

Gulf Islands

National Seashore
Mississippi, Florida



Mississippi Areas

Bayous, Islands, Wildlife, & More



Protect Yourself & the Park During Your Visit

For Your Safety:



The sun can be intense. Wear sunblock.



Be mindful of uneven surfaces.



Closed areas protect you and wildlife.



Extreme weather possible.



In case of an emergency call 911.

Important Park Regulations:



Glass is not permitted on beaches.



Pets are not permitted on island beaches.



Metal detectors are not permitted.



Unmanned aircraft are not permitted.

Learn more and get a complete list of park regulations on our website www.nps.gov/GulfIslands

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Davis Bayou Area

Area open from 6 a.m. to sunset

Visitor Center: 9 am to 4:30 pm

Campground Reservations: 1-877-444-6777

www.recreation.gov

To beaches
and Gulfport
(ferry to West
Ship Island)

Ocean Springs Rd

Park
Entrance

Government Street

● Visitor center

🏠 Ranger station

--- Hiking trail

♿ Wheelchair-accessible

--- Multi-use trail

🚻 Restrooms

P Parking

🍷 Picnic area

🚤 Boat launch

Live Oaks
Bicycle Route

Pavilion 1
P 🍷

OCEAN
SPRINGS

Pavilion 2
P 🍷

Pavilion 3
🚻 P 🍷

Pavilion 4
P 🍷

National Seashore Boundary

Campground
♿ 🚻

Robert McGee Road

Nature's Way
Trail Loop

Halstead Bayou

Pavilion 5
P 🚻 P 🍷

CCC Spur Trail

Park Road

Davis Bayou
Trail

William M. Colmer
Visitor Center

Park Headquarters

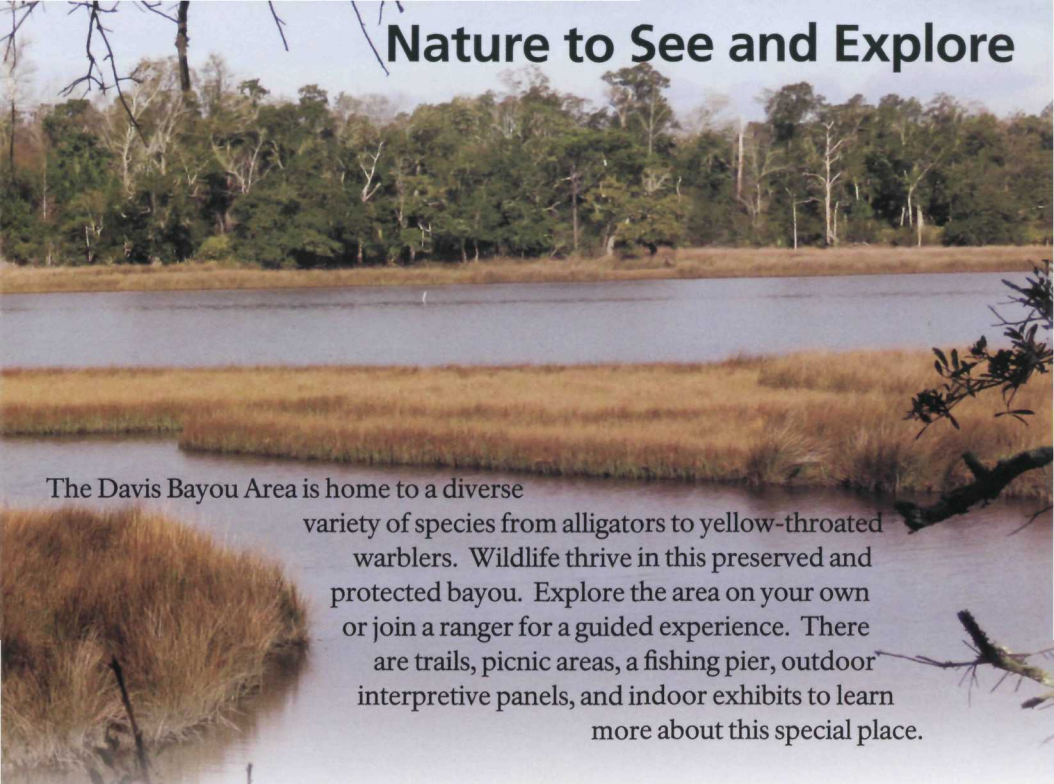
🏠 ♿ 🚻 🚻

Fishing Pier

North

↑ DAVIS BAYOU

Nature to See and Explore

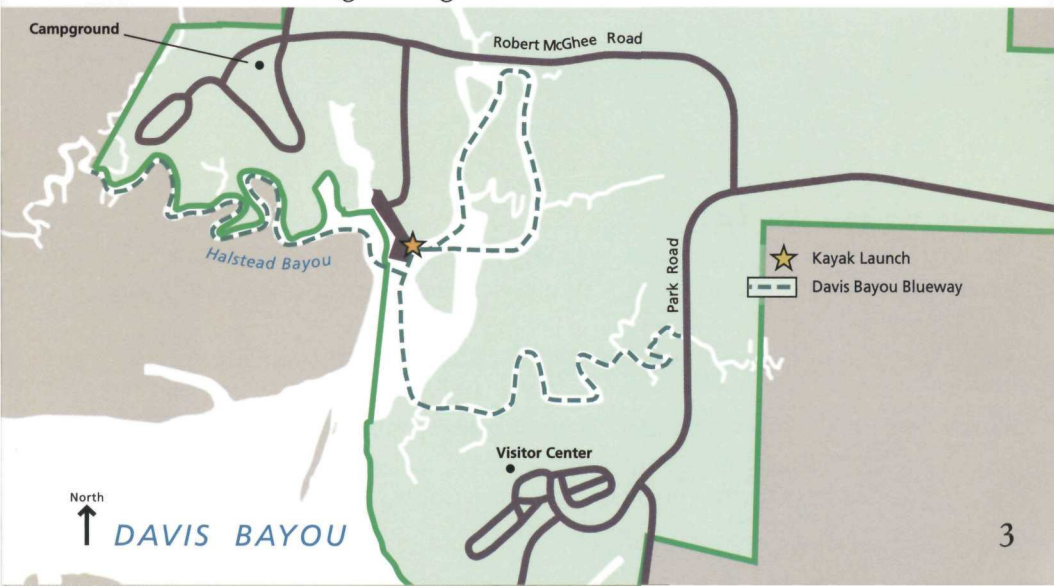


The Davis Bayou Area is home to a diverse variety of species from alligators to yellow-throated warblers. Wildlife thrive in this preserved and protected bayou. Explore the area on your own or join a ranger for a guided experience. There are trails, picnic areas, a fishing pier, outdoor interpretive panels, and indoor exhibits to learn more about this special place.



A Different Perspective

Explore the bayous from a completely different perspective by kayak, canoe, or paddleboard. The Davis Bayou Blueway offers paddlers the opportunity to enjoy the plants and animals of the bayou. The blueway is part of the Gulf Coast National Heritage Area, creating a link through the region.



West Ship Island

Located 12 miles off the coast, this island was once known as Ship Island. In 1969, Hurricane Camille, one of the most powerful storms recorded to make landfall in Mississippi, cut the island in half creating East and West Ship Islands. The separation was exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In an effort to reintroduce sand into the barrier island system, the United States Army Corps of Engineers began reconnecting the islands in 2018.

West Ship Island, like other barrier islands, serves as an important buffer for the mainland and critical habitat for many species. Shorebirds and sea turtles lay their fragile nests on the islands annually. Sea oats and other native vegetation anchor the islands' ever-moving sand.



Know Before You Go

West Ship Island is only accessible by boat. A passenger ferry service runs to the island seasonally. Ticket information and schedules can be found at www.msshhipisland.com.

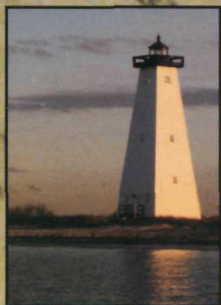
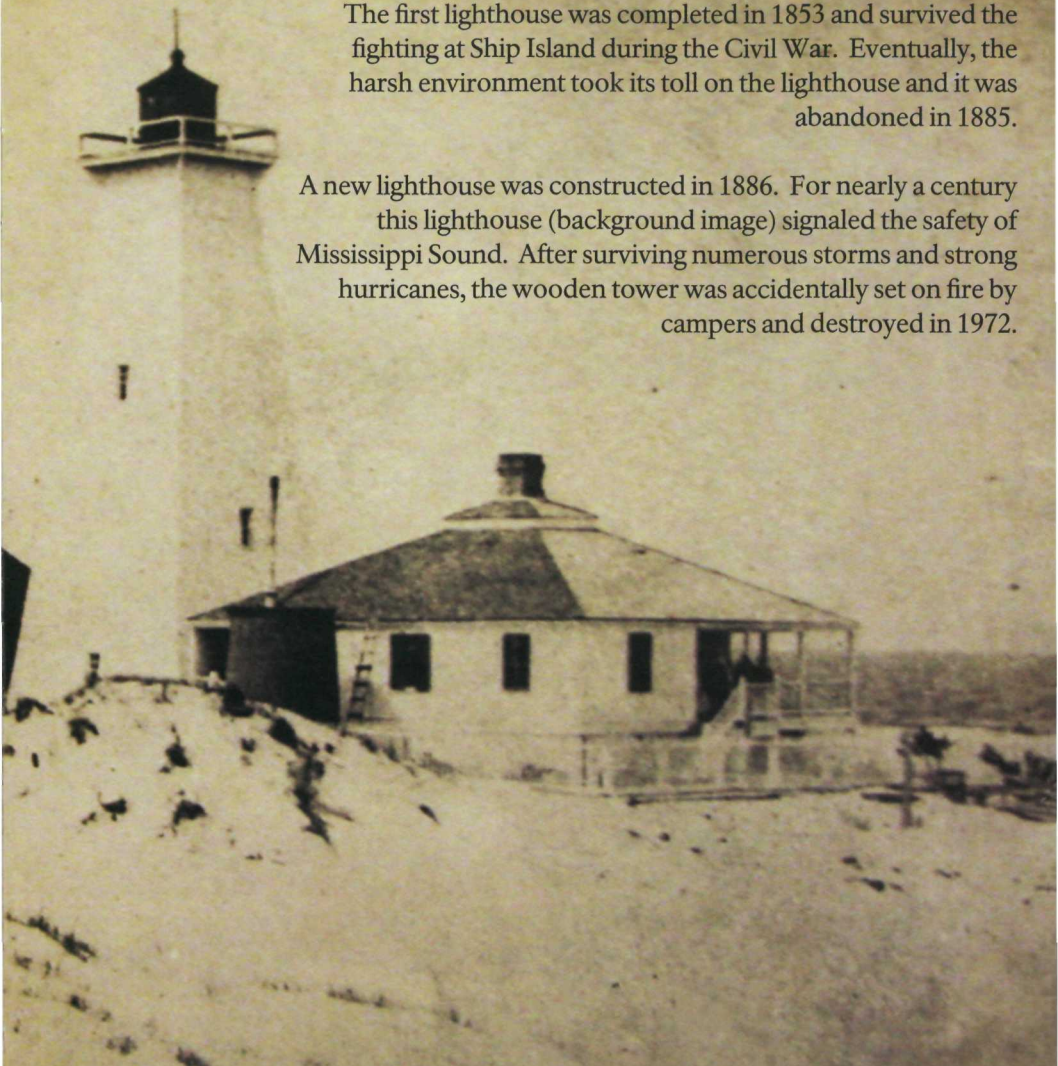
There is a swim beach on the southside of the island with seasonal lifeguard service. Additionally, there are restrooms, a snack bar, and two large shade shelters on the island. Sunscreen and insect repellent are highly recommended.

Glass, drones, camping, and metal detectors are not permitted on the island.

Ship Island Lighthouses

The lighthouses on Ship Island are no longer present. However, for generations they represented safety and home. The first lighthouse was completed in 1853 and survived the fighting at Ship Island during the Civil War. Eventually, the harsh environment took its toll on the lighthouse and it was abandoned in 1885.

A new lighthouse was constructed in 1886. For nearly a century this lighthouse (background image) signaled the safety of Mississippi Sound. After surviving numerous storms and strong hurricanes, the wooden tower was accidentally set on fire by campers and destroyed in 1972.



Recapturing the Past

After the second Ship Island Lighthouse was destroyed, a grassroots movement to recreate this icon began. In 1996, a slightly smaller “exhibit” lighthouse (left) was completed on West Ship Island. The structure provided a physical link to the past lighthouses that once stood on the island. Unfortunately, nature is an unyielding force and the exhibit lighthouse was completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Fort Massachusetts

1. Sally Port

Secured with heavy doors, this is the only entrance to the fort. Although a drawbridge was planned, it was never completed.

2. Terreplain

In 1866, the west end of the island was 500 feet from the fort. Today, the west tip is almost a mile away. From the terreplain, soldiers operated ten cannon positions covering the pass.

3. Traverses

The east side of the fort's upper level is divided by large earthen traverses, which provided additional protection to the cannon positions and storage for powder and ammunition.

4. 15-Inch Rodman

The 15-inch Rodman weighs 50,000 pounds and fired a 400 pound cannon ball three miles. In 1873, this cannon was raised over the fort's wall and mounted here.

5. Parrott Rifles

Unlike smoothbore cannon, projectiles fired from rifled cannon had greater range, accuracy and destructive power. Two 100-pounder Parrott rifles, protected the fort's eastern flank.

6. Cannon Debris

Although designed for 37 cannon, only 17 were mounted during the 1870s. In the early 1900s, many were sold for scrap. Due to their weight, most were broken apart before removal. The debris here, were never removed from the fort.

7. Stair Tower

Three spiral granite staircases were built to use less space and provide protection against enemy fire.

8. Hot Shot Furnace

This coal-fired furnace was meant to heat cannon balls intended to set wooden ships on fire. Although common to coastal forts, this furnace was never used.

9. Guardrooms

One on either side of the sally port, these rooms could house soldiers, but most lived outside the fort. The narrow opening in the wall permitted the soldiers to fire on enemy forces with rifles.

10. Powder Magazines

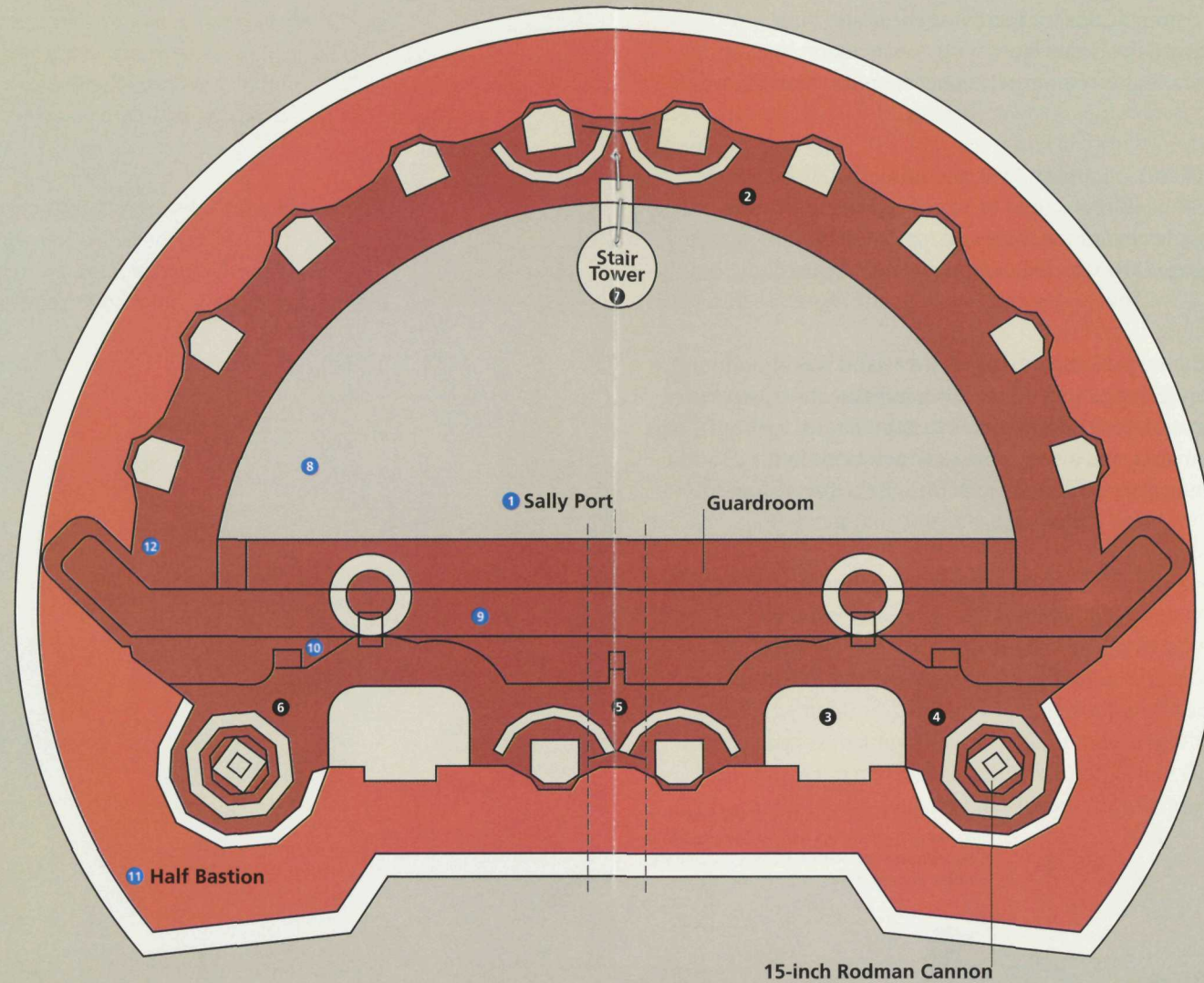
Located next to the guardrooms, powder magazines stored the fort's supply of black powder. The magazines were lined with wood to keep the powder dry.

11. Half Bastions

Projecting out at each end of the fort's east wall, half bastions were designed to provide cross fire to protect the entrance.

12. Casemates

These arched rooms on the lower level of the fort provided support for the upper level, and a protected firing position for cannon. In 1873, thirteen 10-inch Rodman cannon were mounted in these casemates, and were situated to fire through the embrasures.



0 Lower Level


0 Upper Level

Civil War on Ship Island

Although Fort Massachusetts was not completed until 1866, Ship Island was used by both Federal and Confederate troops. Calls for fortifying the island began in 1855, and building a fort was approved two years later, with construction beginning shortly thereafter. Secession and war halted construction before more than the fort's foundations could be laid.

Mississippi troops captured Ship Island in January 1861 and immediately began to establish defensive positions. These positions would be tested as Federal commanders began looking for Gulf Coast footholds to launch raids and major excursions. On July 9, 1861, the USS *Massachusetts* engaged the Confederate positions on the island, but the battle was indecisive.

As the war progressed and Confederate priorities changed, the island was abandoned, and Federal troops took possession in September 1861. With its protected deep water, the island proved to be an ideal location for Federal forces to launch raids on Gulf Coast cities in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and also supported operations in the Florida panhandle. In spite of these ongoing operations, construction of the fort resumed.



The Louisiana Native Guards built this battery on Ship Island. In the center behind Capt. Benjamin F. Manton and Col. Nathan Daniels is Company D of the 2nd Regiment.

African American Soldiers on Ship Island

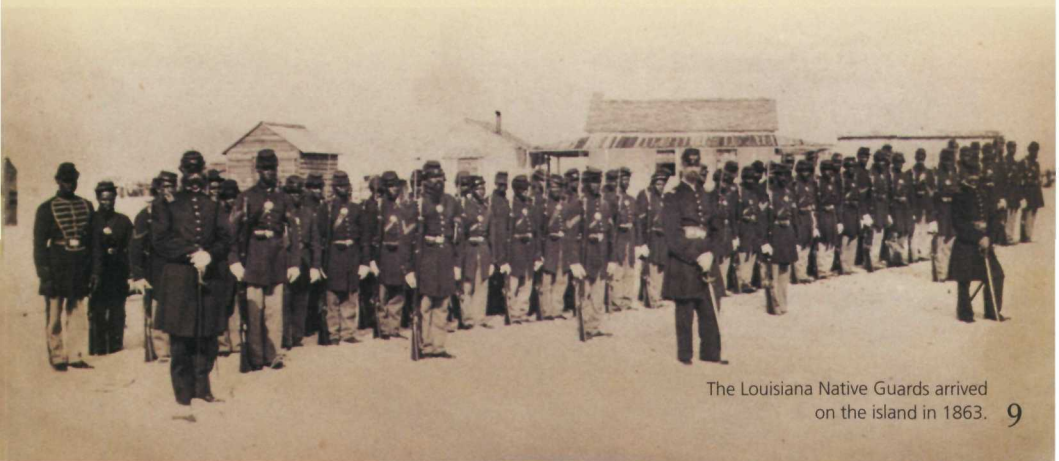
Hundreds of African Americans served as Union soldiers on Ship Island during and after the Civil War. The name of their regiments evolved during the war, beginning with the Native Guards changing to the Corps d’Afrique, before the US Colored

Troops was adopted. Generals intended to use black soldiers for labor or guarding forts, but not for fighting. Many white people believed black men could not learn how to be soldiers, yet the troops stationed at Ship Island fought well and gained respect of their white superior officers.

Black soldiers faced many challenges, including being paid less than white soldiers and many of those soldiers refusing to drill alongside black troops. The presence of black officers also evoked racial slurs from white officers. One black regiment that served on Ship Island was the 2nd Louisiana Native Guards.

This regiment was composed of mostly enslaved men who fled servitude and joined the Union forces in New Orleans. Most recruits were from Louisiana, but two privates, Wemba Congo and August Congo, had only arrived three years earlier aboard an illegal slave ship from Africa. The regiment entered service in October 1862, becoming one of the first black regiments to officially join the US military.

Just days after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in January 1863, and the abolition of slavery became a Union military objective, the 2nd Louisiana was ordered to Ship Island. There they drilled, worked, and guarded prisoners. In April, 180 men were sent to nearby Pascagoula, Mississippi as part of a Union Army raid. During a break in the fight, several black soldiers entered a hotel and hoisted the United States flag, a display that may have hinted at their hopes for a free and equal life. This fight was one of the first between black soldiers and Confederates. Though the raid had little military importance, it represents significant local history associated with civil rights in this country.



The Louisiana Native Guards arrived on the island in 1863.

Visit Mississippi Barrier Islands

Incredibly beautiful islands are just a handful (8-13) of miles off the coast of Mississippi. In addition to West Ship Island, the National Park Service preserves and protects Petit Bois, West Petit Bois, Horn, East Ship, and portions of Cat Islands. Maritime forests, marshes, meadows, freshwater ponds, lagoons, and sand dunes provide a near ideal habitat for diverse wildlife.

Be Prepared

Exploring these barrier islands can be a unique and exciting experience, but be prepared to be self-sustaining. There are no facilities or potable drinking water on any of the islands. Camping is permitted on the islands, although there are specific regulations available on the park's *Backcountry Camping* webpage.

Getting to the Islands

Access to the islands (other than West Ship Island) is by private boat only. A list of approved charter boat operators and their phone numbers are listed on the national seashore's website. Boaters should follow all state and federal operation and safety laws. Inland water boats are not appropriate for transportation to the islands. Captains should refer to navigational charts #11372, #11373, & #11374 and monitor VHF radio channels 16, 22, & 23. The Horn Island Pier is for administrative use only; boaters to the islands should anchor a safe distance from shore.

Find licensed charter operators at www.nps.gov/guis/getinvolved/cua HOLDERS.htm

Island Wilderness

Wilderness is an indispensable part of the American story. American Indians depended on the bounty of wilderness for survival while western explorers were inspired by its untamed beauty. However, essential wilderness has disappeared in the last 100 years. As Americans realized the long-term health and welfare of the nation was at risk, a vision for conservation emerged in 1964 with the passage of the Wilderness Act.

This act provided Congress the ability to designate qualifying areas as wilderness areas, providing the highest level of protection to “secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.” Off the coast of Mississippi two islands have been afforded this protection as places of solitude, self-reliance, and refuge from modern-day civilization.

Horn and Petit Bois Islands are wild places for challenging, but memorable experiences. Be prepared to be self-reliant, there are no facilities on the islands. All should practice wilderness ethics and Leave No Trace principles (<http://go.nps.gov/wild-ethics>).



Island Habitats & Residents



Shorebirds

Several species of shorebirds nest and raise their chicks on the national seashore's barrier islands, including least terns, piping plovers, black skimmers, and more. Help protect these fragile creatures by remaining out of areas closed for nesting activities.

Sea Turtles

Four species of sea turtles lay nests on the barrier islands off the coast of Mississippi. Nests are laid between May and October each year, predominately at night. Reducing or eliminating outdoor lights, even inland, can help sea turtles thrive.



Sand Dunes

Anchored by sea oats and other vegetation, sand dunes hold barrier islands together. These fragile features are home to a variety of plants and animals that play a critical role in the barrier island ecosystem. Please do not walk on dunes.

Ospreys

Gulf Islands offers some of the best nesting and hunting grounds for these powerful raptors. Ospreys are territorial, especially around their nests, but they can be scared so much that they abandon their nest. Keep your distance (300 yards) from nests.



Seagrass

Seagrass meadows serve as nurseries in the shallow waters around barrier islands. These plants provide shelter to shrimp, crabs, and many species of fish. Motorized boats damage seagrass beds; boaters should push, pull, drift, or troll instead.

Share Your Experience




@GulfIslandsNPS



#GulfIslandsNS

#FindYourPark



More Information

Website:

www.nps.gov/GulfIslands

Phone:

(228) 230-4100

Mail:

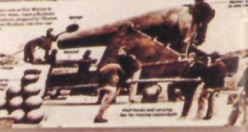
3500 Park Road

Ocean Springs, MS 39564



15-inch Rodman

This 15-inch Rodman is the last of many remaining cast-iron cannons of this caliber, making the largest remaining cast-iron Rodman in the world. The barrel alone weighed 75,000 pounds. With a diameter of 15 inches, the Rodman could fire a 15-inch diameter shell about 100 pounds or a solid 15-inch shell about 1,000 pounds. The carriage took about a year to build. It is named for the man who directed its construction.



KEEP OFF MOUNDS