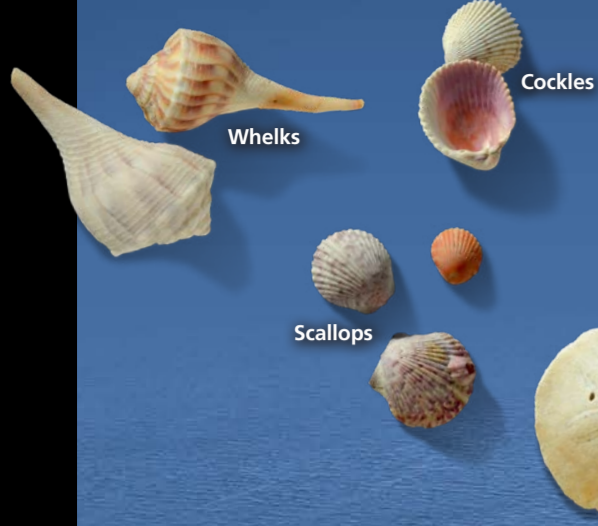
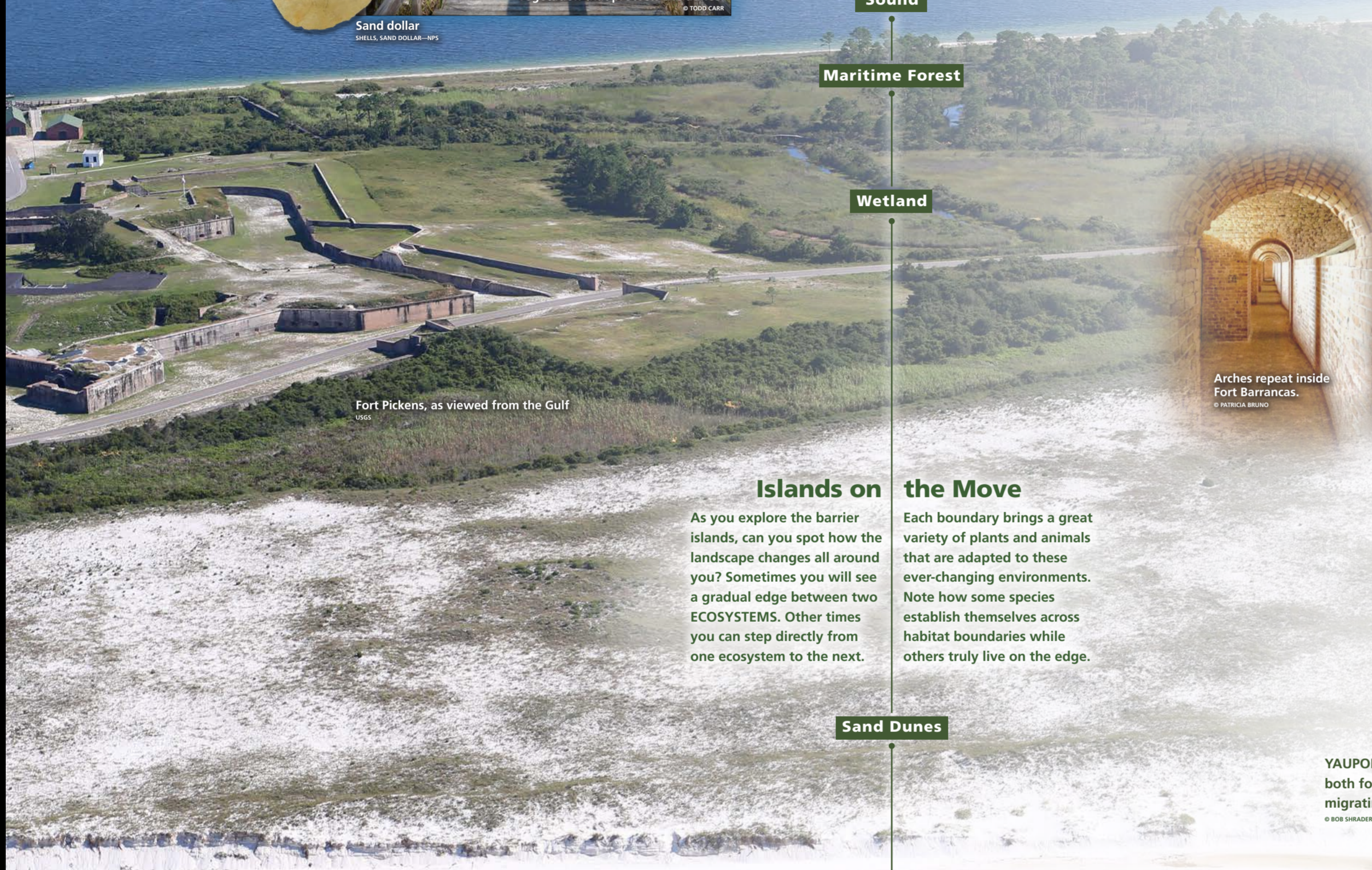


Along This Dynamic Seascape,

a chain of island strongholds guards against threats from the Gulf of Mexico. Whether facing attacking ships or hurricanes, the military fortifications and barrier islands of Gulf Islands National Seashore have protected these harbors and the mainland through many storms.



Sand dollar
SHELLS, SAND DOLLAR—NPS



Fort Pickens, as viewed from the USGS

Sound

Maritime Forest

Wetland

Islands on the Move

As you explore the barrier islands, can you spot how the landscape changes all around you? Sometimes you will see a gradual edge between two ECOSYSTEMS. Other times you can step directly from one ecosystem to the next.

Each boundary brings a great variety of plants and animals that are adapted to these ever-changing environments. Note how some species establish themselves across habitat boundaries while others truly live on the edge.

Sand Dunes

Watching the Waters

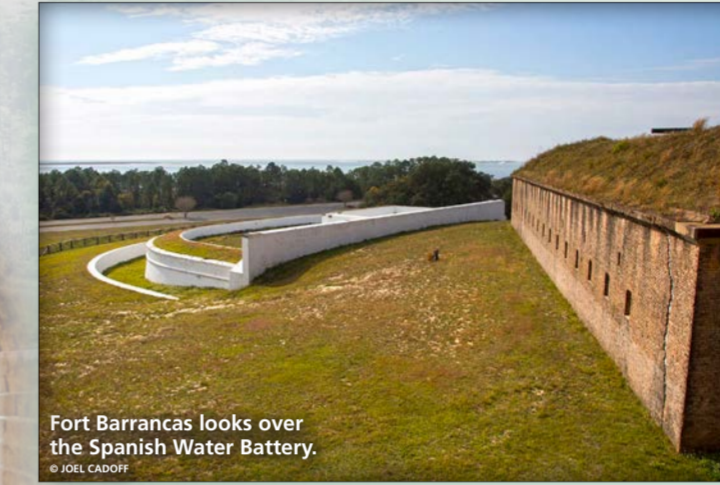
Among natural beauty and recreational opportunities, you will find numerous COASTAL FORTIFICATIONS. The park's collection, like its Third System masonry forts, represents over 200 years of innovation in military design, materials, weapons, and strategy.



Defending the Shore

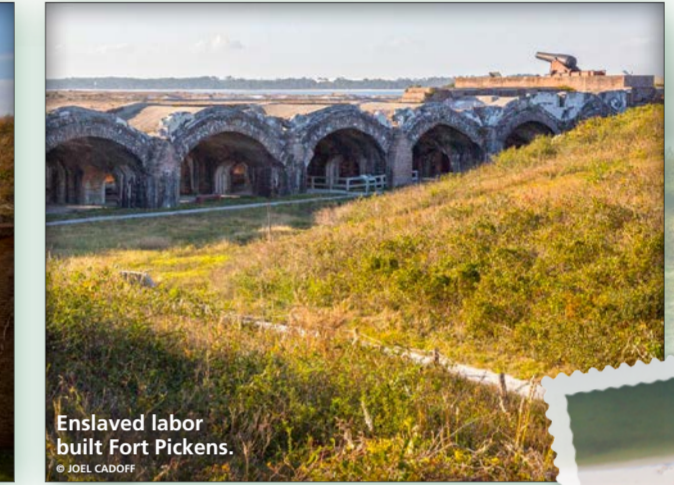
The THIRD SYSTEM of seacoast defense aimed to fortify major US harbors after the War of 1812. Pensacola Bay was chosen as the site for a navy yard, depot, mainland and island forts, naval timber reserve, and more.

The idea was a response to changing warfare technology and strategy—which was also why it was abandoned decades later. Of nearly 200 forts recommended nationwide, only 42 were built. Today the park preserves five sites.



Fort Barrancas PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

With Advanced Redoubt and the Spanish Water Battery, Fort Barrancas protected Pensacola Bay and defended the landward approach to the Pensacola Navy Yard.



Fort Pickens SANTA ROSA ISLAND, FLORIDA

The park's largest fort, Fort Pickens has been partially restored and reveals how its construction has developed over time.

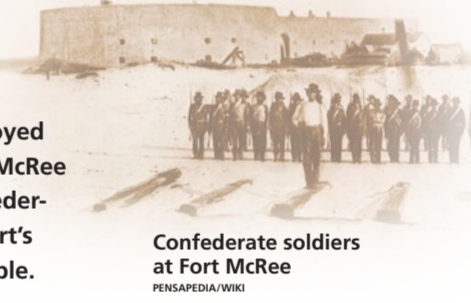


Fort Massachusetts SHIP ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI

On Ship Island, Confederates exchanged fire with the USS *Massachusetts*. After reclaiming the island, the US Army established Gulf Squadron Headquarters and completed the fort in 1866.

Fort McRee PERDIDO KEY, FLORIDA

Federal forces almost destroyed Confederate-occupied Fort McRee in 1861–62; departing Confederates burned the rest. The fort's remnants are no longer visible.



YAUPON HOLLY provides both food and shelter for migrating birds.

LIVE OAKS were ideal for ship building due to the strength and natural curvature of the wood.

Coastal Communities

A range of ecosystems and HABITATS develop where salt water from the Gulf and fresh water from the mainland mix. Over 400 fish species, 300 bird species, and a dozen federally listed threatened and endangered species make the park their home. Water makes up over 82 percent of the park and is a key factor in where these species live.

Gulf

Warm saltwater areas, shallow and deep, house species big and small.

Barrier Island

Water and wind shape and move the islands, changing habitats.

Sound

In waterways between the barrier islands and the mainland, salt water mixes with fresh water.

Estuary

Sediment, saltwater tides, and freshwater streams meet and provide a nursery habitat.

Bayou

Some species live in slow-moving, lowland streams and freshwater marshes of river watersheds.

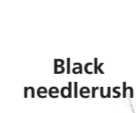


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Seagrass



Saw palmetto



© STEPHANIE PLOSSCHT



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Two States, One Park

Beaches, bayous, and boating are some of the many things you can experience in this two-state, 160-mile park. Fish, swim, hike, bike, picnic, camp, observe wildlife, discover history, and explore two island wilderness areas. The park's staff, website, and official NPS App can help you plan your visit.

Build sand castles on white quartz beaches.

MISSISSIPPI

ALABAMA

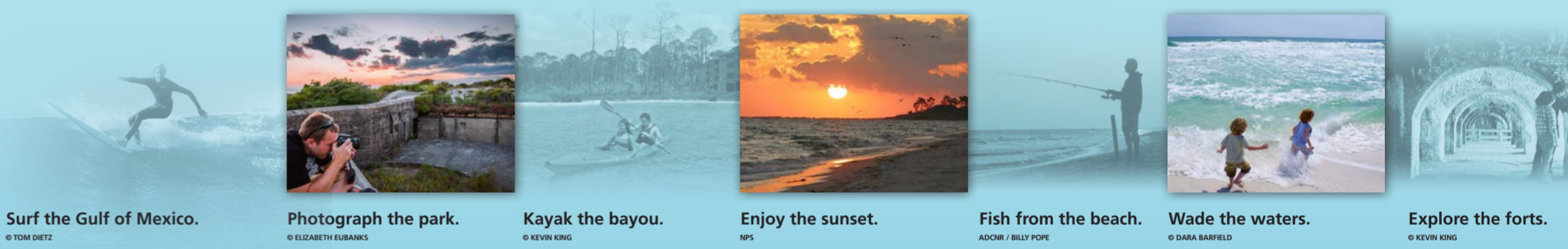
FLORIDA

North

Trail/boardwalk	Gulf Islands National Seashore	Wheelchair-accessible	Picnic area
Multi-use trail	Urban area	Ranger station	Pavilion
Florida National Scenic Trail	Fortification	Boat launch	Campground
		Swimming area	Backcountry camping

Gulf Islands National Seashore is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

Visit the park website at www.nps.gov/guis. Follow us on social media. Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.



Surf the Gulf of Mexico. Photograph the park. Kayak the bayou. Enjoy the sunset. Fish from the beach. Wade the waters. Explore the forts.



MISSISSIPPI AREAS The visitor center has information, exhibits, maps, and films. The campground (open year-round) has electricity, water hookups, a dump station, group tent area, boat launch, and pavilions. Reserve sites at www.recreation.gov. Hiking and paddling trails are self-guiding. A saltwater fishing license is required for all areas. The Davis Bayou area has a fishing pier. Commercial fishing is prohibited in park waters.

Ship Island (Fort Massachusetts) An unshaded, 0.3-mile boardwalk leads to a swim beach, pavilions, restrooms, showers, and snack bar. Facilities are open mid-March through October. Free tours and exhibits are available seasonally. Tours of the fort are not wheelchair-accessible. No camping allowed. Take a one-hour ferry (fee) from Gulfport from mid-March through October or dock your boat near the fort on the sound-side shore year-round during daylight hours only. Private boats are not permitted to use the pier.

Cat, Petit Bois, West Petit Bois, and Horn islands are reachable only by private boat. No facilities or staff are available. Petit Bois and Horn islands are designated wilderness areas—lands untrammeled by humans, undeveloped, and retaining a primeval character with only an impermanent human presence. They are protected to preserve their natural conditions and offer opportunities for solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation.

Backcountry camping is allowed on Horn, Petit Bois, and West Petit Bois islands. A permit is required for groups of 10 or more on Horn and Petit Bois islands only. Camping on Cat Island is allowed only on park land. Bring all your food and drinking water.

Boaters follow NOAA charts 11372, 11373, and 11374.

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org

FLORIDA AREAS The Fort Pickens and Fort Barrancas visitor centers have exhibits, films, and park stores. Visit the park website for programs, hours, and guided tours.

Seasonal ferry service (one hour, fee) between downtown Pensacola, Pensacola Beach, and Fort Pickens is available March through October. Entrance fees apply at Fort Pickens, Fort Barrancas, Okaloosa, Opal Beach, and Perdido Key, or show a valid National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass. • Hike, bike, or paddle self-guiding trails at Fort Pickens, Fort Barrancas, Perdido Key, and Naval Live Oaks. • Fish from Fort Pickens' pier without a license; otherwise, state fishing licensing and regulations apply. • Camping reservations are recommended; make them at www.recreation.gov. To reserve pavilions, email guis_information@nps.gov. • Boaters follow NOAA charts 11378, 11383, and 11384.

ENJOY A SAFE VISIT Never swim alone. Beware of rip currents, barnacle-covered rocks, sharks, jellyfish, and stingrays. • Watch for weather extremes, sudden storms, and changing surf conditions. Do not stand on piers, beaches, or fortifications during thunderstorms. • Use caution while exploring forts and batteries. Carry a flashlight for dark passageways. • Some areas and forts close for your safety or nesting wildlife. Avoid walking on dunes and vegetation; obey closure signs. • State boating and fishing regulations apply. Do not fish or boat in swim beach areas. • Glass is prohibited on beaches. • Wear protective clothing. Drink plenty of fluids. Use sunscreen. • Practice Leave No Trace principles. • Motor vehicles must stay on paved roads. • Metal detectors and spearfishing are prohibited. • Dogs are prohibited on all Mississippi islands and Florida beaches. • Do not feed or disturb wildlife. • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features. • For all park regulations, including firearms, check the website. • We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information call or check the park website.

Emergencies call 911



GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE
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