

# The Gulf Breeze

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Padre Island National Seashore  
News and Information, 2011



Padre Island National Seashore protects the longest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world, preserving rare coastal prairie, a complex and dynamic dune system, and the Laguna Madre, one of the few hypersaline lagoon environments left in the world. While you are here, take some time to observe your surroundings. Whether you are enjoying the beach, launching your boat or windsurfing at Bird Island Basin, driving, or simply walking, there is always something spectacular to see.

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## Ranger-led Programs

ACTIVITY	Su	M	T	W	TH	F	Sa
Beach Walk - 11:00 a.m., Daily Weekends only in April and May	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Deck Talk - 1:00 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Junior Ranger - 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Self-guided	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Birding Skills Class - 2:00 p.m.							X
Guided Birding Tour - 8:00 a.m. November - April	X			X	X	X	X
Evening Program - 7:00 p.m. January - March			X				
Star Party Times and dates vary. Please call ahead.							X
Coffee with a Ranger - 8:00 a.m. January - April					X		
Art in the Park - Held monthly, January- March. Please call ahead for dates and times.			X				
Beach Crafts - 3:00 p.m. Held the 1st and 3rd Friday of each month, January - April.						X	

All programs are subject to change. Please call the Visitor Center at (361) 949-8068 before attending a park event.

# Superintendent's Message



Welcome to Padre Island National Seashore! Our mission is to save and preserve this great park, unimpaired, for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration. Our team pledges to give a 100% effort in carrying out this mission, and we hope that you have an outstanding experience as you explore and enjoy this national treasure. While you are here, take some time to observe the surrounding areas.

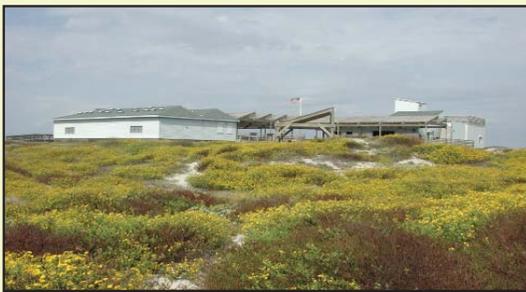
During the spring and summer months, there is a flurry of activity on the beach. You will see turtle patrollers searching for nests, school children on field trips, families recreating, anglers surf fishing, and vehicles of all sizes driving up and down the shoreline. Please be vigilant and safe during this busy season.

The fall and winter months are ideal for bird watching due to the many birds that either migrate through or spend the winter here. Fall brings sandhill cranes, which can usually be seen slowly walking through the grasslands. During winter, hawks may be seen perched on telephone poles, fence posts, or in treetops watching for prey.

Please remember that the National Park Service, visitors, and neighbors are all stewards of this special place, and we must work together to protect and care for the National Seashore so that it may be enjoyed for generations to come.

Joe Escoto, Superintendent

## Around the Park



**Malaquite Pavilion** is where visitors can find the visitor center, park bookstore, concession store, and bathhouse. Bring your snacks and enjoy the shade and cool breeze at the picnic tables. There is an accessible ramp to the beach, and beach wheelchairs are available at no charge at the visitor center.



**Malaquite Beach** has picnic tables and shade structures so that visitors can enjoy the beach in comfort. Visitors are welcome to bring a grill to cook on at the beach.



**Malaquite Picnic Shelter** is a great place for picnicking with your family and friends. Water is available. Lights and electricity are available upon request. Feel free to bring your own grill.



**Grasslands Nature Trail** is three-quarters of a mile long and is handicap-accessible. The trail may offer a glimpse of the birds and other wildlife that roam the grasslands. This is also a great place to watch the sun set over the island.



**Novillo Line Camp** will take you back in time to the days when there were more cattle than gulls on Padre Island. Take a light walk to the last standing remains of the Dunn family cattle ranching operation.

# Camping



## North and South Beach

**Camping is free, but a permit is required.**

South Beach is the shoreline that runs along the Gulf of Mexico from the south end of Closed Beach to the Mansfield Channel. North Beach is the shoreline that runs along the northernmost section of the National Seashore, along the Gulf of Mexico. Mile markers are placed every five miles on the beach. All camping in these areas is primitive and open to RV and tent camping. Camping here is at your own risk. Vehicles occasionally get stuck in soft sand. At the entrance of South Beach, there is a chemical toilet and a large dumpster. Flush toilets and cold-water rinse showers are available at the Malaquite Visitor Center.



## Malaquite Campground

**\$8/night**

**50% off with an Interagency Senior or Access Pass**

Tucked in the dunes with a view of the Gulf of Mexico, Malaquite Campground offers 50 semi-primitive designated sites, six of which are tent sites. Tent campers may put their tents on the beach or at their campsite. This campground provides flush toilets, cold-water rinse showers, picnic tables, grills, and shade structures. There are no hook-ups available, but there is a free gray/black water dump station and potable water filling station off of the entry road to the campground.



## Bird Island Basin Camping, Windsurfing & Kayaking

**\$5.00/day or \$10.00/year**

**50% off with an Interagency Senior or Access Pass**

Located on the shores of the Laguna Madre, this site offers fantastic opportunities for windsurfing, kayaking, boating, birding and fishing. Both RV and tent camping sites are available. There are chemical toilets only, but flush toilets and cold-water rinse showers are available at the Malaquite Visitor Center.



## Bird Island Basin Boat Ramp

**\$5/day or \$10/year**

There are 106 vehicle/trailer, four vehicle only, and four handicap parking spaces available for visitors wishing to launch a boat to access the Laguna Madre.



## Yarborough Pass

**Camping is free, but a permit is required.**

Yarborough Pass is located 15.5 miles south of the visitor center. To find the camping area, drive to the 15-mile marker on South Beach and backtrack approximately 100 yards. Access to this area is possible only through the 4-wheel drive area of South Beach and by boating down the Laguna Madre. Be aware that the road through the dunes is sometimes filled with exceptionally deep and soft sand in which even 4-wheel drive vehicles may occasionally become stuck. The flooded areas may be deep. Please call the visitor center at (361) 949-8068 ahead of time for an update on weather and driving conditions. Permits are available at the entry to South Beach.

# Driving Down Island

Jorge Martinez, Division of Interpretation and Education

Driving on the beach is a great adventure, but it takes experience and preparation. Remember that, in Texas, all beaches are public highways and all traffic laws apply, including seatbelt regulations. Two-wheel drive vehicles have limited access to driving down South Beach, and the wind, Gulf currents and weather can make beach driving conditions unpredictable at times. Read this guide to learn how to best prepare yourself for traveling down island and call the Malaquite Visitor Center at (361) 949-8068 or the Weather Hotline at (361) 949-8175 for the most current tide, weather, and driving conditions.

The following items are useful to bring along on any down island trip:

- |                        |                             |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Water               | 11. Tide chart              |
| 2. Ice                 | 12. Extra fuel              |
| 3. Sunscreen           | 13. Spare tire(s)           |
| 4. Protective clothing | 14. Shovel                  |
| 5. A shade structure   | 15. Five-gallon bucket      |
| 6. First aid kit       | 16. Wooden planks or carpet |
| 7. Flashlight          | 17. Floor jack              |
| 8. Hand sanitizer      | 18. Air Compressor          |
| 9. Toilet paper        | 19. Flat tire repair spray  |
| 10. Trash bags         | 20. Tow strap               |



This truck got stuck by driving over decomposing seaweed at the water's edge. If you see water pooling in your tracks, move closer to the dunes.

Want to avoid a mess like the one shown above? Here are some things to consider:

1. The National Park Service does not tow vehicles, and the cost for a private wrecker to come down island may cost from several hundred to several thousand dollars.
2. Travel in the tracks of those that have gone before you. This will not only help you avoid areas of very deep sand, but also most debris. Remember that northbound vehicles have the right of way.
3. Keep moving in deep sand. It may be difficult to pull out if you stop.
4. Although it may be easier to drive on the hard sand at the water's edge, remember that a steep shell embankment may exist in some areas. This may make leaving the hard sand difficult if it suddenly softens. If water is seen pooling in your tracks, do not stop. Move to drier ground.
5. If you do get stuck, use your shovel to dig yourself out or place your planks or carpet in front of or in back of your tires and try to drive out. Use seaweed or buckets of seawater to wet the sand to increase traction.
6. It is a good idea to start your down island drive one to two hours before low tide in order to take advantage of what may be the best possible driving conditions.
7. Stay within the posted speed limits. In addition to being the safest way to drive, this is the most comfortable. Often the beach has a washboard texture, which makes driving over it at high speed like hitting a series of speed bumps. In addition, this will lessen damage to your vehicle should you encounter any unseen debris. Rangers do use radar to monitor traffic speed.
8. Do not attempt to drive off the beach and into areas of vegetation. In addition to being prohibited, this is also unwise because the grass often conceals large areas of standing water and very soft mud.
9. Park where you will not block traffic. By parking on the driving road, you force people to drive in the soft sand, which increases the chance that their vehicle will get stuck.
10. Watch for pedestrians, especially near tents and parked vehicles, and at night. Watch for small children near the surf where they may not hear approaching vehicles.
11. Be alert for nesting sea turtles crawling across the beach during the day and night from mid-April to mid-July. If you see a nester, do not disturb the turtle and mark the nest without puncturing it. Report the sighting to the nearest ranger as soon as possible. If no rangers are nearby, call National Seashore personnel at (361) 949-8173, ext. 226.

# Why There? A Digital Approach

Travis Clapp, Division of Science and Resources Management

Why there? That question may seem strange because it is one that people don't often think about. The invention of Geographical Positioning System (GPS) hardware and software has helped answer this question and has changed science, technology, and even day-to-day life. Today, there is no need to listen to a friend give you odd directions over the phone or type an address into an internet search engine and instantly receive directions to a destination. The current state of GPS technology gives birth to the Geographic Information System, or GIS. According to the National Park Service (NPS), a GIS consists of computer hardware, software, and georeferenced data—information corresponding to a place on the surface of the Earth. A GIS is able to analyze location, features or objects (such as a stream), and feature characteristics (such as water quality or direction of water flow), in relation to other locations, features, and their characteristics. Using GIS is necessary to efficiently and effectively take care of natural and cultural resources in parks like Padre Island National Seashore.

A major mission for the NPS is conservation. The National Seashore uses GIS to help fulfill this mission. Within a GIS, data is called a *layer*. Think of it as laying data on top of a map to see how it relates to that specific location. The more layers of data you have, the better you can understand how the layers relate to one another. People can make assumptions based on the location and the attributes collected. This is called *geospatial analysis*. Geospatial analysis is useful when dealing with conservation.

“Every action has an equal and opposite reaction,” said our great friend Sir Issac Newton, and GIS helps management teams prepare for that opposite, or potentially bad, reaction. Fire Management is one example of preventing this kind of reaction.



A layer of data to show where a fire burned.

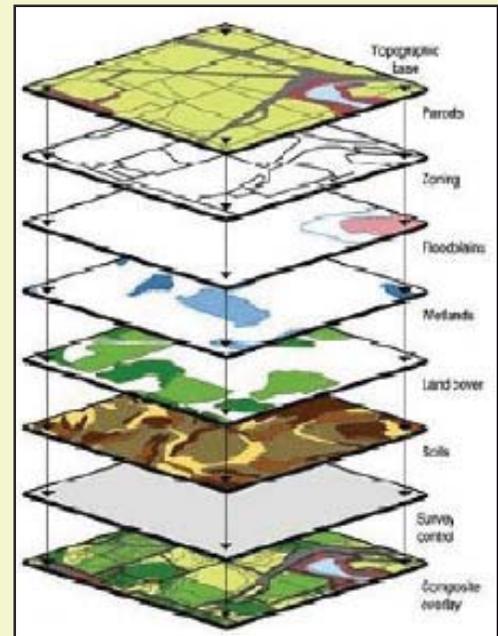
The National Seashore routinely practices prescribed burns, but also needs to prepare for natural and other types of burns. When a fire is burning, there are layers that need to be considered, like where the fire started. Another important layer is natural resources, which fire managers need to avoid. Knowing and applying these layers, people in charge of managing a fire can visualize, analyze, and make real-time decisions based on how the fire is behaving. Then they can determine what steps need to be taken to conserve sensitive resources, like a historic building or endangered wildlife. This sort of accuracy and efficiency cannot be performed any other way. GIS takes the unmanageable and makes it manageable.

Currently, the National Seashore is surveying for birds and has banded some earlier in the year, like the red knot. The red knot has beautiful plumage when it is breeding, and scientists are fascinated by this creature because it migrates thousands of miles between the Arctic Circle and Tierra del Fuego on the southern tip of Argentina. This incredible bird is quickly making its way to being

listed as a threatened or endangered species, so scientists are trying to understand where and when it travels, and the ultimate question: why it travels to certain places at those certain times.

One strange thing is that park scientists do not know why red knots migrate to Padre Island. Some think that these birds are a community of red knots that do not follow their peers' usual migration patterns. Using a tracking tool called a geolocator, researchers are following these birds to test this hypothesis. Currently, GPS data related to the red knot data is being compiled by park staff and researchers. This data contains attributes like plumage. Using these analyses through GIS, scientists can make assumptions about these birds and compare them to studies on other communities of the same bird. Research is still in progress concerning the red knot, and GIS is playing a very important role in the development of data.

In the future, all types of research data at the National Seashore will be connected. This will allow for every aspect of a situation to be looked at carefully through GIS and for proper decisions to be made quickly and effectively. Looking at coordinates and their attributes help park managers make strong and better decisions. Ultimately, GIS helps park managers solve the answer to the question: “Why there?”



Data layers in GIS help scientists and park managers understand how features of an area are related to one another.



A red knot with a GPS tracking band.

# Kids' Corner

## What's In Your Sargassum?

Sargassum weed is found on the Texas coast mostly during spring months, but this changes every year. Read the following article about Sargassum and then look at the drawing below. Some creatures that are mentioned in the article are written in bold letters. How many of those animals can you find in the picture below?



## Strange and Smelly Seaweed

*Amy Nordfelt and Chelsea Aldrich, Division of Interpretation and Education*

The day has come when you and your family are finally driving to Padre Island National Seashore to have a fun-filled day at the beach. You walk on a trail through the dunes to get to the warm sand. Your excitement increases over the smell of the sea and awaiting fun. Then, there it is, the beautiful beach. But, oh no! There's gross seaweed all over the shore! This is most people's reaction when they see seaweed on the Texas coast. But it's not such a bad thing, and after reading this article, you should understand why.

The first thing you should know is what the seaweed is called and where some of it comes from. Sargassum weed is most often what we see washed on the beaches of Texas, and it comes from a place called the Sargasso Sea. This sea is a very vast area located east of the Florida coast in the Atlantic Ocean. Here, Sargassum weed grows naturally and provides habitat for many different kinds of marine life. A habitat is a place where an animal can find shelter, food, and space to grow.

A lot of different animals can blend in, or camouflage, with their sargassum home. One animal that has great camouflage is the **Sargassum fish**. This fish moves along slowly, either swimming or walking along the sargassum weed using the fins right behind its gills. Then, when a fish swims nearby, the Sargassum fish will open its huge, vacuum-like mouth and can swallow a fish whole that is equal to its size. Another feisty animal that lives in Sargassum weed is the **Sargassum crab**. These little guys grow very quickly and can slice and dice any unsuspecting fish that may swim too close. **Sargassum shrimp** and crabs have their names because they blend in with their homes, just like the Sargassum fish.



The Sargassum fish isn't the only creature with a strangely shaped body that looks like seaweed. Like walking sticks on land plants, **Sargassum pipefish** look very similar to the stems of Sargassum. **Nudibranchs** are creatures that are like snails without shells. They hang out on Sargassum and eat small creatures called bryozoans. Strangely enough, though, nudibranchs don't taste very good themselves, so shorebirds stay away from them when they wash onto the beach. Many of the other creatures that live in Sargassum are tasty to fish, sea turtles, and many other ocean creatures. Look at the picture to the right to see how many fish are attracted to floating mats of floating Sargassum weed. What a Sargassum-licious feast!

Sargassum weed is also a place where baby sea creatures can hatch from their eggs and grow and learn, like people at a preschool. Many baby fish, called fry fish, live in the seaweed until they are big enough to live in the open ocean. **Sea turtles** also live in Sargassum when they first head out into the open ocean as little hatchlings. Like fish, they can hide in the seaweed and even eat it. Since so many animals need the sargassum weed to live and grow, it is a very important and special place.

When big chunks of Sargassum break away from the giant seaweed mats found out at sea, different ocean currents carry them to beaches and the Texas coast. A lot of the time there are still many little marine animals, such as shrimp and crabs, hiding in it. Eventually, Sargassum washes up on the shore, and all sorts of hungry shorebirds line up to dig through the seafood buffet! Not only do the shorebirds love to eat animals found in Sargassum, but land crabs will also scavenge through it after dark looking for a late night snack. So, Sargassum weed is a good thing because it also provides food for other animals that live on the beach.

Once Sargassum weed washes ashore, the hot Texas sun will begin to dry it out and break it down into tiny pieces. We call this decomposing. As seaweed breaks down, the wind carries some of it into the dunes where it provides nutrients for all the dune plants. So not only does it help the animals, but it also helps to fertilize the plants on the island.

So, when you see the beach full of seaweed, don't shriek out in disgust. Instead, get excited about all the amazing marine life you can find living inside of it. Grab your net and bucket and catch seaweed out in the ocean, bring it to shore, and shake it out to see what little animals fall out. You might be surprised at all of the neat things you discover in the seaweed and how much fun it can be to search through it.

## One Kind of a Ranger

*Tyler Hudock, Division of Visitor and Resources Protection*

There are several different kinds of rangers you may encounter when visiting Padre Island National Seashore. There are interpretive rangers, rangers who manage resources, law enforcement rangers, firefighters, and many others. Often, rangers are lumped into one category... police. This general view stems from the fact that we all wear the green and grey. Although we all wear the Park Service uniform and honor the same mission statement, we do very different jobs. I would like to help you understand the diverse world of my job as a law enforcement ranger and our relationship with visitors.

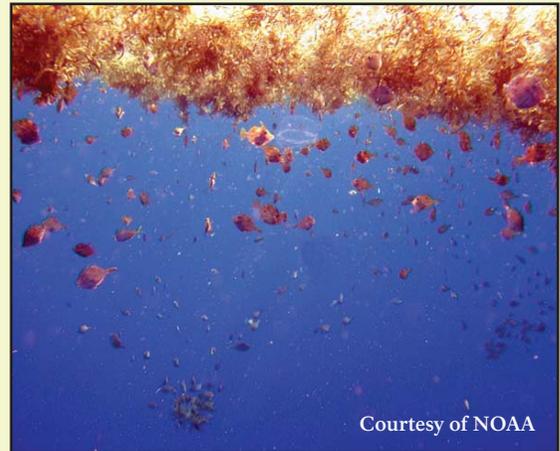
A law enforcement ranger is tasked with a wide variety of duties. At the National Seashore, our duties include emergency medical services, search and rescue, wildland firefighting, hurricane evacuation, visitor education, and law enforcement. During a general day at work, I encounter visitors who have questions, need help, or just want to talk to a member of the team. Through my conversations with them, I find ways to help people or make their visit to the park one that they can remember. Our job is first and foremost that of a public servant.

On any given day at Padre Island, I estimate that only 51 percent of my daily activities include law enforcement duties. Some of these activities include traffic enforcement (traffic accidents/ speeding), resource protection (fishing violations/poaching), campground compliance (permits), and boating compliance. The rest of my day is devoted to other duties. What I like most about being a law enforcement officer is my daily interaction with visitors.

I ride in my patrol vehicle and find good conversation. The best way to learn about the park I work in is to pick the brains of the visitors who have been coming to the park for years.

During my casual interactions with visitors, I am also acting as a law enforcement officer. Being a law enforcement ranger has taught me to be very good at multi-tasking. While serving the public, I am also ensuring that visitors are both enjoying their stay safely and acting in

*To read more, go to RANGERS on page 10.*



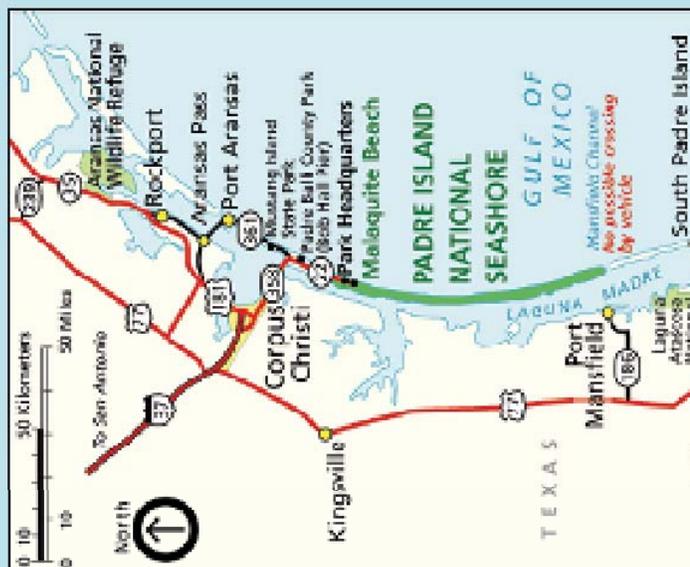
Courtesy of NOAA

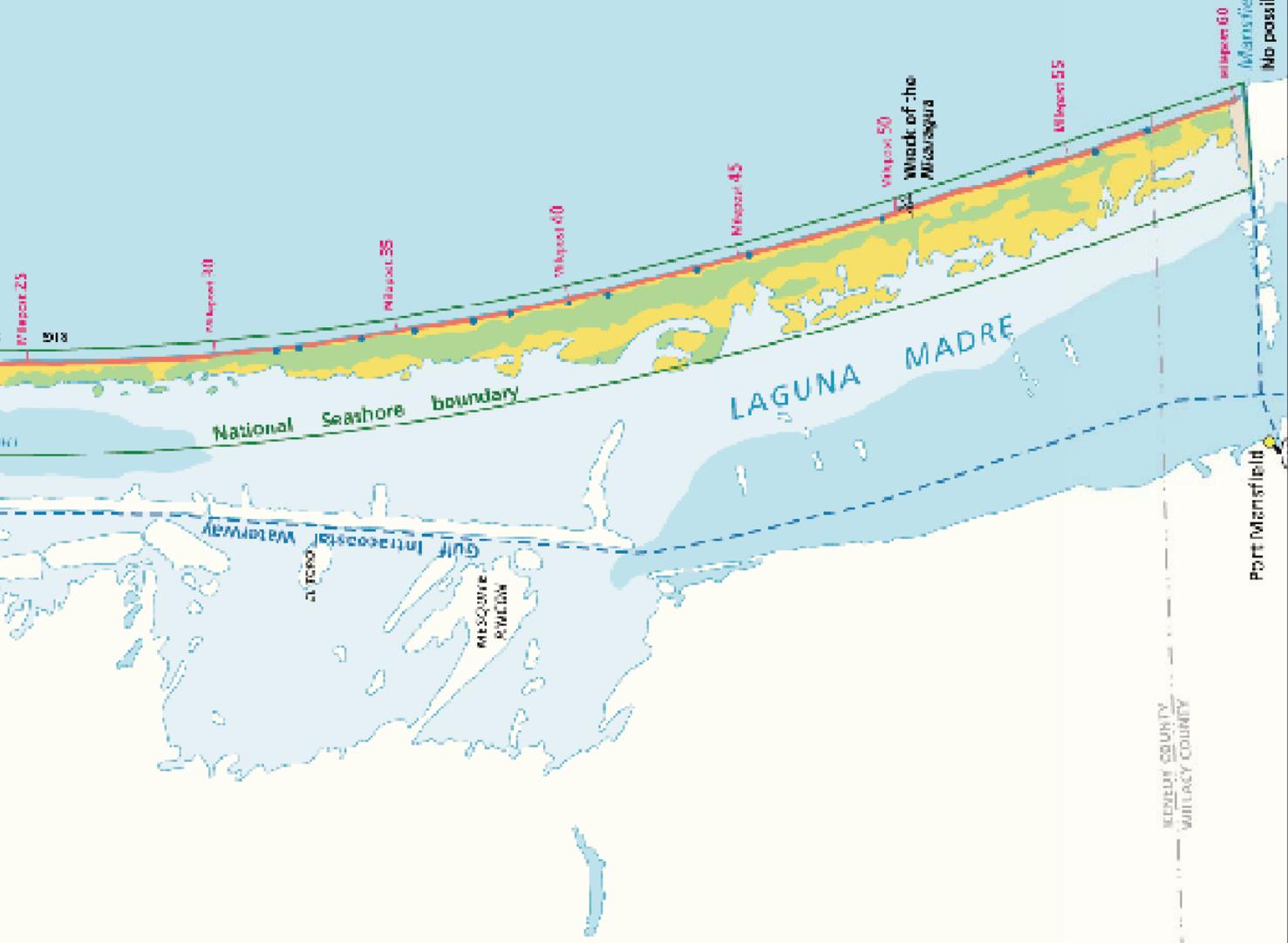
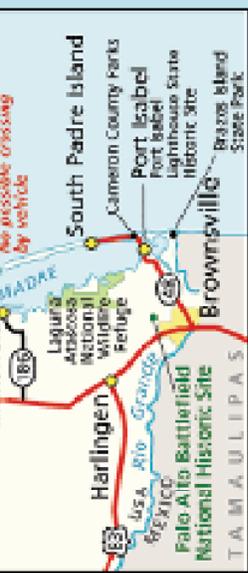
Look at all of the sea creatures that show up to feed on the tasty animals living in the floating sargassum weed!



A ranger driving down the beach.

# GULF OF MEXICO





**Natural areas within Padre Island National Seashore**

- Beach
- Dunes
- Grasslands and flats
- Other area
- Tidal flat
- Spoil area
- Weather channel

- Picnic area
- Boat ramp
- Showers
- Wind surfing
- Campground
- Primitive campsite

REGULATORY COUNTY  
WILLACY COUNTY

Port Mansfield

Mansfield Channel

No possible crossing by vehicle

## Rangers *(continued from page 7)*

accordance with park regulations. Within the park boundary I enforce the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR), as well as applicable state laws (Texas criminal and traffic code). I enforce these rules and regulations through visitor education. I identify violations taking place in the park and rectify them with verbal warnings, citation, detention, and arrest.

When visitors are in vacation mode they leave their worries and stresses at home. However, a few visitors also leave their better judgment at home. When you come to visit the National Seashore, the same rules that apply outside the park also apply inside. Some of the violations that I see over and over include driving under the influence of alcohol, open containers of alcohol in a motor vehicle, speeding, driving off-road, feeding the wildlife, and littering.

So, when you come to the National Seashore, please remember to pack your better judgment. The same rules that apply on Texas highways apply here when you are driving on over 60 miles of sand. Help keep your beach clean, fun, and most importantly safe. See you down island.



A ranger patrolling by boat.



### Be a WebRanger!

Go online to [www.nps.gov/webrangers](http://www.nps.gov/webrangers) to play games online and to visit your country's national parks from your computer at home. You can even earn rewards by completing fun activities, like navigating through an underwater field of seagrass, patrolling the Arctic with your own dog sled team, sailing on a whaling voyage around the world, and even designing your own ranger station! Have fun and explore your world! At the park's visitor center, ask a park ranger how you can become a Junior Ranger.

## Sea Turtle Nesting During 2010

*Donna J. Shaver, Ph.D.*

*Chief, Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery*

The Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery at Padre Island National Seashore was very busy during the 2010 sea turtle nesting and egg incubation seasons. Although fewer Kemp's ridley nests were found in Texas this year than during the last two years, record numbers of loggerhead and green sea turtle nests were found. Satellite tracking of nesting Kemp's ridley turtles continued at the National Seashore, and staff aided with similar tracking work in Mexico. Even though oil from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill did not reach our shores, the potential impacts of the spill to Kemp's ridley turtles was of great concern and occupied a lot of personnel time.

### Kemp's Ridley Nests

For over three decades, the National Park Service has worked with several other agencies in the U.S. and Mexico to help save Kemp's ridley sea turtles from extinction. Kemp's ridley is the world's most endangered sea turtle species.

During 2010, staff and volunteers once again patrolled the North Padre Island beachfront to find and protect nests. Reports from the public also resulted in detection of a few nests. One hundred forty Kemp's ridley nests were found in Texas during 2010. It was the fourth consecutive year that more than 100 nests were documented in Texas since record keeping began in the early 1980s. Fewer nests were found during 2010 than in 2008 and 2009, which may have stemmed from the previous cold winter.

Of the 140 Kemp's ridley nests documented in Texas during 2010, 74 were located at Padre Island National Seashore. More Kemp's ridley nests are consistently found at the National Seashore than at any other location in the U.S., making it the most important Kemp's ridley nesting beach in the U.S. Eight of the 140 nests were found on North Padre Island, north of the National Seashore.

Eggs from 87 of the nests found at the National Seashore and northward on the Texas coast were brought to the National Seashore's incubation facility for protected care. Resulting hatchlings were released at various locations on the northern half of the National Seashore.



A Kemp's ridley sea turtle with a satellite tracking device.



Kemp's ridley hatchlings head off to Gulf waters.

Eggs from 21 nests found at the southern end of the National Seashore were transported to a large screen enclosure, called a corral, located at the patrol base camp near mile marker 40. This was the third year that we used this incubation technique at the National Seashore. As part of a three-year-study, we are testing this technique and establishing procedures on a small scale before it is necessary to incubate many more nests in corrals in the future, as nesting continues to increase. Hatchlings from nests that hatched early in the season were released near the corral.

Eggs from 32 nests located on South Padre Island and Boca Chica Beach were transferred to a corral on South Padre Island and the hatchlings that emerged early in the incubation season were released on South Padre Island.

When Hurricane Alex approached, eggs were evacuated from the corrals at the National Seashore and on South Padre Island and were transported to the National Seashore incubation facility. Hatchlings from those nests were released on the beach at the National Seashore.

Overall, nearly 12,000 Kemp's ridley hatchlings were released on the Texas coast this year. Most of these were released at the National Seashore. Twenty-three of the hatchling releases held at the northern end of the National Seashore were open to the public. Over 5,000 people attended these releases, with many traveling long distances just to be there. Viewing of the nesters and hatchlings is becoming an increasing source of ecotourism in the area.

#### Satellite Tracking of Nesting Kemp's Ridley Turtles

During 2010, satellite transmitters were deployed on six Kemp's ridley turtles that nested at Padre Island National Seashore. Movements of these turtles are being studied to address various scientific and conservation objectives. Among those, movements are being monitored in relation to the distribution of oil from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Many of the turtles that were monitored during the National Seashore's tracking efforts from 1997-2008 migrated through and foraged within waters offshore from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and the west coast of Florida, areas within the trajectory of the oil spill. Movements of these turtles can be tracked on [www.seaturtle.org](http://www.seaturtle.org) under the Padre Island National Seashore Kemp's Ridley Tracking – 2010. Through August 2010, one of the transmitters has ceased functioning, one of the turtles remains off Padre Island National Seashore, three of the turtles are offshore from Louisiana, and one is offshore from the west coast of Florida. During 2010, we also resumed collaborating with Dr. Patrick Burchfield, director of the Gladys Porter Zoo to track the movements of Kemp's ridley turtles outfitted with transmitters in the vicinity of Rancho Nuevo, Mexico, where most Kemp's ridley turtles nest. Previously, we helped track adult males, and we are now aiding with study of five adult females.

The movements of these adult females can be viewed on [www.seaturtle.org](http://www.seaturtle.org) under Rancho Nuevo, Mexico Kemp's Ridley Tracking – 2010. We will also overlap movements of these turtles with the extent of the oil spill.

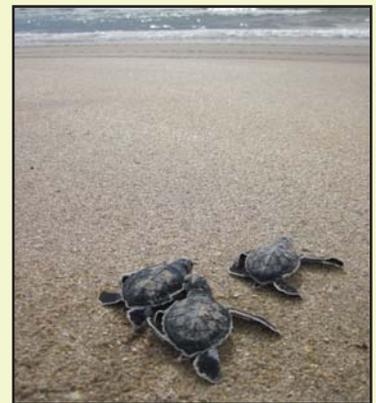
#### Green and Loggerhead Sea Turtle Nests

Through August 2010, seven loggerhead and seven green sea turtle nests were documented on the Texas coast. All were found at Padre Island National Seashore. These are the most loggerhead and green turtle nests recorded on the Texas coast in a year. The previous record for loggerheads was six nests and for green turtles was five nests set in 1998 and tied in 2008.

#### How to Attend a Hatchling Release

During 2011, public releases of Kemp's ridley hatchlings will resume in late-May or early-June 2011, depending upon when the first nests of the year are found. Projected hatchling release dates will be posted online when nests are brought to the National Seashore incubation facility for care. As those projected release dates near, call the recorded Hatchling Hotline at (361) 949-7163 for the latest information.

For more information on the Kemp's Ridley Recovery Program and to learn how you can watch a sea turtle hatchling release during the 2011 nesting season at Padre Island National Seashore, visit our website at [www.nps.gov/pais/](http://www.nps.gov/pais/).



Green sea turtle hatchlings being released to the Gulf of Mexico.

# Those Remarkable “Winter Texans”!

William Botts, Division of Interpretation and Education

When summer ends, days grow shorter. There’s a chill in the air at night that has been missing for many weeks. It’s time to head south for warmer weather. Texas is a popular place to spend the winter, but it can be a long, hard trip. Howling winds and occasional early season snow can make travel treacherous. Snow obscures the view and can turn otherwise easily avoidable objects into lethal hazards. Travel is always risky. Aside from accidents, it’s a challenge to find a decent place to rest. There are also those willing to prey upon careless travelers that drop their guard, even for a few minutes. Lastly, will decent food be available when it’s needed? Food is not always easy to find considering some “Winter Texans” cover 1500 miles to get here from northern Canada and pass through some remote areas.

It’s sad, but true: some traveling to South Texas will die on the way. These intrepid travelers must really like it down here to undertake such an arduous journey! State and federal governments encourage them to come here by preserving places for them to stay. Places such as Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Goose Island and Mustang Island state parks, and Padre Island National Seashore provide attractive accommodations. It’s safe to say that the entire quality of life in South Texas just wouldn’t be the same without these particular Winter Texans, better known to most as “migratory birds.”

Did you assume the article was referring to human Winter Texans, rather than avian ones? The preceding description is easily misconstrued because the same travel hazards such as accidents and the search for a safe place to rest and eat are things that threaten every traveler, human or otherwise. Most estimates say nearly half of all migratory birds die during their annual round trip journey. Luckily for humans, the likelihood of resolving travel challenges is higher than it is for migratory birds. How many human visitors from the north would undertake a visit to Texas if the odds of survival were so poor?

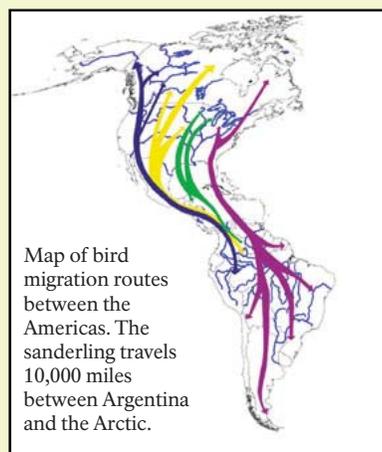
South Texas’ regional economy is thankful for the birds. Bird watching is big business. The amount of money generated for the regional economy is estimated to run into the millions of dollars. To meet some of the beautiful migrants during a visit to the National Seashore, you needn’t spend a lot of money. Simply take a walk along the beach at anytime other than the summer months, and you’ll likely encounter the remarkable sanderling.

It’s an easily spotted member of the Sandpiper family that illustrates the idiosyncrasies typical of migratory birds. Visitors that aren’t familiar with the 7- to 8-inch sanderling describe it as “that little bird that looks like a wind-up toy.” It’s entertaining to watch it run after a receding wave pecking the sand in a quest for food. As soon as a wave surges back in, it races ahead of the incoming wave as though afraid of getting its tiny feet wet, giving rise to the nickname “wave chaser.” Another amusing thing to observe is how territorial sanderlings are. If a turf dispute erupts, the birds lower their heads and hunch up their backs while ruffling their feathers, occasionally charging each other. Typically one bird backs down before an actual fight occurs, but they sometimes physically spar for a few moments until the loser gives up and flees.

Unlike other small sandpipers, sanderlings lack a hind toe. This improves the speed and strength of their gait and enables them to grab small worms, crabs and shrimps flushed from the sand by wave action. Their excellent eyesight is good not only for spotting small foods, but it’s also useful for keeping a lookout for other migrants such as Peregrine falcons that prey upon the sanderling and other shorebirds.



A sanderling scavenges for food to fatten up for its long migratory journey.



Map of bird migration routes between the Americas. The sanderling travels 10,000 miles between Argentina and the Arctic.

The sanderlings on Padre Island sometimes rest for a short while, grab some food to rebuild their body fat, then move on farther south. It’s easy to recognize when they are relaxed since they often stand on one leg. Other birds do the same thing, leading visitors to ask park staff why there are so many one-legged birds on the beach. Standing on one leg doesn’t seem very restful to people, but it’s common to observe among gulls and shorebirds. Once the birds have rested and eaten their fill, some travel on as far south as Argentina to their winter refuge. Imagine those tiny little sanderlings ultimately completing a 10,000 mile round trip from the Arctic to southern South America and back! Others sanderlings are content to overwinter in Texas thus reducing their round trip mileage to “only” 3,000 miles. Why some choose to migrate so far while others are content to stay in South Texas is a mystery. Considering their size and that they travel mostly at night at altitudes of up to 20,000 feet or more, it is remarkable any of them complete the journey.

Regardless of the distance traveled, the migrants travel for a reason. They have to follow the resources. In late May, as the Arctic thaws, the vast tundra offers limitless space that’s free of human disturbance. Sanderlings arrive for nesting just as large quantities of insects hatch. These insects, including thousands of mosquitoes, flies, and fly larvae provide a richer food source than nesting birds can find on their winter grounds.

It takes a lot to feed the busy adults and hungry chicks. By the time the young are about seventeen days old, they are able to fly and better fend for themselves. The chicks grow rapidly, and by August many adults are already headed south. Juvenile sanderlings typically leave a couple of weeks later. Not surprisingly, the first migration by the youngsters is an especially deadly undertaking.

Padre Island National Seashore is a great stopover for many migrating species, since birds from both the Central and Mississippi flyways pass through the park. A big reason shorebirds stop here is that this is one of the last largely undisturbed temperate climate sandy beaches that the birds will experience before heading south through the tropics. Tropical beaches are different in many ways that limit their usefulness to shorebirds. Some species will not stop again until they reach South American temperate beaches in the Southern Hemisphere. They need full stomachs and plenty of body fat before departing from Padre Island.

Simple steps that you take can help them obtain the resting and feeding time that they need. Avoid driving your vehicle into the flocks of birds along the beach. Be sure dogs are leashed at all times. While dogs seldom are fast enough to catch birds, their constant harassment prevents the birds from feeding and resting. The birds desperately need both to avoid becoming yet another casualty of migration.

The National Park Service welcomes winter Texan visitors regardless of whether they drove or literally flew to get here. In other words, there is ample room for people and birds. If you'd like to learn more about the many birds and are visiting during the peak winter migration period, check with the visitor center staff to find out how to join a FREE park-sponsored bird watching trip. Time spent viewing the sanderling and the many other species will deepen your appreciation for both the birds and the critical role the park plays in their survival.

## Volunteers in Parks are Very Important People

*Suzy Murray, Division of Interpretation and Education*

Volunteers in Parks (VIPs) are people from all walks of life who donate their time, energy, and talents to help Padre Island National Seashore fulfill its mission "to save and preserve, for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration, a portion of the diminishing seashore of the United States." There are VIPs who live in the local community and volunteer year-round, including individuals and groups who volunteer occasionally during special events, such as Adopt-a-Beach; Winter Texans who volunteer in exchange for a site to park their RV while they escape cold, northern winters; and the numerous turtle-patrol volunteers.



Volunteer Ron Kratzer showing visitors the touch table.

Volunteers who live in the surrounding communities provide a year-round pool of volunteers. "I have learned so much," said Ron Kratzer, formerly from the interior of Maine, who now lives on Padre Island and volunteers two days a week at the Malaquite Visitor Center. "It makes you feel good when people ask you questions and you are able to tell them something about Padre Island National Seashore that they didn't know."

Besides answering visitors' questions and helping with visitor programs, Ron and the other VIPs who volunteer at the visitor center help with sales in the bookstore.

Students from Del Mar College and Texas A&M University also become VIPs in order to get field experience to complement their classroom studies. There are business executives who walk the beach picking up marine debris and a retired civil servant who archives research materials. Numerous volunteers from the local community, including church groups and scout troops, volunteer to help remove marine debris brought to the beach by the currents in the Gulf of Mexico.

When the temperature begins to fall in the northern United States, "Winter Texans" begin arriving with their travel trailers and RVs. Many of them would like to donate some of their time in exchange for an RV site and spend the winter at Padre Island National Seashore. George and Mary Eggenberger from Michigan have been conducting birding tours from January through April for the past seven years. Their volunteer service gives them the opportunity to share their vast knowledge of birding, and other visitors have a chance to see birds that winter on Padre Island or birds migrating through Padre Island on the Central Flyway. Other volunteers offer their skills in the auto shop, at Park Headquarters, and as campground hosts at Malaquite Campground and Bird Island Basin Campground.

Each year, over one hundred mainly local residents volunteer to patrol the beaches on and around the National Seashore in search of nesting sea turtles. After training in March, these "turtle patrollers" assist biological science technicians looking for nesting sea turtles. Mark Muellerweiss, a former Senior Assistant City Attorney for the City of Houston, said, "It is a rare opportunity to work with an endangered species and feel like you are helping future generations of the species." Mark fell in love with Padre Island in 1973, so when he retired, he wanted to make positive use of his time by volunteering at Padre Island National Seashore. He has helped with turtle patrols, hatchling releases, dispatch, transporting turtle eggs from Galveston, and even drove to South Padre Island to bring back dead sea turtles for necropsy. "Every job is important," said Mark.



Birding experts George and Mary Eggenberger have volunteered at Padre Island National Seashore for nearly a decade.

Would you like to join the VIPs at Padre Island National Seashore? If you are interested in joining the Turtle Patrol team, send an e-mail to [pais\\_seaturtlevolunteer@nps.gov](mailto:pais_seaturtlevolunteer@nps.gov) by the end of February for the required training in March. All other volunteers should contact Suzy Evans, Volunteer Coordinator, at [suzy\\_evans@nps.gov](mailto:suzy_evans@nps.gov) if you have questions or to obtain an application. Every effort is made to match the needs of the various park divisions with the interests and skills of the volunteer.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## I would like to go camping. What sort of information do I need to know?

All campgrounds are open year-round. No reservations are accepted, and all camping is first-come, first-served. Campers must have a camping permit, which is available from the kiosks at the entrance to each campground or from a campground host at Malaquite Campground and Bird Island Basin.



Please note that a 14-day camping limit is in effect at all camping areas. At the end of 14 days, campers must vacate their site and leave the park for a minimum of 48 hours before returning to camp. The total number of days spent camping in the park should not exceed 56 calendar days per year in any combination of visits or consecutive nights. Camping is permitted only in the five camping areas available for public use.



## Can I build a campfire on the beach?

Usually, visitors can build a campfire on the beach unless a fire ban has been initiated by local authorities. At the campgrounds, visitors may only use the grills provided at the campsites and are not allowed to dig their own fire pit. However, on the beach in front of Malaquite Campground and on North Beach and South Beach, people are allowed to dig a small fire pit in the beach sand. No bonfires are allowed in the park. Ground fires are also not allowed at Malaquite Beach, but visitors are welcome to bring their grills from home for use on the ground, not picnic tables. Grills are also not allowed at Malaquite Pavilion. Instead, visitors may set up their grills at the Malaquite Picnic Shelter on the ground, not picnic tables.



## Where can I dump my gray water and sewage?

There are no public RV hook-ups anywhere in the park, but an RV dump station and a water filling station are available for all campers staying in the park. Gray water and sewage must be disposed of only at the dump station at Malaquite Campground. This facility is available to all visitors at Padre Island National Seashore. Here, there is also a water fill-up station for visitor use.

## There aren't any garbage receptacles on the beach, so where I can put my trash?

Please practice leaving no trace by packing your trash out with you when you leave. There are large dumpsters and recycling receptacles in the parking lot of the Malaquite Visitor Center. There are also smaller trash and recycling receptacles on the deck at Malaquite Pavilion. The visitor center also gives out free trash bags for your convenience. Please help the park by picking up trash you see on the beach.



## I love hermit crabs and sand dollars! Can I take them home with me?

The National Seashore protects all living things because each creature plays an important part in its natural habitat. Also, the number of many shellfish species is declining due to a number of human impacts. Taking a wild creature from its home is unethical, and it is against the law at the National Seashore.

While you are not allowed to take living creatures, you are allowed to collect up to five gallons of empty shells, sea beans, and other beach treasures each day. Please keep living creatures in their homes so that, in the future, people will be able to visit Padre Island National Seashore and see the same, or improved, park that you do today.



## Where can I bring my pet and are there any other pet-related rules I should know before visiting the National Seashore?

You can bring your pet to most parts of the park. Because many visitors often spend their day at the visitor center and on Malaquite Beach, dogs are not permitted only in these places for safety purposes. Pets are allowed on North and South Beach, where driving is also allowed, along with Malaquite Campground and Bird Island Basin. Ask a ranger about how you and your pet can access the section of the beach that is closed to vehicles. Pets must be on a leash at all times in the park to keep wildlife and your pet safe. To keep the National Seashore looking clean and to show courtesy to other visitors, please clean up after your animals.

### Is there a rip tide in the Gulf of Mexico?

Yes. Occasionally strong currents and sudden drop-offs in the surf can be dangerous for swimmers and waders alike. If caught in a rip tide that pulls you away from the beach, do not panic. Swim parallel to the beach until you are free from the flow, then swim to shore. Do not attempt to swim to shore against the flow. Use caution when swimming and never swim alone.



### Are there any dangerous animals at Padre Island National Seashore?

Watch out for animals like Portuguese man-of-war, stingrays, and rattlesnakes. The Portuguese man-of-war can cause a painful sting, which is usually accompanied by redness and some swelling of the affected skin area. Stingrays (bottom-dwellers), if stepped on or agitated, can inflict a puncture wound that can be extremely painful. Rattlesnakes live in the dunes, grasslands, and mudflats. If injured by wildlife, visitors can seek help and treatment at the visitor center or by a park ranger.



### I was walking on the beach and found a strange container with some liquid in it. Should I pick it up and throw it away?

No. Hazardous materials periodically wash ashore and range from 55-gallon barrels containing unknown substances to used medical products. If you come upon hazardous materials, note the location and alert a park ranger without touching the object(s).



### When I go to the beach, I love feeding the gulls. Is that allowed in the park?

While feeding the wildlife can be fun and allows us to be closer to animals, it is not allowed at the National Seashore. Feeding wildlife is prohibited by NPS policy, and it causes wildlife to feel safe and okay approaching people. When this happens, wildlife begins to depend on people for food, and close encounters can cause animals to harm people, be harmed by people, or to harm other wildlife. Please keep yourself, other visitors, and animals safe and wild by not feeding wild creatures in their natural habitat.



### Can I use a metal detector at the National Seashore?

No. Possession or use of metal detectors is prohibited in the park. Items such as seashells and driftwood, washed in by the tide, may be collected as long as the items are not used for commercial purposes. All other collecting is prohibited in order to preserve and protect cultural resources.



### Is hunting allowed within the boundaries at Padre Island National Seashore?

Hunting is not permitted in the park, except for the taking of waterfowl by boat in the Laguna Madre in accordance with applicable state and federal regulations. Transporting lawfully taken wildlife, including exotic species, through the park is prohibited, except for waterfowl and fish.

### Can I bring my firearm to the National Seashore?

Yes. As of February 22, 2010, a new federal law allows people who can legally possess firearms under federal, Texas, and local laws to possess firearms in Padre Island National Seashore.

It is the visitor's responsibility to understand and comply with all applicable state, local, and federal firearms laws. Federal law prohibits firearms in certain facilities in this park; those places are posted with signs at public entrances. If you have questions, please visit the park website at [www.nps.gov/pais](http://www.nps.gov/pais).



### Can I ride my dune buggy in the National Seashore?

Beaches are Texas public highways. Only street legal and licensed vehicles may be driven in the park. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs), UTVs, go-carts, golf carts, and dune buggies are prohibited. Driving in dunes, grasslands, or mudflats is prohibited. Pedestrians have the right-of-way at all times and do not always watch for approaching vehicles. Drive with caution and strictly observe posted speed limits. On the beach, northbound traffic has the right of way.



Western National Parks Association (WNPA) is a nonprofit cooperating association of the National Park Service, founded to support the interpretive activities of the National Park Service. One of WNPA's founding goals was to create and publish park-related information unavailable elsewhere. Currently WNPA has more than 175 books in print with many new publications introduced yearly. Western National Parks Association supports parks by producing more than a half million pieces of free literature annually, including park magazines such as this, trail guides, newspapers, schedules, and brochures. Since its inception over 70 years ago, it has contributed more than \$55 million to national parks, generated through store sales to park visitors and the support of our members. For more information or to shop online, please visit our website at [www.wnpa.org](http://www.wnpa.org).



### Store's Summer Hours

Monday to Friday  
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Weekends  
9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

### Store's Winter Hours

Daily  
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Located at the Malaquite Pavilion, the Padre Island Park Company is a general concessions store with supplies that you may have forgotten or need along with gifts and souvenirs.



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Padre Island National Seashore



**Mailing Address:**  
P.O. Box 181300  
Corpus Christi, TX 78480

**Physical Address:**  
20420 Park Road 22  
Corpus Christi, TX 78418

**Park Information:**  
(361) 949-8068

**Official Park Website:**  
[www.nps.gov/pais](http://www.nps.gov/pais)

**The Gulf Breeze Editor:**  
Chelsea Aldrich

**For emergencies, dial 9-1-1.**

Increasingly, partnerships are an essential and effective means for the National Park Service to fulfill parts of our mission and foster a shared sense of stewardship that is so crucial for our future. Padre Island National Seashore would like to thank its partners for the continued services they have offered to the park's visitors throughout the years.