these potential Wilderness additions.

1. Reserved Rights Holders

Within the Fire Island Wilderness there are 20 occupied structures. Twenty of these structures are occupied under the terms of reserved rights agreements between the National Seashore and the former owners. This includes seven structures in the Long Cove area, twelve structures in the Whalehouse Point area and one structure located approximately one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) mile west of Old Inlet. All of these reserved rights agreements expire in 1992.

The National Seashore in cooperation with the occupants will manage these structures, outbuildings and associated area immediately surrounding these residences at present standards so as not to preclude their eventual inclusion into the Wilderness. Minor repairs and improvement of the structures and immediate ground will be permitted.

Reserved rights and life holders will retain vehicular access to their residences via travel along the ocean beach, under current regulations as outlined in 36 CFR 7.20, and the potential addition corridors as depicted on the Wilderness Map (Appendix F).

Upon the expiration of these occupancy agreements, the structures will be removed and the area restored to a natural state.

2. Potential Addition Corridors

Two potential addition corridors have been identified on the Wilderness Map. These include (1) the Long Cove vehicle cut and approximately one and one-half (1½) miles of sand road servicing the seven residences in Long Cove and the National Park Service facility at Watch Hill, and (2) the Whalehouse Point vehicle cut and approximately one mile of sand road servicing residents of this area.

These access corridors will be maintained until 1992. At that time, the National Seashore will prepare appropriate environmental compliance documents regarding the future of the Long Cove and Whalehouse Point vehicle cuts.

3. Long Cove Nature Trail

The Long Cove Trail consists of 3,600 feet of "roll down" boardwalk extending from the western boundary of the Wilderness and terminating in a wooden overlook within the Long Cove Marsh. In close proximity to this trail lies the more recently constructed "Watch Hill Nature Trail" which is totally outside of the Wilderness. Since the construction of this trail, it has been found that the Long Cove trail is no longer necessary to achieve visitor use objectives. This trail does, however, provide access between the Watch Hill ferry terminal and the one reserved rights holder residing between Long Cove and the Watch Hill campground. As these individuals are elderly and as this trail provides their sole source of access, the removal of this trail would create a severe hardship and possibly preclude their use of the residence. For this reason that portion of the Long Cove trail lying between the Watch Hill campground and this residence will be allowed to remain until 1992. That portion of the trail east of this residence, including the marsh overlook, has been removed. A portion of the trail removed has been relocated between the reserved rights holder residence and the remaining portion of the long Cove trail. This will minimize existing resource damage in this area and facilitate access by this resident. The Long Cove trail project was completed during the summer of 1982.

4. Watch Hill Horse Stable and Maintenance Storage

This existing facility lies between the Watch Hill campground

and Long Cove. It presently consists of a small wooden stable, corral and maintenance storage yard encompassing 12,000 feet² (0.28 ac). Both the General Management Plan and Wilderness Proposal mandate the relocation of the facility outside of the Wilderness. The horse patrol operation is, however, critically necessary to preserve and protect Wilderness resources and visitors.

The National Seashore will relocate the horse stable, corral and maintenance area, by 1992, to an area outside the Wilderness. In the interim, the horse stable will remain operational at its present location. Expansion of the stable and corral at this location will not be permitted and the above ground waterline extending from the campground to the stable was removed in 1982.

Since the establishment of the Wilderness, the horse stable has been painted with a color more compatible with the natural landscape and much of the store maintenance material in this area has been relocated to the Watch Hill complex, west of the Wilderness. The Park staff will continue to relocate as much of this material as possible during the summer of 1982. Removal of some of this material is beyond the capabilities of existing Park equipment, but will be relocated before 1992, or earlier, if funds become available.

5. Old Inlet

The Old Inlet facility presently consists of dock, boardwalk, dune crossing and bathhouse. Present visitor use, primarily sunbathing, swimming and beachcombing, is estimated at 14,000/year. The National Seashore will make every effort to keep visitation at or below this level.

The existing structures will be retained and maintained, however, no expansion of facilities will be permitted. The existing bathhouse will be replaced with a primitive privy when destroyed or when the extent of maintenance and repairs exceed 50% of the value of the structure.

6. Smith Point West Handicapped Nature Trail

The Smith Point West trail consists of approximately 5,000 linear feet of 5' wide wooden elevated boardwalk designed to handicapped specifications. This trail extends from the eastern Wilderness boundary at the Smith Point West Visitor Center and extends into the Wilderness for a total distance of approximately 1,400'. The trail loops through four different habits (swale, dune, maritime forest and marsh and has recently been designated a National Recreational Trail by the Secretary of the Interior). This trail is in complete compliance with the land classification system of the approved General Management Plan adopted prior to

Wilderness designation. Nevertheless, this trail was legislatively defined as a Potential Wilderness Addition and is incompatible and out of character with the Wilderness. Therefore, the Smith Point Handicapped Trail will be relocated outside the Wilderness when completely destroyed or when repairs exceed 50% of the value of the facility.

IV. WILDERNESS USE

Wilderness is described in the Wilderness Act as an area "where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The visitor must accept wilderness largely on its own terms. Modern conveniences are not provided for the comfort of the visitor; and the risks of wilderness travel, of possible dangers from accidents, wildlife, and natural phenomena must be accepted as part of the wilderness experience.

Traditional visitor use in the "High Dune Management Unit," prior to wilderness designation, included day hiking, sunbathing, limited camping and backpacking and regulated hunting. In general, these activities will continue, but may be further regulated to ensure the preservation of wilderness values and resources. No development for the convenience of the visitor, except for minimal requirements for the health and safety of the wilderness visitor or the protection of the resource will be undertaken.

The management objectives identified in the General Management Plan for the "High Dune Management Unit" are strongly related to the specific legislative mandates of the authorizing legislation and support Wilderness management policy. These are:

- To protect the natural qualities of the "High Dune Management Unit" and to provide for traditional low-density recreational use.
- To maintain primitive qualities of this unit so as not to preclude potential wilderness classification.
- To remove man-made structures within the management unit and to restore these units.
- To manage the unit as a primitive area.

Past management actions have included:

- The reduction of motor vehicle travel north of the primary dune.
- The removal of 20+ squatter residences from the Wilderness area.
- The closure of all unneeded vehicle cuts.
- The elimination of the routine use of water management and chemical pesticides for mosquito control.

Throughout this period, the area has been monitored and patrolled to ensure resource preservation.

A. Day Use

The continuation of traditional day use at present levels does not present a problem with resource preservation or degradation of Wilderness values except as noted below.

Traditional day use will continue within the Fire Island Wilderness but will be monitored by the Park staff to determine the number of Wilderness visitors, the types of recreation occurring and any adverse effects on the resource. Based on this information day use carrying capacities will be developed and future day use limitations may be imposed as necessary to preserve Wilderness values and resources.

The area lying between Smith Point and the third elevated dune crossing west of Smith Point has, however, already incurred resource damage to both the dunes and the Wilderness associated with increasing beach recreation. This section of the ocean beach lies adjacent to the heavily used Smith Point County Park. Visitors seeking solitude not available at the County Park have increasingly migrated to this section of the Seashore. Although the ocean beach lies outside of the Wilderness, resource damage to the dunes and swale vegetation has occurred from visitors travelling from the County parking lot to the beach via the Wilderness.

Existing resource damage consists of compacted foot trails, which parallel the Burma Trail and newly formed trails radiating from the beach to the swale and forest areas. Since the designation of the Wilderness, vehicular travel on the Burma Trail has been greatly reduced, and a definite improvement to the resource has been noted. Many areas of the Trail have begun to revegetate naturally and the once compacted and rutted portion of this former jeep trail have now been supplemented with newly accreted, loose sand. Visitor foot travel on the loose sand of this trail is, however, difficult and has promoted visitors to travel in the vegetated areas adjacent to the trail. Over the 1981 visitor use season, a well defined trail of compacted vegetation developed parallel to the Burma Trail between the first and third dune crossings. There is a strong probability that, as this trail becomes devoid of vegetation, additional trails will develop and compound the existing impacts.

This heavily used portion of the beach also lies approximately one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) mile from the nearest restrooms of either Smith Point or Old Inlet. This is believed to have encouraged visitors to utilize the swale and forest areas north of the second and third pedestrian crossings for this purpose. As a result, a series of new trails now traverse the swale and terminate in the isolated forest areas. These impacts are presently restricted to the area between Smith Point and the third dune crossing west of Smith Point, and appear directly related to increasing visitor use of this portion of the ocean beach.

Alternatives which were considered to mitigate these impacts include: (1) increase surveillance of this section of the Wilderness to determine the number of visitors travelling through the swale and to more

precisely determine the cause of the impacts, (2) increase ranger patrol and public education to discourage inappropriate use and unnecessary travel in the Wilderness, (3) establish visitor carrying capacities for this portion of the beach and Wilderness, (4) eliminate the existing pedestrian dune crossings and handicapped trail if they are shown to contribute to use and resource damage and (5) establish primitive restrooms.

The National Park Service will initially implement alternatives 1 through 3. The elevated pedestrian crossings will remain for the present, however, the four foot high hand rails on the level portion of the crossovers will be replaced with two foot high rails to reduce visual impact. These pedestrian crossings will be monitored. If it is determined they are no longer necessary for the protection of the resource or, in fact, contribute to resource degradation they will be removed.

If the implementation of alternatives 1 through 4 proves unsuccessful and if monitoring of this portion of the beach and Wilderness indicates that it is absolutely necessary, the National Seashore may establish primitive restrooms. These temporary facilities would be placed on wide sections of the ocean beach between the period May 15 through September 15. Restrooms would be self-contained pump out vaults similar to those frequently used on construction sites.

Close evaluation, including public input, of this alternative or any additional options will be conducted prior to implementation.

B. Hunting

Recreational hunting within the Fire Island National Seashore is permitted by Public Law 88-587 and will continue. Rabbit hunters and waterfowl hunters, entering the Wilderness via Smith Point will be required to secure a daily hunting permit and complete the hunting and game questionnaire as in the past.

The number of rabbit hunters utilizing the Wilderness at any one time was reduced from a total of 65 in 1980 to a total of 45 in 1981. This includes a total of 12 hunters in Zone A (Smith Point to Old Inlet), 15 hunters in Zone B (Old Inlet to Whalehouse Point) and 18 hunters in Zone C (Whalehouse Point to Long Cove). This reduction was successfully employed in 1981 and was necessary to ensure visitor safety and the preservation of Wilderness resources and values. This reduction in hunters applies only to rabbit hunters and does not effect waterfowlers.

The collecting of deer may be permitted for scientific research or for controlling severe overpopulation, as determined by the North Atlantic Regional Office scientific staff. The collecting of deer by other than National Park Service personnel will be allowed only after appropriate environmental compliance has been completed including an opportunity for public review.

C. Overnight Use

National Park Service Wilderness Preservation and Management Policies permit primitive camping within National Park Service managed Wilderness areas provided it does not adversely impact the natural resources or lower the recreational values of the Wilderness.

Primitive camping is defined as an overnight stay by which access is gained by foot and where facilities are minimal.

One management objective of the Fire Island National Seashore's General Management Plan is to utilize Fire Island's resources in providing recreational facilities and opportunities that are generally unavailable elsewhere in the region, while maintaining the serenity and beauty of the barrier island.

Primitive camping in a Wilderness setting is presently unavailable in the local area, although family and group camping exist at Watch Hill and Smith Point County Park, both adjacent to the Wilderness. Therefore, the National Seashore will permit dispersed, individual camping on an experimental basis. Primitive camping will be closely regulated through a backcountry permit system and closely monitored to ensure the values of solitude and resource preservation are not compromised. Backpackers will be permitted to choose their own campsites under general guidelines established by a team composed of experienced backpackers, park planners and resource managers. This team will also establish backcountry permit levels, develop regulatory and safety pamphlets and implement monitoring techniques. Once completed, the primitive camping policy will be included in Appendix E of this plan.

Primitive camping will not be implemented until the primitive camping policy is completed by, but no later than, January 1984.

Dispersed individual camping levels will not exceed those levels originally proposed in the General Management Plan for camping at the Old Inlet area.

This type of primitive camping will provide the ultimate Wilderness experience and should disperse minimal impacts to levels where natural recovery will be rapid.

V. WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT

The Fire Island Wilderness will be managed so as to preserve for future generations the natural flora, fauna and physiographic conditions of this unique area in a primitive state. The entire Wilderness will be administered as a natural ecosystem where the influence of man is minimal and the character of the area is molded by the forces of nature.

Management actions will be directed at restoring the natural character of the area and preserving and monitoring the natural systems. Evidence of man's previous actions will be removed or reclaimed by nature.

A. Use of the Minimum Tool Including Motorized and Mechanical Equipment

1. National Park Service

The National Park Service will use the minimum tool necessary to successfully, safely and economically accomplish Wilderness management objectives. Economic factors will be considered the least important of the three criteria and the chosen tool or equipment will be the one that least degrades Wilderness values temporarily or permanently.

Maintenance within the Wilderness will be the minimum necessary to preserve the integrity of the Wilderness and provide for a safe visitor experience.

The use of motor vehicles and mechanical equipment will not be permitted except in emergencies and where there is absolutely no viable alternative. Emergencies may include evacuating sick and injured visitors, controlling wild or structural fires, or evacuating people during severe storms when beach travel is not possible.

The general public will not be permitted to use motorized or mechanical equipment within the Wilderness.

2. Utility Companies

The Fire Island Wilderness includes the underground utility lines of the Long Island Lighting Company and New York Telephone Company which run along the Burma Trail for the entire length of the Wilderness. These lines service the National Park Service's Old Inlet and Watch Hill facilities, the Village owned Bellport Beach, reserved rights residents at Old Inlet, Whalehouse Point and Long Cove and Fire Island's eastern communities. These underground lines are permissible facilities within the Wilderness. Mechanized or motorized equipment (including vehicles) may be used to repair and maintain these lines when emergencies arise. Even then, however, the use of this equipment will be kept to the minimum required to resolve the problem. These lines may not be extended or enlarged and no new lines may be installed.

The "at ground level sectionalizing device" installed by LILCO in the Old Inlet area will be removed when LILCO completes the cross bay cable to Fire Island Pines or upon the expiration of LILCO's special use permit on June 25, 1987, whichever comes first.

The Superintendent will determine when an emergency exists which requires the use of motorized or mechanical equipment and will authorize the appropriate level of use. The specific approval (written, if time allows) of the Superintendent will be required prior to entering the Wilderness with equipment or vehicles.

The inspection of cables and other facilities will not be performed with the assistance of motor vehicles; foot crews shall be used whenever possible. Utility company vehicles may be driven along the ocean beach, which is non-Wilderness land, under current Seashore regulations as outlined in 36 CFR 7.20 and with a valid permit issued by the National Seashore.

In addition, the National Seashore will work closely with the utility companies to eliminate all but the most essential travel by motor vehicles in or adjacent to the Wilderness.

3. State and Local Agencies

The use of motorized or mechanical equipment within the Wilderness by New York State, Suffolk County, or other municipal agencies will not be permitted except in emergencies as defined for the National Park Service under Section 1 (Use of the Minimum Tool Including Motorized and Mechanical Equipment, page 14). This plan does not restrict state and local officials from vehicular travel along the ocean beach beyond current regulations of the National Seashore as outlined in 36 CFR 7.20.

4. Reserved Right Holders

Reserved right holders will retain access to their homes through vehicular travel along the ocean beach under current regulations as outlined in 36 CFR 7.20 and via "potential addition corridors" identified on the official Wilderness Map (Appendix F).

An exception to this policy applies to the one residence located immediately west of Old Inlet. The Wilderness Study/Preliminary Wilderness Proposal (January 1980) recognized a "potential addition corridor" via the Old Inlet vehicle cut and the Burma Road. This vehicle cut was closed naturally by storms later in 1980 and no longer exists. This retained rights holder will retain his legal right of access by travelling the Burma Trail from Smith Point to the residence.

5. Village of Bellport

The use of motorized and mechanical equipment on the Village

owned property of Bellport Beach is in no way regulated by this plan. Vehicular access to Bellport Beach by Village officials and agencies will be achieved through travel along the ocean beach under current regulations as outlined in 36 CFR 7.20 and via the "potential addition corridor" at Whalehouse Point and depicted on the official Wilderness Map (Appendix F).

B. Fire Management

Fire is the powerful phenomenon with the potential to drastically alter vegetative cover. The presence or absence of natural fires within a given ecosystem is recognized as a potent factor stimulating, retarding or eliminating various components of the ecosystem. Most natural fires are lightning caused and are recognized as natural phenomena which must be permitted to continue to influence the ecosystem if truly natural systems are to be perpetuated. National Park Service fire management policies allow prescribed natural fires (lightning) to burn provided these fires contribute to the attainment of park or Wilderness management objectives and as long as the fire remains within the guidelines of pre-determined limits, called prescriptions, as defined in a detailed Fire Management Plan.

National Park Service management policies dictate suppression of management fires if they threaten:

- human life
- cultural resources or physical facilities of the Park
- to escape from pre-determined zones or from the Park
- to exceed the prescription

There is, however, little scientific data on the role of either natural or man-caused wildfire in the development and maintenance of the ecosystems of Fire Island. Until research on past fire occurrence, distribution and the influence of both fire and past fire management on the ecosystem is conducted, the need and role of wildfire in the Wilderness cannot be adequately assessed. Such research has been requested and should be completed by 1984. The results of this study will be incorporated into a detailed Fire Management Plan with special emphasis on the Wilderness area.

Until then, the fire management objectives of the Wilderness shall be:

- ---to prevent man-caused wildfires
- to suppress man-caused wildfires with the minimum amount of temporary and long term resource damage, within the limits of human safety.
- to continue monitoring fire weather while conducting specific fire research.

---to complete, as a component of the Park's Resource Management Plan, a detailed Fire Management Plan with specific attention to Wilderness fire management policy.

C. Mosquito Management

The most extensive tidal marsh areas of the Fire Island National Seashore now lie within the Fire Island Wilderness. These marsh areas are highly productive biological systems and provide habitat for six species of reptiles, seven species of mammals and 129 species of birds including herons, waterfowl, egrets, shorebirds, gulls, terns and songbirds. Tidal marshes also provide habitat for many inter-tidal and marine organisms and are the nursery grounds for various finfish and invertebrates. Physically, the marshes provide very effective buffers against wave and ice energy and protect adjacent uplands from erosion and salt water intrusion by dissipating wave and tidal energy. For these reasons, as well as esthetics, it is imperative that the National Seashore preserve in as nearly a natural state as possible the remaining marsh lands of Fire Island and particularly those within the Fire Island Wilderness.

The General Management Plan, page 34, provides the following guidelines for mosquito control and tidal marsh preservation:

1. "The cessation of ditching as a mosquito control method will remain in effect until its utility can be proven and its effectiveness is shown to outweigh the associated environmental degradation."
2. "The use of insecticides, herbicides and other chemical and petroleum products as widely applied flora and fauna control methods on federally owned tidal marshes and other lands will not be allowed."
3. "In the event of an officially declared health emergency, as determined by the U.S. Public Health Service, the Director of the National Park Service must approve use of any pesticide or other chemical control substance, and application procedures shall be in accordance with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations and other applicable laws."
4. "A long term tidal marsh research program will be initiated to answer basic ecological questions concerning the effectiveness of ditching and the application of chemicals for mosquito control."

The Fire Island Wilderness will be managed in conformance with the guidelines of the General Management Plan. New ditching, the routine maintenance of existing ditches and the use of chemical pesticides (includes BTi) as mosquito control techniques will not be permitted. Recent agreements regarding mosquito management effecting the Wilderness area are included in Appendix G.

D. Restoration

The Fire Island Wilderness will be managed so that the character of

this area will be molded primarily by the forces of nature and so that human influence will be minimal.

Previous evidence of human activity, in most cases, will be allowed to be reclaimed by nature. Large scale debris, such as the concrete pads near Smith Point, septic tanks and the old Coast Guard dock near Whalehouse Point will be removed as money and environmentally sound technology become available.

Unpainted snow fence will be used to repair man induced damage to the primary dunes or to restrict pedestrian traffic along the dune line.

This Wilderness Plan does not preclude the repair of breaches that may occur in the Wilderness area, in order to prevent loss of life, flooding and other severe economic and physical damage to the Great South Bay and surrounding areas. Prior to the repair of any breach within the Wilderness area, a full Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared and a public meeting conducted to review alternatives.

Exotic plant species within the Wilderness will be assessed and may be removed.

All rehabilitation projects will be fully evaluated including alternatives and will be documented with photographs before and after corrective action.

VI. MANAGEMENT FACILITIES

A. New Facilities

No new management facilities are contemplated for the Fire Island Wilderness or proposed in this Plan. Facilities designed solely for the convenience of the visitor will not be permitted and existing facilities within this category will be removed. If, in the future, it becomes necessary to establish new facilities to preserve the natural resources or to ensure a safe visitor experience, ample opportunity for public review and comment will be provided.

B. Existing Facilities

1. Roads, Trails and Vehicle Cuts

The Burma Trail is an abandoned sand jeep trail one vehicle wide which runs through the entire Wilderness generally parallel to the dune line. In addition, there are a number of spur trails and abandoned jeep trails radiating from the Burma Trail which terminate in the marsh, old homesites, etc.

Motor vehicle travel on some sections of these trails has been prevented by gates located at Smith Point, Whalehouse Point and Long Cove. Vehicular travel on these trails has been greatly reduced over the years and has resulted in accretion of sand and re-vegetation of many portions of the trail. Present travel on the Burma Trail is limited to that of reserved rights holders and to emergency situations requiring travel by the National Park Service or utility companies.

The National Seashore will retain the Burma Trail as the main East-West foot trail through the Wilderness and as a bridle path for National Park Service horse patrol operations. Natural revegetation will be allowed to reduce the width of the Burma Trail and completely reclaim spur trails.

Maintenance of the full width of the existing Burma Trail will not be necessary as visitor foot travel will probably maintain an acceptable width. The use of horses by the general public will not be permitted within the Wilderness, and existing gates will be maintained to preclude motor vehicle traffic.

2. Pedestrian Dune Crossings

Between Smith Point West and the Old Inlet facility are three elevated 4' wide pedestrian dune crossings. These dune crossings are in compliance with the land classification system of the approved General Management Plan and were constructed prior to Wilderness designation. They were constructed specifically to mitigate pedestrian impacts to the primary dune. National Park Service Wilderness preservation and management policies permit

minimal facilities such as the dune crossings, when necessary for the preservation of Wilderness resources. The National Park Service will, therefore, retain these facilities while continually monitoring their need. If it is determined they are no longer necessary for the protection of the resource, they will be removed. In the interim, the four feet high hand rails on the level portions of the crossovers will be replaced with two foot high rails to reduce visual impact. The existing hand rails on the stairs will remain in compliance with federal safety regulations.

3. Artesian Wells

Within the Fire Island Wilderness are three artesian wells; two at Whalehouse Point and one west of Smith Point. Generally, these wells will be returned to a more natural state by capping these wells and removing all visible support structures including planking and piping. The ground water line running between the Smith Point Visitor Center will be removed. The public will be advised that these artesian wells do not constitute a safe source of potable water. Restoration of the artesian well at Smith Point will begin as soon as funding and manpower permits. The two wells at Whalehouse Point are presently used by reserved rights holders living in this area. Restoration of these wells will be delayed until 1992 or until it is determined that they are no longer needed by these residents.

4. Signs

Within the Fire Island Wilderness occasional signs will be necessary to regulate visitor activity in certain areas to protect the resource or the visitor. The existing "Keep Off The Dunes" signs will be retained. It may be necessary to utilize signs to designate potable water sources, pit privies and authorized dune crossings. The National Seashore will utilize signs only where absolutely necessary for the protection of the resource or to ensure the safety of the Wilderness visitor. All signs will be the smallest size and of the minimum number to accomplish the objective. Potential signs will be fully evaluated to determine their need, number and location and will be constructed in compliance with the National Park Service sign system specifications. Every effort will be made to ensure signs blend with the natural environment to the maximum extent possible.

5. Sanitary Facilities

The National Park Service will attempt to balance Wilderness use with the ability of the natural systems to absorb human waste, rather than construct sanitary facilities within the Wilderness.

It may, however, become necessary in the future to construct primitive facilities in certain areas near existing dune

crossings to ensure public health standards and to protect the resource. Such facilities would be pit privies designed to completely blend with the natural environment, and would not be constructed without ample opportunity for public review and comment.

6. Navigational Aids

The Watch Hill channel guide, which consists of two pole mounted electrically powered lights, exists within the Wilderness adjacent to the western boundary and Great South Bay.

This facility requires little maintenance and is necessary to ensure safe access by boats into the Watch Hill channel. This channel guide is an existing, non-conforming use and will remain. If, in the future, it is determined that this guide is no longer necessary to ensure safe access, it will be removed.