

# The Gulf Breeze

Padre Island National Seashore  
News and Information, 2015

National Park Service  
Department of the Interior



# Gulf Breeze

## 2015 Edition

An Annual Magazine from  
**Padre Island National Seashore**  
**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**



# Welcome

## to Padre Island National Seashore!



I sincerely hope you enjoy your visit to the longest remaining stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world. Over half a million visitors come here each year to enjoy camping, swimming, fishing, boating, and other recreational activities. One of the top windsurfing destinations in North America is located here in the park.

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### Padre Island National Seashore

**Mailing Address:** P.O. Box 181300  
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Corpus Christi, TX 78418

**Park Information:** (361)949-8069

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

**Weather & Beach Conditions:** (361)949-8175

**Sea Turtle Hatchling Hotline:** (361)949-7163

**Park Facebook Page:** [facebook.com/nps.pais](https://www.facebook.com/nps.pais)

**Sea Turtle Program Facebook Page:**  
[facebook.com/nps.pais.seaturtles](https://www.facebook.com/nps.pais.seaturtles)

### Partners and Concessions

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 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.

**Western National Parks Association Nature Store**, located inside Malaquite Visitor Center, is a nonprofit partner of the park that provides support for park programs using proceeds from sales of educational books, field guides, games, and other items. For more information, visit their website at [wnpa.org](http://wnpa.org) or call (361)949-8069.

**Island Seashore Gift Shop**, located at Malaquite Pavilion, is a general concessions store. They offer snacks, ice, souvenirs, beach equipment rentals, toys, and apparel, as well as bait and tackle. For more information, call (361)949-9368.

**Worldwinds Windsurfing, Inc.**, located at Bird Island Basin's windsurfing area, offers lessons and rental equipment for windsurfing and kayaking. For more information, visit their website at [worldwinds.net](http://worldwinds.net) or call (361)949-7472.

**On the Cover:** A calico crab at Big Shell Beach, Padre Island National Seashore. Photo by Kyle Christensen, NPS.

The Seashore is an ever changing landscape of beaches, dunes, grasslands and tidal flats where visitors can discover an amazing natural world sandwiched between the Gulf of Mexico and the Laguna Madre. Tens of thousands of migratory birds as well as many species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and fish are found in the park. The most endangered sea turtle in the world, the Kemp's ridley, nests here more often than at any other location in the country. Visitors can also explore human stories of Spanish treasure, shipwrecks and survivors, open range cattle ranching, and more. These rich natural and cultural stories help make Padre Island National Seashore a national treasure.

This national park was created to preserve the seashore, unimpaired, for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration. I hope you will join and support our dedicated park staff and volunteers in this effort. Please be safe and courteous while boating, camping, or otherwise enjoying the park. Watch for children and animals while driving on the beach. Look for and report nesting and stranded sea turtles. And pick up a free trash bag from the entrance station or visitor center to help keep our beaches beautiful. We 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.

In 2016 the National Park Service will celebrate 100 years of connecting people to America's Best Idea—our National Parks. As we approach our Centennial year, we want to introduce or reintroduce the National Park Service to all Americans. I encourage you to find your park—that special National Park site that you connect with and want to visit over and over again. And I hope you will find it here, at Padre Island National Seashore.

Mark Spier, Superintendent

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# Things to Do



Malaquite Beach. NPS photo.

## Swimming & Sunbathing

The seashore has about 65 miles of beachfront where you can swim, sunbathe, or just relax on the beach. Malaquite Beach and Pavilion offer a family-friendly area closed to vehicles, fishing, and pets. No lifeguards are present. Malaquite Pavilion has cold-water rinse showers and restrooms. Pet-friendly beach access trails, cold-water rinse showers, and restrooms are located in the Malaquite Pavilion parking area. There are also chemical toilets at the entrance to South Beach.

or Access passes get 50% off camping fees. Malaquite Pavilion has cold-water rinse showers, restrooms, trash bins, and recycling. Malaquite Pavilion parking area has pet-friendly cold-water rinse showers, restrooms, and dumpsters. There are also chemical toilets and dumpsters at the entrance to South Beach.

## Fishing

Surf fishing is allowed along almost 65 miles of park shoreline free with your entrance pass. Anglers can also enjoy fishing by boat or wade fishing at Bird Island Basin for a fee of \$5.00/day or with a \$10.00 annual pass (in addition to the park entrance fee). Anglers must meet Texas fishing license requirements and follow state regulations.



Surf fishing. NPS photo.



Malaquite Campground. NPS photo.

## Camping

Whether you want to camp along the beach or the bay, near restrooms or in a remote area, we have camping opportunities for tents and RVs. Leashed pets are allowed in all camping areas.

Malaquite Campground, tucked in the dunes along the Gulf, is \$8.00/night (in addition to the park entrance fee). It has cold-water showers, flush toilets, picnic tables, shade structures, a gray/black water dump station, a potable water filling station, and paved parking. Bird Island Basin, located along the Laguna Madre Bay, is \$5.00/day or \$10.00 for an annual pass (in addition to the park entrance fee). It has a vault toilet and gravel parking. Primitive beach camping at your own risk along more than 60 miles of the park's shoreline and at Yarrowborough Pass is free with your entrance pass.

There are no RV hook-ups in the park. All camping is first-come, first-served (no reservations). Permits are required for all camping. Those with Interagency Senior

## Windsurfing & Kayaking

Bird Island Basin is one of the top windsurfing areas in the nation. Conditions in the Laguna Madre are great for both windsurfing and kayaking. You can bring your own equipment or rent equipment and even take lessons at Worldwinds Windsurfing concessionaire (361-949-7472). A Bird Island Basin day use fee of \$5.00/day, or a \$10.00 annual pass, is required (in addition to the park entrance fee).



Photo courtesy of Worldwinds Windsurfing, Inc.

You can also windsurf or kayak in the Gulf of Mexico along the entire shoreline of the park free with your park entrance pass.

# More Things to Do



Bird Island Basin. NPS photo.

## Boating

Bird Island Basin boat ramp is a popular spot for boaters to access the Laguna Madre. It provides parking spaces for 106 vehicles with trailers, 4 vehicles without trailers, and 4 vehicles with disabled parking permits. A day use fee of \$5.00/day, or a \$10.00 annual pass, is required (in addition to the park entrance fee).

## Picnicking

You can picnic anywhere on the beach. Picnic tables and shade structures are provided at Malaquite Pavilion, on Malaquite Beach, and at the Picnic Shelter located at the northern end of the Malaquite parking area.

## Birdwatching

Padre Island provides habitat for over 380 bird species and a critical rest stop for tens of thousands of birds during spring and fall migration. Birders come from all over the world to see the incredible variety and number of birds in the park. Join a free guided bird tour, borrow a pair of binoculars from the visitor center free of charge, and discover the fun of birding.

## Beach Driving

Driving on the beach is allowed along more than 60 miles of park shoreline. Venture a short distance off the pavement, 20 miles down to Big Shell, or all the way to Mansfield Channel. Be aware that driving is at your own risk. Most areas require a 4-wheel drive vehicle. All vehicles must meet state highway standards. No off-road vehicles (e.g. ATVs) are allowed. To prevent damage to vegetation, driving is limited to the beach-front. See page 11 for tips on driving down island.

## Hiking & Walking

Enjoy a relaxing stroll on the beach anywhere along the park's shoreline. Those with mobility challenges can get

on the sand with a beach wheelchair, available free for loan at Malaquite Visitor Center. Grasslands Nature Trail offers a paved, accessible view of rare coastal prairie habitat. You can also walk to Novillo Line Camp and see where cowboys once corralled cattle.

## Beachcombing

Beachcombing for shells, sea beans, and other items is a fun way to enjoy the park's shoreline. If you have a 4-wheel drive vehicle, Little Shell and Big Shell beaches can be especially productive areas for this activity.



Beachcombing. NPS photo.

## Attending a Ranger Program

Park Rangers offer a variety of programs free of charge. Programs are subject to change. Call the Visitor Center at (361)949-8069 for more information.

### Beach Walk

Offered year-round. See what you discover on this easy 45-60 minute stroll.



### Deck Talk

Offered year-round. See and touch some of the fascinating things found in the park in this 30-45 minute program.



### Junior Ranger

Offered year-round. Earn your own Junior Ranger badge and do some fun activities at your own pace.



### Birding Tour

Offered fall, winter, and spring. View a variety of birds during this 2-3 hour guided driving tour. We have binoculars and field guides for loan. Space is limited.



### Birding Skills

Offered fall, winter, and spring. Learn the basics of birding, binoculars, and field guides during this 45 minute program.



### Evening Program

Offered winter. Enjoy a starlit program on various topics at the campground amphitheater.



### Star Party

Offered winter. View and learn about the stars during this 45-60 minute program.



### Hidden Treasures

Offered spring and summer. Catch and release some amazing creatures that live in the surf.



### Sand Sculpting

Offered summer. Learn to build a beautiful sand castle.



### Hatchling Release

Offered summer. Sea turtle nests found in spring and summer are moved and protected until they hatch. When conditions allow, the public is invited to watch the newly hatched turtles be released into the wild. To find out more, call (361)949-7163.



Birdwatching. NPS photo.



Beach driving. NPS photo.

# King of the Hill



Tiger shark. Photo by Albert Kok.

## or End of the Line?

**Shark.** That one word is all most people have to hear to set off a myriad of emotions, most of them fearful. What images come to mind when you think of sharks? Are you similar to most people and worry sharks are out to get you when you enter the sea? Or are you part of the minority that recognizes what an amazing and misunderstood creature they really are?

The movie “Jaws” is familiar to all but the youngest children in many countries around the world. It instilled an entire generation with irrational fears about an apex predator that has far more to fear from humans than the other way around. Here are a few statistics about sharks that are worth pondering:

1) For each human fatality by a shark, over 30 million sharks are killed by people.

2) More people are killed annually by vending machines than by sharks! How could this be? When no soda comes out, the purchaser occasionally attacks the machine in frustration, resulting in it toppling onto and crushing the tormentor. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, your chance of dying by drink machine “attack”

is almost 4 times as great as from a shark attack. Final score: vending machines 2.18 people per year, sharks 0.06 people per year!

3) Another shocking “score”—man’s best friend, the dog, averages 31 fatal human attacks per year in the U.S. Sharks average one fatal human attack approximately every other year somewhere around our expansive coastline. By the way, if you are wondering about the risk in Texas—there have been two fatal attacks on the Texas coast in the entire last CENTURY! Our beaches are some of the safest in the world.

4) Have you or family members ever dug holes in the beach to play in? Dr. Barry Maron, a cardiologist and former life guard, published studies warning of the danger of those holes collapsing. Yet again, a statistic that helps put shark risk in perspective: during a recent 15 year period, there were 16 fatalities worldwide from sand hole collapses versus 12 fatalities from shark attacks! Who would imagine digging holes and sitting in them kills more beach goers than sharks!



Sharks at a Japanese processing plant. Photo released to media.

The reality is that sharks are truly unlike any other creature and have an array of adaptations that could easily be turned upon humans. Fortunately, sharks have never really developed a taste for our flesh. With today’s technology it is not people, but sharks that are at risk. “Finning” sharks for making shark fin soup kills millions of sharks per year, leaving the carcasses as waste. The increasing popularity of the soup in Asia has caused the population of several species to drop by over 90% since the 1970s. You can do your part to help out our Gulf Coast sharks by releasing any sharks you catch while fishing.

While these statistics may do little to alleviate what appears to be our innate fear of being devoured by another creature (take your pick—sharks, crocodiles, piranhas, pythons, bears, etc.), if you are able to apply a bit of logic to the issue it may help alleviate unnecessary worry that sometimes prevents visitors from enjoying the ocean.

# Which Beach Will We Leave Behind?



When you think of a beach what do you see? Crisp, blue waters and beautiful white sand speckled with various shells awaiting your discovery? A quiet place for soaking in the warm sunshine as you listen to the sounds of shorebirds and the lulling wash of the surf? Or maybe you imagine a family picnic with kids running and playing in the water. Whichever scene you imagine, trash is probably not part of the picture.

Unfortunately, trash is a common find at Padre Island National Seashore, in large part because of its location. As currents enter and flow through the Gulf of Mexico, they carry sand, shells, trash, and other debris items that come from the Mississippi, Cancun, and other areas. Padre Island sits at a point where currents collide, like two trains crashing head-on. Much of the debris they carry gets ejected and washes up on Padre Island.

Sargassum seaweed, shells, sea beans, and other natural debris are beneficial to the health of the island. But not all debris is natural. Plastic bottles, food containers, boards, and other artificial items are also carried by currents and brought to the island. Some float here from thousands of miles away after entering smaller water sources that flow into the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea, or Atlantic Ocean. These artificial items can take several hundred years to break down.

Roadside trash, improperly maintained landfills, and illegal dumping by ships all contribute to marine debris found in Gulf of Mexico waters. Some trash items are also left on Padre Island's beaches by visitors, adding to the problem.

Trash in the water and on the beach can ruin an otherwise enjoyable visit. But trash is not only unsightly, it is also harmful. If you've ever found a piece of plastic on the beach with one or more diamond-shaped holes in



Padre Island. NPS photo.s

it, you found evidence of such harmful effects. Those holes are from sea turtle bites! Sea turtles can mistake plastic floating in the water for jellyfish—one of their favorite foods. Dolphins and other marine life can also confuse trash with food. Ingesting plastic can make marine animals sick and may eventually result in death. Rope and fishing line can entangle and harm wildlife. Plastic six-pack rings, which last for hundreds of years, can entangle animals and lead to deformities as those animals continue to grow.



Turtle-bitten debris. NPS photo.

The situation may seem daunting, but simple changes in everyday activities can make a big difference in the health of our oceans. Use canvas bags when shopping and reusable water bottles instead of disposable plastic. Cut up six-pack rings and recycle. You can also join in one of our beach cleanups. Millions of pounds of trash have been removed from the beach by volunteers, staff, and visitors like you. Each action is a vote for the kind of world you want, and the kind of world you want to leave behind. With your help we can restore our waters and maintain a safe and healthy ecosystem. Help make that beautiful beach you imagined a reality!

Want another way to help? Go to [marinedebris.engr.uga.edu](http://marinedebris.engr.uga.edu) and report marine debris from your phone!

- *Claire Breton, Division of Interpretation and Education*

# Jewels of the Sky

The whirring of wings and flurry of aerial acrobatics signal the return of two iconic insects to our skies.

**F**rom their incredible life cycle to their jewel-like colors, dragonflies and damselflies are awe-inspiring and fun to watch. But these flying predators look very different when they begin life as dragonfly nymphs and damselfly naiads. They are small and aquatic, living in marshes, ponds, and other fresh water. They feed on smaller insect larvae, worms, and tiny crustaceans like fairy shrimp. This aquatic phase of their life cycle can last anywhere from eleven months to several years, depending on the species.

Compared to its younger life, the adult life of a dragonfly or damselfly is short, averaging

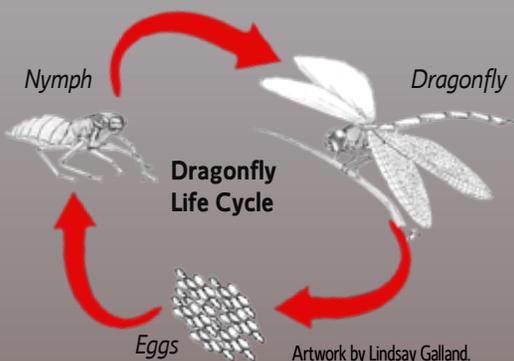
only three months. During this time, it has only two things in mind: mating and food – lots and lots of food. A dragonfly can eat hundreds of mosquitos each day. They hunt by hovering over plants and swooping down to pick off prey (gleaning) or by continually moving and searching, feeding, even eating while flying (hawking). Despite their huge appetite and formidable jaws, they do not bite humans and only pose a threat to other insects.

With stunning colors, fascinating behavior, and wonderfully descriptive names like hyacinth glider and red saddlebags, dragonflies and damselflies are just as watchable as butterflies or birds. Many species are easy to identify at a distance with binoculars. And

the generally warm, sunny climate of Padre Island means you can find dragonflies and damselflies here year-round, although the best time to observe them is in early fall on sunny days.

Migrating dragonflies often move ahead of cold fronts, so check weather patterns. If your visit coincides with a “flight-season,” a period of their life cycle when large numbers of nymphs transform into dragonflies and become more visible, you could witness hundreds or perhaps thousands of these delicate creatures darting above grasslands and marshes, hunting mid-flight. Their glimmering aerial displays are one of nature’s most enchanting dances.

- Lindsay Galland, Division of Interpretation and Education

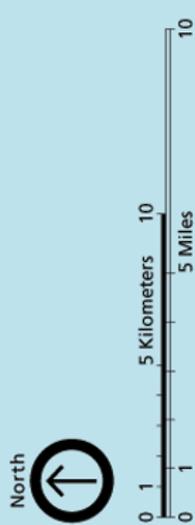


A red saddlebags dragonfly on Padre Island. NPS photo.

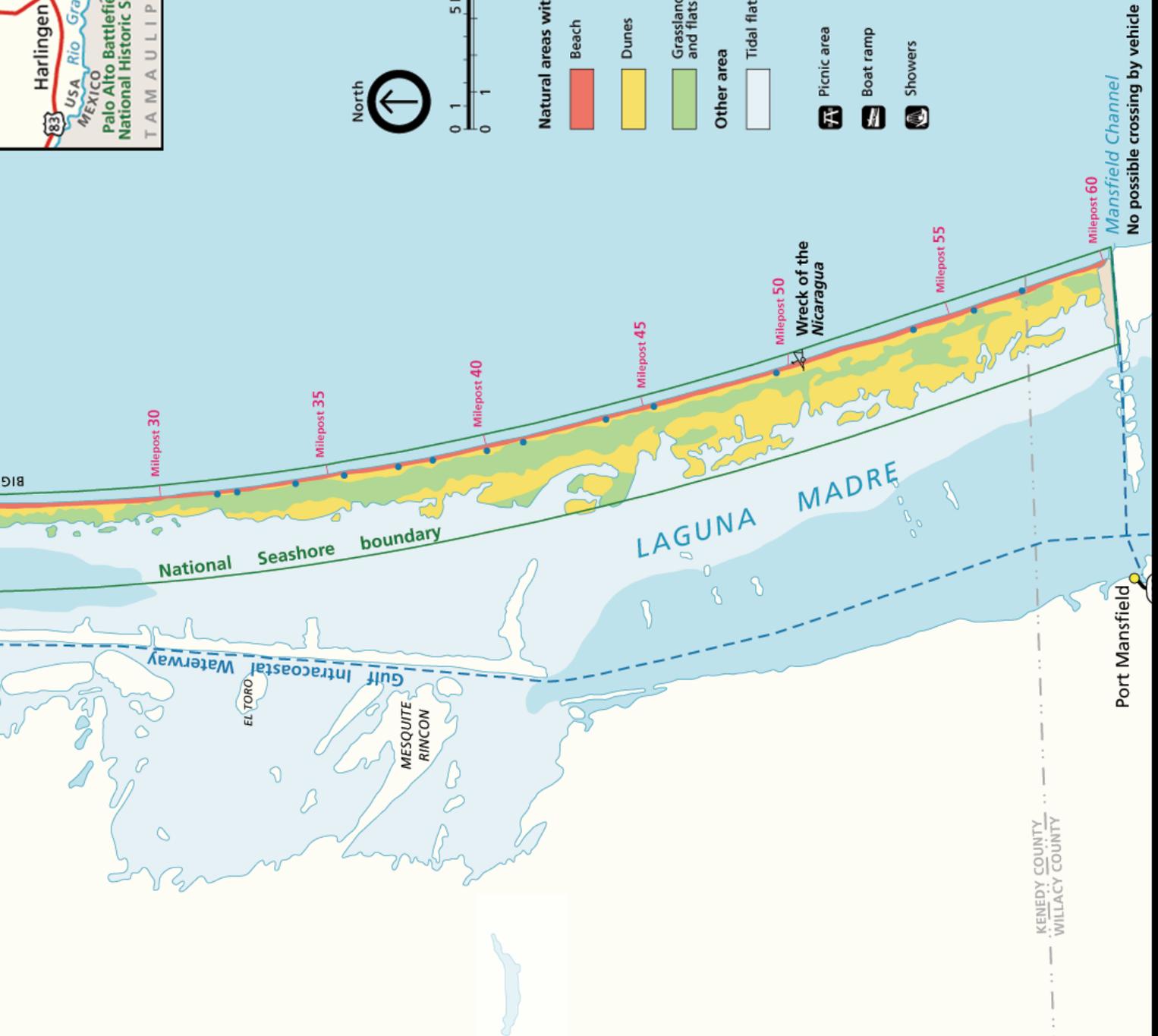
# Padre Island National Seashore



# National Seashore



- Natural areas within Padre Island National Seashore**
- Beach
  - Dunes
  - Grasslands and flats
  - Other area
  - Tidal flat
  - Spoil area
  - Washover channel
- 
- Picnic area
  - Boat ramp
  - Showers
  - Wind surfing
  - Campground
  - Primitive campsite



**No possible crossing by vehicle**

# An Island Ranching Empire



Novillo Line Camp with inset of Dunn Ranch vaqueros on horseback. Photos from NPS archives.

Patrick Dunn, who referred to himself as the Duke of Padre Island, ran a cattle ranch on Padre Island from 1879 to 1926. His ranch was the last unfenced open range operation in the lower 48 States. According to Dunn, because the island is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico to the east and the Laguna Madre to the west, it made an ideal location for a cattle ranch as no fences were needed to keep the herds from straying.

Dunn built four line camps, which he called “stations”, for his island ranching operation. In 1928, he described what we call line camps today in court testimony: “I maintained four stations, you might call them, where I had a little cabin for myself and a place for the cook and hands to cook and sleep in and pens and dipping vats, and small pens to put the horses in, and cattle sometimes. Those were just small pastures where we could handle the cattle conveniently.”

Novillo Line Camp was one of those four stations. This historic site in the park preserves the last standing buildings from the line camps that once dominated the island. The site offers visitors a way to literally touch history.

With all of the cattle and horses came a need for a reliable source of water. Fortunately for Dunn, the water table on Padre Island is so high that digging just a small hole a few feet deep can produce water. So Dunn had his men dig trenches into the sand and line them with wooden troughs to hold the water that would slowly seep in. Dunn and his men called these water sources cow wells and tanks. They were located at the line

camps and at regular intervals down the island. According to Dunn there were 75 cow wells and tanks until the storm of 1916 destroyed them. Since these wells were so low to the ground the cattle had to kneel to drink. Over the years people would joke that Dunn was so religious that he even made his cattle get on their knees to pray.



Patrick Dunn. Photo from NPS archives.

**“If the Lord would give me back the island now, wash out a channel in the Corpus Christi Pass 30 feet deep, and put devilfish and other monsters in it to keep out the tourists, I’d be satisfied.”**

**—Patrick Dunn, 1927**

Eventually, Dunn owned most of the northern half of Padre Island. He looked upon most tourists as trespassers, and he went to great efforts to keep people seeking recreation, fishing, or game hunting opportunities away. He ran a regular advertisement in the Corpus Christi paper prohibiting hunting and fishing on the island. He built fences from the dunes to the surf to prevent fishermen and beachcombers from moving up and down the beach. In later years Dunn even hired an agent who charged for written permission to access the island.

Since trees are scarce on Padre Island, Dunn used whatever type of wood washed ashore to construct his home, shacks, pens, and fences, and to fuel cooking

fires. But on the island, wood is constantly attacked by termites, carpenter ants and wood bees and rarely lasts more than 10 years. Keeping the line camp structures in good shape required constant effort.

Today is no different. The preservation of the Novillo Line Camp historic structures—the bunkhouse, kitchen, and corrals—requires regular attention and maintenance.

To preserve and restore these structures in a way that is as historically accurate as possible, staff from the park's Division of Science and Resources Management use driftwood gathered from the beach when they can, just as Dunn's ranch hands did. Where an unusual and uniform size of lumber is required to match the original construction of the site, such as on the walls of the bunkhouse, they use mill spec lumber. They also use the same tools that were typically used for rough construction during Dunn's lifetime. The process can be very difficult and delicate, but it preserves the site in as original a state as possible.



Park staff stabilize the bunkhouse at Novillo NPS photo.

Novillo Line Camp stands as a tangible remnant of the rich cultural legacy of the island, a monument in wood and metal. It can be seen from the main park road, across from the road to Bird Island Basin. Although it is not an officially designated trail, visitors can walk back to the camp. So stop by on your next visit, and take a trip back in time.

- Charles Sassine, Division of Science and Resources Management

## Top 10 Tips for Driving Down Island

Driving down island to Big Shell or other remote areas can be a great adventure, but it also entails risks and hazards that should not be taken lightly. Experience and the right preparations can help you avoid getting stuck, stranded, or trapped in a potentially dangerous situation. Here are 10 tips to help ensure your beach adventure is fun and safe.

1. **Plan ahead.** Call our Beach Hotline (361-949-8175) for driving conditions, alerts, and more. Starting down 1-2 hours before low tide may offer the best conditions.
2. **Bring supplies.** Fill up your gas tank. Bring food, water, first aid supplies, and equipment to dig yourself out if stuck.
3. **Use a 4-wheel drive vehicle.** Driving on the beach is at your own risk. Even 4-wheel drive vehicles can get stuck, and a wrecker can cost several thousand dollars.
4. **Stay alert.** Hazards can form or wash in overnight. Sinkholes or boards with nails can be hidden by seaweed. If you hit a soft spot, keep moving. If you see water pooling in your tracks, move to drier ground.
5. **Watch for children and animals.** Slow down and look for children as you approach tents or parked vehicles. Watch for and avoid deer and other animals, especially at night and when visibility is reduced.
6. **Know what to do.** Don't touch jellyfish or Portugese man-of-war—they sting even if dead. If stung, apply meat



Trouble down island. NPS photo.

tenderizer and vinegar and seek medical attention if needed. To avoid stepping on a stingray, shuffle your feet along the bottom when in the water. To avoid rattlesnakes, stay out of the dunes.

7. **Keep it legal.** All vehicle requirements and traffic laws apply. So fasten your seatbelt, follow speed limits, and leave your ATV at home. North-bound vehicles have the right of way. Don't block the road. Driving in dunes, grasslands, or mud flats is prohibited.
8. **Expect little to no cell phone service.** Climb a dune for better reception. In an emergency, call 911.
9. **Help keep your beaches beautiful.** Trash washes in from other areas or is left behind by visitors. You can help by properly disposing of your trash and even picking up trash found on the beach. Pick up a free trash bag at the visitor center.
10. **Look for and report nesting and stranded turtles.** Do not disturb nesting sea turtles, just mark the nest location and report it to a ranger or call (361)949-8173 ext. 226 as soon as possible.

Green sea turtle. Photo by Caroline S. Rogers, USGS.



Kemp's ridley sea turtle. NPS photo.



## Different Turtles, Different Needs

**Padre Island National Seashore is special to many people. But this unique coastal habitat is also special to two very different sea turtles, for very different reasons.**

Five sea turtle species occur in Texas. All are classified as threatened or endangered and receive protection in the U.S. But two of these species—the threatened green turtle and the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle—are more prevalent and vulnerable at Padre Island National Seashore and require more conservation and research efforts. These two species vary considerably in size, appearance, habitat, food habits, seasonality, and life stages in Texas. Each also has a different outlook for population recovery.

### Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle

At 80-100 pounds with a shell about two feet long, the Kemp's ridley is the smallest sea turtle in the world. Their shell is very round compared to other sea turtles. Adults travel and forage in Gulf of Mexico nearshore waters from Florida to the Yucatan Peninsula, eating mostly crabs.

Like all sea turtles, Kemp's ridleys must come onto land to lay their eggs. But unlike other sea turtles, Kemp's ridleys nest mostly during the day and in group nesting events instead of at night and individually. They nest primarily in Texas and Mexico. Padre Island National Seashore protects vital nesting habitat for the Kemp's ridley. In fact, more than half of all Kemp's ridley nests found in the U.S. each year are located here in the park.

Kemp's ridley is the most endangered sea turtle in

the world. For more than three decades, the National Park Service has worked with other agencies in the U.S. and Mexico to help save this species from extinction. To increase the local population and aid with species recovery, patrols are conducted from April through mid-July to locate and protect nesting females and nests on Gulf of Mexico beaches in Texas. Eggs from most nests are relocated either to the Padre Island National Seashore incubation facility or to corrals—large, screened enclosures on the beach—for protected care.

In 2014, more than 10,000 Kemp's ridley hatchlings were released from nests found in Texas. Most were released at Padre Island National Seashore. To increase awareness and support for Kemp's ridley conservation, the public was invited to watch 24 of these hatchling releases at the park. More than 11,000 people attended! Many traveled long distances and planned their vacation around the opportunity to watch a release.

From the 1990s through 2009, Kemp's ridley nesting increased rapidly in Texas and Mexico. But since that time, nesting has leveled and most recently decreased. During 2014, 119 Kemp's ridley nests were found in Texas, including 72 at Padre Island National Seashore, which is an eight year low. The primary Kemp's ridley nesting beaches in Mexico show similar trends, indicating a decline in nesting by the entire population. This is an alarming devel-

opment as these turtles already face numerous challenges such as incidental capture by fishing activities, predation, poaching, loss of habitat, and marine debris. The decrease in the number of nests documented may indicate that this species is no longer on the path to recovery, and underscores the importance of our continued conservation and research efforts.

Kemp's ridley sea turtle hatchling. NPS photo.



**Public hatchling releases are held between late May and late August each year at the National Seashore. No fee is charged to attend. For more information, visit our website at [nps.gov/pais/](http://nps.gov/pais/), Facebook page at [facebook.com/nps.pais.seaturtles](https://www.facebook.com/nps.pais.seaturtles), or call our Hatchling Hotline at (361) 949-7163.**

## Green Sea Turtle

At 300-400 pounds with a shell that is 3-4 feet long, the green sea turtle is the second largest sea turtle in the world. Like most sea turtles, their shell is longer than it is wide. Green sea turtles occur in warm tropical and subtropical waters around the world where algae and seagrasses—their primary foods—are found. They nest individually and at night. Nesting occurs on numerous islands and coastlines in over 80 countries. Green turtles also nest on Padre Island in low numbers.

The Laguna Madre and Padre Island jetties are rich in seagrasses and algae, providing very important, year-round habitat for juvenile green sea turtles. This green turtle population once thrived in Texas, but became depleted due to severe freezes and overexploitation in the late 1800s.

During the past few years, an increasing number of green turtles have been found “cold stunned” in Texas between November and February. Cold stunning occurs when severe cold fronts drastical-

ly drop water temperatures. Sea turtles, like other reptiles, cannot regulate their body temperature. When water temperatures drop below about 50 degrees in the shallow bays and passes of South Texas, these turtles become immobilized and float helplessly to the water's surface or wash ashore. If not located and protected quickly, they typically succumb to cold exposure or predation. Thanks to the hard work of many people, thousands of cold stunned green turtles have been recovered alive, rehabilitated, and released back into South Texas waters.

The large numbers of green turtles seen in local waters and found stranded in recent years indicate that after decades of conservation efforts by many organizations, the juvenile green turtle population is increasing in Texas. However, the species is still classified as threatened and continued recovery efforts are essential.

- Rosalie Rossi, Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery

## Top 5 Ways You Can Help Sea Turtles

1. **From April to August, please look for and report nesting sea turtles, their tracks, and hatchlings to a patroller or to 361-949-8173 ext. 226.**

2. **If you see a sea turtle struggling in the water, floating, or washed ashore (alive or dead), please call 361-949-8173 ext. 226.**

3. **Follow posted speed limits. Nesting turtles blend in with sand and vegetation and are hard to see. They may nest in vehicle ruts, and they cannot move to avoid an approaching vehicle.**

4. **Keep the beach clean. Sea turtles can mistake plastic for food or become entangled in fishing line.**

5. **Volunteer! Many of our nests and turtles are found by people like you! For more information about becoming a sea turtle volunteer, email us at: [pais\\_seaturtlevolunteer@nps.gov](mailto:pais_seaturtlevolunteer@nps.gov).**



Dr. Donna Shaver shows visitors a green sea turtle before it is released. NPS photo.

# Day Trips to National Parks in Texas

The rich natural and cultural history of Texas is an irreplaceable and treasured part of our nation's heritage. Thirteen National Park sites have been established in Texas to help preserve that legacy. Five are within a day's drive of Corpus Christi, offering great weekend getaways for outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs alike.



A living history demonstration at Palo Alto. NPS photo.

## **Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park**

**(Brownsville):** Before the Civil War, Texas was embroiled in another war over territory claimed by both the United States and Mexico. Palo Alto preserves the sites of the first two major battles of the U.S.-Mexican War. Special events and programs, including living history demonstrations, highlight the service and sacrifice of soldiers on both sides of a complex conflict with repercussions that are still felt today.

## **San Antonio Missions National Historical Park (San Antonio)**

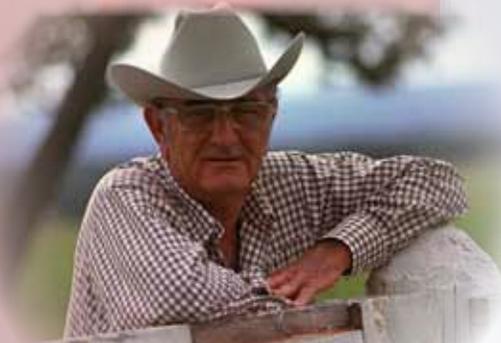
In the 1700s, the Coahuiltecan of South Texas were in dire straits. Apache raids from the north, European diseases from the south, and lingering drought left them few options. Who knows what they thought when Franciscan friars arrived intent on converting them from the hunter-gatherers they had been for eons into Catholic, tax-paying subjects of the King of Spain. The mission-forts the friars and Coahuiltecan built offered protection and survival, but at a high cost. The Coahuiltecan lost their identity—even their names. They had to become Spanish, accept a new religion, and pledge loyalty to a distant, unseen king. San Antonio Missions protects four of these beautiful, fortified churches where Coahuiltecan descendants still come to worship.



Mission Concepción. NPS photo.

## **Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park (Johnson City)**

Perhaps no other president is so strongly identified with one geographical area than our 36th President, Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ). He was born, raised, elected to public office, and buried in the Hill Country. A Texan through and through, Johnson was shaped by the land and his family's ranching legacy. Ranch hands still manage descendants of LBJ's original herd of Hereford cattle at this national historical park.



Lyndon B. Johnson. NPS archives.

**Big Thicket National Preserve (Kountze):** Life of all types abounds in the Big Thicket of southeast Texas. Cacti and yucca grow near longleaf pines, while southern magnolias grow near beech and bald cypress trees in this place where nine different ecosystems converge. Canoeists and kayakers explore bayous, creeks, and rivers; hikers choose from 40 miles of trails; birders search for red-cockaded woodpeckers and brown-headed nuthatches; and hunters stalk deer, squirrel, rabbit, feral hog, and waterfowl. Big Thicket has something for everyone.



Kayaking the Big Thicket. NPS photo.



Rock art at Amistad. NPS photo.

**Amistad National Recreation Area (Del Rio):** The U.S. portion of the International Amistad Reservoir offers camping, hiking, and excellent fishing and boating. Its caves and rock formations are also ancient museums displaying mysterious, 4,000-year-old paintings on rock shelter walls in numerous sites. Amistad, which means “friendship,” is an oasis in the desert that straddles the U.S.-Mexico border.

Spend a weekend finding and enjoying one of these nearby national park sites. The stories and resources of Texas and of our nation are preserved in these special places that belong to all Americans. Find out more at [nps.gov/state/tx/index.htm](http://nps.gov/state/tx/index.htm)



## National Parks: The Next Century

In 2011, National Park Service (NPS) Director Jonathan B. Jarvis marked the agency's 95th birthday with the release of [A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement](#). This document identified four major objectives for NPS and its partners for the next century: (1) Connect People to Parks; (2) Advance the NPS Education Mission; (3) Preserve America's Special Places; and (4) Enhance Professional and Organizational Excellence.

Jarvis described [A Call to Action](#) as “a rededication—to our traditional stewardship role but with an expanded and strategic focus that addresses our relevance in a changing world.” To chart a path toward that second century vision, it outlined 39 concrete actions, such as “Value Diversity” and “Go Digital.” Padre Island National Seashore (PINS) has implemented many of these Call to Action items—here are just a few.

“Ticket to Ride” expands opportunities for students to directly experience national parks. At PINS, we offer grants to schools to help cover transportation costs for field trips through a partnership with *Sharkathon*.

“Go Digital” reaches new audiences and maintains a conversation with all Americans by transforming the NPS digital experience to offer rich, interactive, up-to-date content. PINS has two Facebook pages where our online community of visitors can share information and experiences about the Seashore with one another. It is also a great place to see the latest announcements and read posts that are both informative and educational.

“Step by Step” instills deep connections between a younger generation and parks through a series of diverse park experiences. To build a pathway to youth employment and connect new generations to parks, PINS welcomes and encourages young people to participate in our volunteer program.



Students catch and release creatures during Hidden Treasures. NPS photo.

“Next Generation Stewards” creates a new generation of citizen scientists and future park stewards by conducting fun, engaging, and educational activities. PINS offers a variety of such activities for school groups that visit the Seashore. We also have activities such as Hidden Treasures and the Underwater Explorer Junior Ranger program for visiting families.

As the National Park Service prepares to celebrate its Centennial in 2016, we invite you to be a part of this special time with us. Visit us often and get to know and love these places that you own. Discover the services the NPS performs in your community and in communities throughout the country. We hope you enjoy your experience of America's national parks and join us in the stewardship of these special places.

- Lee McDowell, Division of Interpretation and Education

# Frequently Asked Questions

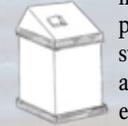
**I want to go camping—what do I need to know?** Camping is permitted on North Beach, at Bird Island Basin Camping Area, at Malaquite Campground, on South Beach, and at Yarborough Pass. All camping areas are open year-round. No reservations are accepted, and all camping is first-come, first-served. Campers must have a camping permit, which is available from the kiosks at the entrance to each camping area. Camping anywhere in the park is limited to 14 days at one time and no more than 56 days per calendar year. After each 14-day stay, all camping equipment and vehicles must be removed from the park for a minimum of 48 hours. No camping is allowed at the Malaquite Visitor Center beach or parking area. See “Camping” on page 3 for more information on camping fees and specific areas.



**May I build a fire?** Unless a fire ban has been initiated, small campfires on North and South beaches are allowed. Campers at Malaquite Campground can build a campfire on the beach in front of the campground but not within the campground. No fires are allowed at Bird Island Basin (visitors can use the grills provided for cooking). No bonfires are allowed anywhere in the park. At Malaquite Beach, no campfires are allowed, but visitors can bring their own grills to the picnic shelter located in the parking lot. No grills are allowed on the Malaquite Pavilion deck. See “Picnicking” on page 4 for more information.



**Where do I take my trash?** Due to illegal dumping of hazardous materials, trash cans are no longer provided in many areas of the park. However, free trash bags are available at the park entrance station and at Malaquite Visitor Center. Dumpsters, trash cans, and/or recycling containers are located at Malaquite Pavilion, the entrance to South Beach, and Bird Island Basin. Please don't leave your trash on the beach, bury it in the sand, or toss it into the dunes. Help make your park beaches beautiful by practicing “leave no trace”—if you bring it in, take it back out.



**Where can I dump my gray/black water?** There are no public RV hook-ups in the park, but an RV dump station and a potable water filling station are available to all visitors. Both are located at the entrance to Malaquite Campground. See “Camping” on page 3 for more information.



**May I collect seashells and other things?** Yes, if they are not alive. All living things are protected within the park. So if you find something alive—a hermit crab, a living sand dollar, etc.—don't harm it, just leave it where it is. But you can pick up and collect up to 5 gallons of empty (dead) shells, sea beans, or other natural beach treasures per day. See “Beachcombing” on page 4 for more information.



**May I use a metal detector?** No. Possession or use of a metal detector is not allowed in order to preserve and protect cultural resources.



**I found a strange container on the beach—what should I do?** Hazardous materials, from medical syringes to 55-gallon barrels of chemicals, sometimes wash ashore. If you come across something hazardous, don't touch it. Note the location and alert a park ranger as soon as possible.



**Are there riptides?** Yes, occasionally conditions can create riptides. If caught in one, don't panic. Swim parallel to the beach until you are free

from the flow pulling you out, then swim back to shore. Do NOT attempt to swim against the current pulling you out. Use caution when swimming, and never swim alone. See “Swimming & Sunbathing” on page 3 for more information.

**May I feed the gulls?** No. Feeding gulls or other wildlife in the park is not allowed. It can cause them to start approaching people too closely, it teaches them to beg for and steal human food, and it can make them less able to survive on their own.



**Are there any dangerous animals?** Jellyfish and Portuguese man-of-war can cause a painful sting, even if they are dead—so don't touch them. If stung, rub the area with a paste of meat tenderizer and vinegar, or pour hot water on it. Watch for allergic reactions, and seek medical attention if necessary. Stingrays sit on the sandy bottom and can inflict an extremely painful puncture wound if stepped on or agitated. To help avoid them, shuffle your feet on the sandy bottom as you walk. Be aware that sharks occur in the Gulf as well. Rattlesnakes live in the dunes, grasslands, and mudflats, so avoid those areas. First aid is available at Malaquite Visitor Center. In an emergency, call 911 (climb a dune for better reception).



**May I bring my dog or other pet?** Yes, to most areas. Pets on a leash are allowed everywhere in the park except for Malaquite Pavilion and the portion of Malaquite Beach right in front of the visitor center. Sand trails located on either side of Malaquite Pavilion may be used by pet owners to access the rest of the closed beach area. Please be courteous to other visitors and clean up after your pet. Pets must be on a leash at all times.



**Are hunting & fishing allowed?** Fishing is permitted everywhere in the park except for the portion of Malaquite Beach right in front of the visitor center. No hunting is permitted in the park except for the taking of waterfowl by boat only out in the Laguna Madre. Both of these activities must be done in accordance with applicable state and federal regulations. Transporting any other lawfully taken wildlife, including exotic species, through the park is prohibited.



**May I bring my firearm into the park?** Yes. A 2010 federal law allows people who can legally possess firearms to bring them into national parks. But it is the visitor's responsibility to understand and comply with all applicable state, local, and federal firearms laws. And federal law prohibits firearms in certain park facilities. These places are posted with signs at public entrances.



**May I bring my ATV or off-road vehicle?** No. Texas beaches are considered public highways, and only street-legal and licensed vehicles are allowed in the park. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs), UTVs, go-carts, golf carts, dune buggies, and other such vehicles are prohibited. Driving in dunes, grasslands, and mudflats is also prohibited. For more information, see “Beach Driving” on page 4 and “Top 10 Tips for Driving Down Island” on page 11.



## ***We hope you enjoy your visit to Padre Island National Seashore!***

Artwork by Lindsay Galland.