



Foundation Document Overview

Padre Island National Seashore

Texas



Contact Information

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Purpose



Located on the Texas coast, PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE preserves, protects, and interprets the outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the longest undeveloped barrier island in the United States and its surrounding water for public benefit, inspiration, and scientific understanding.



Significance

Significance statements express why Padre Island National Seashore resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Padre Island National Seashore is the longest section of undeveloped barrier island in the United States, protecting the majority of remaining Texas coastal prairie, a dynamic environment constantly sculpted by wind and sea, and the Laguna Madre, one of the few hypersaline lagoon environments left in the world.
- As the largest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the United States, Padre Island National Seashore provides unobscured views and diverse recreational opportunities such as beachcombing, swimming, picnicking, camping, sunbathing, fishing, kayaking, and bird and wildlife viewing in a pristine and solitary environment. Laguna Madre is an internationally recognized windsurfing area.
- The waters and lands of Padre Island National Seashore provide important habitat for marine and terrestrial plants and animals, including a number of rare, threatened, and endangered species. Geography, gulf dynamics, rare coastal prairie and pristine wetlands, wind tidal flats, biodiversity, location along multiple migration routes, and lack of development make the park an ideal place for natural communities and species associated with barrier islands.



Significance



- Five species of threatened and endangered sea turtles occur in the Gulf of Mexico, and Padre Island National Seashore is the only area on the Texas coast where nests from all five of these species have been documented. More Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests are found at the park than at any other location in the United States, making it the most important nesting beach in the United States for this endangered species. Park waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Laguna Madre, and Mansfield Channel also provide important foraging and migratory habitat for these species.
- Padre Island National Seashore is critical for bird species including more than 380 documented migratory, overwintering, and resident bird species. The island is designated as a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy and was the first NPS unit to be recognized as a Site of International Importance by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.
- Padre Island National Seashore includes important archeological resources relating to American Indian occupation, the era of early Spanish exploration, maritime history and shipwrecks, and a robust military history from the US war with Mexico through World War II. The Novillo Line Camp and associated historic resources of Padre Island National Seashore include some of the last remaining structures relating to barrier island open-range cattle ranching in the United States.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Recreational Opportunities**
- **Barrier Island Ecosystem**
- **Sea Turtles**
- **Undeveloped Barrier Island**
- **Collective History**



Description

Padre Island National Seashore is on North Padre Island, on the Gulf of Mexico, southeast of the city of Corpus Christi, Texas. It encompasses over 130,000 acres and 65.5 miles of the 113-mile-long barrier island—one of the longest remaining undeveloped stretches of barrier island in the world. The park protects a rare coastal prairie environment; a complex, dynamic dune system; and the Laguna Madre, one of the few hypersaline lagoon environments left in the world.

The park's relatively natural setting provides opportunities for wildlife viewing, fishing, camping, boating, kayaking, windsurfing, nature study, beach driving and walking, swimming, shelling, and contemplation. Each year, approximately 565,000 visitors make their way to the park. The majority of visitors experience only a small portion of the island due to the challenging terrain and time commitment required to traverse the length of this 65.5-mile stretch of undeveloped barrier island. As a result of the island's configuration, most visitor activity occurs on approximately 2,000 acres of this 130,454-acre park unit. The concentration of visitors occurs along the beach and small visitor center. Outside of these developed areas, the rest of the relatively unspoiled barrier island provides visitors an opportunity to experience quiet and solitude where the beauty of a night sky is largely uninhibited by ambient light from nearby urban centers.

Padre Island National Seashore and surrounding waters provide important habitat for marine and terrestrial plants and animals, including a number of threatened and endangered species. The park is involved in a major international research and conservation project to save the most endangered of all sea turtles, the Kemp's ridley. The park is one of the few places the public can witness this rare and endangered sea turtle species nesting on the beach.

Situated along the Central Flyway, Padre Island National Seashore is a globally important area for more than 380 migratory, overwintering, and resident bird species (nearly half of all bird species documented in North America).

Terrestrial systems within the park include a mixture of upland grasslands, vegetated dunes, and extensive wetland environments. More than 60% of the park consists of wetlands comprising marshes, inland waters, wind tidal flats, and seagrass beds. Marine environments include the Gulf of Mexico along the length of the park to a depth of two fathoms and the hypersaline estuary of the Laguna Madre.

The park's cultural resources represent centuries of human use, first dating to the Karankawa Indians' use of the barrier island as a source of food and refuge. Between Spanish discovery of the island in 1509 and the early 19th century, Spanish troops en route to Mexico and unfortunate shipwreck victims infrequently visited the island. Beginning with its initial land grant in 1804, the island was primarily used for ranching and cattle grazing until 1970, almost a decade after Padre Island National Seashore was established. Most surviving historic resources date to the ranching period of the late-19th and early-20th century, although prehistoric archeological sites and shipwreck remains are also scattered throughout the park.

