



The Gulf Breeze

The official newspaper of
Padre Island National Seashore

Summer 2009



Padre Island National Seashore protects the longest section of undeveloped barrier island in the world, preserving rare coastal prairie, a complex, dynamic dune system, and the Laguna Madre, one of the few hypersaline lagoon environments left in the world.

Greetings from the Superintendent

WELCOME TO PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE, THE longest remaining undeveloped stretch of barrier island in the world. Our mission, is to save and preserve this great park unimpaired for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration. The Padre Island National Seashore 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. Whether you are enjoying the beach, launching your boat or windsurfing at Bird Island Basin, driving, or simply walking, there is always something to see.

Spring and summer are busy seasons here at the National Seashore, and as we enter this time of year, we ask that you be vigilant. 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. For the safety of everyone and to protect our natural resources, the speed limit for the entire length of the beach is 15 miles per hour from April 1 through July 31. The Kemp's ridley turtles nest during this time of year and if you are not paying attention, you may miss the opportunity to witness a nesting event. From June through August, you will also have the opportunity to view turtle hatchling releases on the beach. In order to allow all who want to enjoy this beautiful place the opportunity, we must be careful and courteous.

We are still dealing with the effects of Hurricane Ike. The storm surge and currents brought massive amounts of debris to the National Seashore. We would like to thank Captain Billy Sandifer for his tireless efforts organizing his 14th annual Big Shell Beach Clean-up in March. This year, he and 500 volunteers, along with the National Park Service as a partner, cleared 800,000 lbs. of trash and debris off of Big Shell Beach. We are diligently working to clean up what remains.

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 Padre Island National Seashore so that it may be enjoyed unimpaired for generations to come. Whether you are touring the country or are from the local community, we hope that you enjoy your visit and plan to return.

Sincerely,

Joe Escoto, Superintendent

Report Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Nesting April through July

Donna J. Shaver, Ph.D.
Chief, Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery

KEMP'S RIDLEY SEA TURTLES NEST AT PADRE ISLAND National Seashore from April through July. You can help restore the population of this endangered species at its most important nesting beach in the U.S. by watching for the two-foot-long, olive green turtles on the beach and reporting them immediately.

Long-term recovery efforts making a difference

Kemp's ridley has been the focus of global recovery efforts for decades. Most nest along the Gulf of Mexico coastline in Tamaulipas, Mexico, with the epicenter of nesting near the village of Rancho Nuevo. Since 1978, the National Park Service has been working with many partners in the U.S. and Mexico to increase nesting by this native species at the National Seashore. One objective has been for the National Seashore to serve as a safeguard against extinction in the event that a political or environmental disaster occurs at their nesting area in Mexico.



A female Kemp's ridley comes ashore to nest

Thanks to the hard work of many people, nesting is increasing rapidly. A record 195 Kemp's ridley nests were documented on the Texas coast in 2008. Nearly 55% of the Kemp's ridley nests documented in the U.S. have been found at the National Seashore, making it the most important nesting area in the U.S. for Kemp's ridley. However, to ensure the survival of these turtles and nests here, and increase their population, monitoring and protection efforts must continue.

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Need-to-know info

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY,

DIAL 911

Park rangers are available during normal working hours to provide assistance.

Lost-and-found items may be reported at the visitor center.



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U.S. Department of the Interior

The Gulf Breeze

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National Park Service
Editor, Juan Rodriguez
Superintendent, Joe Escoto

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 181300
Corpus Christi, TX 78480-1300

Park Headquarters:
361-949-8173

Visitor Center:
361-949-8068

Beach/Weather Conditions
361-949-8175

Internet Address:
www.nps.gov/pais

E-mail address:
pais_visitor_center@nps.gov

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Interpretive Programs

Program	Time
Beach Walk	11:00 a.m. <i>Weekends only through May and daily starting in June</i>
Deck Talk	1:00 p.m. <i>Daily</i>
Family Program	3:00 p.m. <i>Seasonal (Fri, Sat, Sun)</i>
Junior Ranger	Self-paced

Programs are subject to change. For more information, please contact the Malaquite Visitor Center at 361-949-8068, or visit the park's website, www.nps.gov/pais.

Hours

Padre Island National Seashore is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Malaquite Visitor Center is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., year-round.

The Malaquite Visitor Center and Concessions are closed on Christmas day.

Location

The park's physical address is 20301 Park Road 22, Corpus Christi, Texas 78418. From Interstate Highway 37, turn onto Highway 358. The highway then crosses over the Laguna Madre on the JFK Causeway and becomes Park Road 22. At the end of Park Road 22 is the National Seashore's entrance station. Traveling through the park takes one to the Malaquite Visitor Center. Approximately one-half mile farther down the road the pavement ends and beach access begins. The total driving distance from I-37 to the beach is approximately 37 miles.

Educational and Interpretive Programs

Deck Talks and Beach Walks are held every day. Deck Talks last 45-60 minutes and are an in-depth discussion of marine organisms and beach debris, including shells, sea beans, and human-made items that are found along the shoreline. Beach Walks last 45 minutes and are guided walks along the beach with a ranger. Due to a high volume of school groups, Beach Walks will be held on weekends until June. Family programs may be offered at the Malaquite Visitor Center during the summer months on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Topics may include nature journaling, birding, nature crafts, and beach activities for children and their families. The National Seashore also offers environmental education programs for school groups of all ages. These professionally-presented programs teach children about topics that may include habitats and migration while providing direct contact with nature. Contact the park's Environmental Education specialist, William "Buzz" Botts, at 361.949.8068 for more detailed information and to make a reservation for your group.

Available Facilities

The Malaquite Visitor Center has an information desk, small museum, bookstore, concession stand, observation decks, restrooms, and cold showers (open 24 hours). Malaquite Picnic Shelter is new and located in the visitor center parking lot. The visitor center is fully wheelchair accessible with ramps to the main deck and an elevator to the main observation deck. Beach wheelchairs are available for day use. Please contact the visitor center for more detailed information.

Camping

There is a 14-consecutive day limit for camping. Overnight camping is limited to a total of 56 days in a calendar year. No reservations are accepted. Primitive camping requires a free backcountry permit, available at the Entrance Station and the camping and registration kiosks located at Bird Island Basin and the South Beach entrance. Permits must be displayed on vehicles.

Malaquite Campground (Open All Year)

Semi-primitive, providing only toilets, cold rinse showers, picnic tables, and 48 designated sites (6 sites are for tent camping only). An \$8 fee is required for a site, \$4 with a Senior or Access passport. There are no hook-ups. There is a gray-and black-water dump station and potable water filling station near the campground entrance. Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m. The area is patrolled by rangers. Camping is accommodated on a first-come, first-served basis and reservations are not accepted. Please call 361.949.8068 to check on availability. Also, a camping envelope is needed at the Malaquite Campground and Bird Island Basin. Please deposit your payment in the Iron Ranger.

North Beach (Open All Year)

Primitive, no charge. A camping permit is required and is available from the Entrance Station. Open to RV and tent camping. No reservations are needed. There are no facilities or designated sites. Camping is permitted from the dunes to the water's edge and is open to two-wheel drive-vehicles. However, beach conditions may vary with weather, and campers should always use caution to avoid becoming stuck in unexpectedly deep sand.

South Beach (Open All Year)

Primitive, no charge. A camping permit is required and is available from the camping registration kiosk located at the entrance of South Beach. Open to RV and tent camping. Camping is permitted from the base of the dunes to the water's edge (up to 100-ft. distance). There are no designated sites. The camping area extends from the end of Park Road 22 south 60 miles to the boundary of the park at the Mansfield Channel. There are no roads, all driving is on the beach. The first five miles of South Beach are open to two-wheel-drive vehicles. The lower 55 miles are accessible to four-wheel drive vehicles.

The beginning of the 4-wheel drive area is marked with the five-mile marker sign. Please note that in Texas beaches are

considered highways, and all vehicles must be street-legal and licensed. Licensed and unlicensed ATVs, UTVs, go carts, and dune buggies are not allowed to be driven in the park.

Be aware that driving conditions on the beach may vary with the weather and areas of soft sand may be sometimes found in the two-wheel-drive area, making driving difficult and possibly becoming stuck. Wrecker services can be costly and response time slow. Some areas within the four-wheel-drive area have very deep sand. Please park your vehicle out of the way of traffic. A bulletin on how to prepare for driving down island is available by contacting the visitor center. Call 361.949.8068 before driving down island to check on beach conditions. Driving off the beach and into the dunes, grasslands, and mudflats is prohibited.

Yarborough Pass (Open Intermittently)

Primitive, no facilities and no charge. A camping permit is required and is available from the South Beach camping and registration kiosk. Reservations are not needed. Located on the Laguna Madre 15.5 miles south of the visitor center. Access to the area is possible only through the 4-wheel drive area of South Beach. To find the campground (not a developed campground), drive to the 15-mile marker, then backtrack approximately 100 yards and look for a notch in the dunes. Drive through the pass and follow the road approximately two miles to the campground. Be aware that the pass through the dunes is sometimes filled with exceptionally deep and soft sand in which even 4-wheeldrive vehicles may become stuck. Do not drive on the mudflats surrounding the campground. Fines for damaging the mudflats are heavy.

Bird Island Basin (Open All Year)

A camping permit is required and is available at the Bird Island Basin camping registration kiosk. There are pit toilets available. Bird Island Basin is suitable for both RV and tent camping. A fee of \$5.00 per day, or a \$10.00 annual fee for camping, day use, and boat ramp use is charged at the Entrance Station, in addition to the park entrance fee. If you possess a Senior or Access pass, the fees are reduced by half. Bird Island Basin is located on the Laguna Madre approximately four miles from the visitor center. In addition to camping, Bird Island Basin has a windsurfing area ranked by Windsurfing Magazine as the best flat water sailing site in the continental U.S. There is also a boat launch ramp.

Nest detection is challenging – we need your help!

National Seashore staff and volunteers search the Gulf of Mexico beachfront on North Padre Island to find and protect the nesting turtles and their nests. Because of the very large patrol area (nearly 80 miles) and the nesting characteristics of the species, nest detection is very challenging. It only takes the nesters 45 minutes to crawl up the beach, bury their eggs in the sand, and return to the sea. Because the turtles are on the beach for such a short period of time, patrollers look for tracks left in the sand by the nesting females.

Kemp's ridley tracks are about two feet wide, extending from close to the water up the beach. Once the turtle has already re-entered the water, both an entrance and exit pathway are present. Unfortunately, Kemp's ridley tracks are more difficult to see than are tracks from the other sea turtle species. Unlike the others, Kemp's ridleys nest mostly during daylight hours when dew levels are the lowest and tracks vanish under the hot sun. Kemp's ridleys are the smallest and lightest of the sea turtles so they leave only a faint track in the sand. Also, nesting tends to occur on windy days when these faint tracks blow away quickly. To add to the challenges, Kemp's ridleys often nest in groups or simultaneous emergences called arribadas.

Thankfully, visitors are helping greatly with our nest detection efforts by finding and reporting up to half of the nesting sites that are located and protected each year. To alert them and gain their help in locating nests, the "nesting Kemp's ridley alert" flag is flown on the National Seashore Entrance Station and Malaquite Visitor Center flagpoles each day that a Kemp's ridley nest is found on the Texas coast. The rectangular flag has orange background and the black silhouette of a sea turtle. Nesting can occur on any day during the nesting season, but when the flag is flown be particularly watchful since the probability of finding nests increases because of arribada nesting.



A turtle patroller surveys a Kemp's ridley nest site

Patrols to find nesting

We use Utility Transport Vehicles (UTVs) to repeatedly patrol the Gulf of Mexico beachfront at the park, each day between April and mid-July, from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Other groups also conduct systematic nesting patrols to some extent on all other Texas Gulf beaches, but our nest-detection program is the largest on the Texas coast.

We want to find the nests so that we can protect the eggs and produce as many hatchlings as possible to help ensure future nesting here. Unfortunately, if we do not find the eggs, far fewer hatchlings are born due to predation, high tides, and other factors. Eggs from most nests found on North Padre Island and northward along the Texas coast are brought to the National Seashore's incubation facility for protected care and monitoring. Eggs are also protected in screen enclosures on the beach called corrals. One of these corrals is located at Padre Island National Seashore and one on South Padre Island.

Each year, a few nests go undetected at egg laying and are found while hatching by visitors. Unfortunately, at many of these sites, mortality has occurred due to predation of eggs or hatchlings, and crushing of hatchlings by passing vehicles.

You can help

Please help us by watching carefully for nesting Kemp's ridley turtles and their tracks from April through mid-July, and for hatchlings emerging from previously undetected nests from late-May through August. Use caution and drive slowly so that you do not inadvertently run over any. Kemp's ridleys nest anywhere from the high tide line into the dunes. They are difficult to see because their olive green color blends with the sand and vegetation and they often become covered with sand during nesting. They sometimes nest in vehicle ruts and cannot move quickly to avoid an approaching vehicle. In fact, while they are actually laying eggs they enter a trance-like state and will not move from the nest.

Be prepared for delays in travel on the beach to enable nesting turtles and hatchlings to be safe and undisturbed on the beach, and time for biologists to document and protect the nests.

What to do if you see a nesting sea turtle, tracks, or emerging hatchlings?

IMMEDIATELY report all observations to a passing turtle patroller or by calling (361)949-8173, ext. 226. If possible, stay at the site until a biologist arrives. Also, please do not take any turtles, eggs, or their parts from the beach since they are protected by law, and it is illegal for you to possess them.

If you find a nesting turtle: (1) Allow her to nest undisturbed; (2) Protect her from passing traffic; (3) Stay back while she is crawling up the beach to select a nest site and starts to lay eggs; (4) After she has started to lay eggs, mark where she nested but do not pierce anything into the sand or you could puncture eggs; (5) Examine her flippers for tags and note any tag numbers found; (6) Photograph or video her from a downward profile; and (7) Allow her to re-enter the water.

If you find tracks from a nester: (1) Step to the side of the tracks and any disturbed areas of sand along or near them, and keep other people and vehicles off them so that evidence needed to help find the nest is not obliterated; (2) Carefully mark the tracks and any disturbed areas of sand, but do not pierce anything into the sand or you could break eggs; and (3) Take photos from a few different angles.

If you find hatchlings emerging from a nest: (1) Mark the cavity that they emerged from; (2) Protect them from passing traffic and predators, such as gulls and crabs; (3) Photograph and count the hatchlings; and (4) Allow them to enter the surf.

Attend a hatchling release

From June through mid-August, after 45-53 days of incubation, the hatchlings born in the incubation facility are released on the beach at the northern end of the National Seashore. Each year, 15-20 releases are open to the public and over 2,000 visitors attend free-of-charge. For more information on these releases, visit our website at www.nps.gov/pais/, where the projected dates for the release of each nest are posted. Information on the next upcoming release can be obtained by calling our recorded Hatchling Hotline at (361)949-7163.

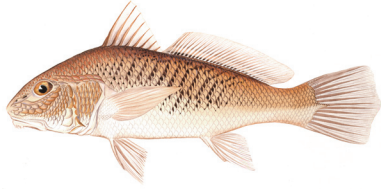


Hatchling sea turtles embark on their oceanic journey

Common Saltwater Fish

Atlantic Croaker

(*Micropogon undulatus*)



Description: The Atlantic croaker has a row of whiskers on each side of its lower jaw. The young are silver, while older fish are yellow with short irregular brown streaks.

Habitat: These fish frequent the bottoms of bays, surf, and spoil islands.

Size: These average less than 1 pound, but may reach 4 pounds.

Fishing tips: Try fishing with peeled shrimp, live shrimp, and cut bait.

Black Drum

(*Pogonias cromis*)



Description: Whiskers on the black drum's chin help it to find marine worms, shrimp, crabs, and other shellfish. Two plates deep in their throats help the black drum crush and grind their food.

Habitat: Well adapted to a wide range of aquatic habitats, this fish can range from the shallow bay waters of the Laguna Madre to deep waters in the Gulf of Mexico.

Size: These fish average 2 pounds, but may reach 80 pounds or more.

Fishing tips: Try fishing with dead shrimp or pieces of crab fished close to the bottom.

Red Drum

(*Sciaenops ocellatus*)



Description: This reddish bronze fish has a black spot on each side at the base of its tail and lacks the chin whiskers of black drum. These fish feed head down as they scour the bottom for crabs, shrimp, marine worms, and small fish.

Habitat: For the first few years of their lives, the red drum prefers sea grass beds, shallow waters, and mudflats in the bays. Adults migrate from the bays to the Gulf of Mexico, where they remain for the rest of their lives.

Size: This fish can weigh up to 50 pounds.

Fishing tips: Try fishing with live finger mullet, cut mullet, live croaker, live or dead shrimp, and lures fished close to the bottom with gold and silver spoons.

Sheepshead

(*Archosargus probatocephalus*)



Description: These black and white striped fish crunch up barnacles, Fiddler crabs, and many other hard-shelled animals with their large front teeth.

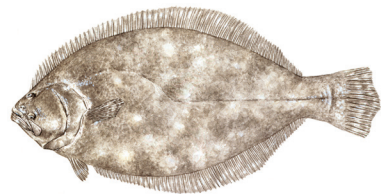
Habitat: Oyster reefs, barnacle-encrusted pier pilings, bulkheads, and jetty rocks.

Size: Averages 2 pounds, but may reach up to 15 pounds.

Fishing tips: Try fishing for these shellfish-loving fish with Hermit crabs, Fiddler crabs, or live or dead shrimp around piers, rocky outcroppings, jetties and oyster reefs.

Southern Flounder

(*Paralichthys lethostigma*)



Description: This well-camouflaged, flat fish blends in easily against the muddy or sandy bottom it inhabits because it can change the color of its upper side to match its surroundings.

Habitat: This fish is most commonly found near the mouth of bayous leading into back bays and marshes, near marsh grasses, oyster reefs, or spoil islands. In fall, southern flounder migrate to the Gulf of Mexico to spawn.

Size: Average 1–3 pounds but may reach 13 pounds or more.

Fishing tips: Try fishing with live finger mullet, mud minnows, live shrimp, or artificial lures close to the bottom.

Spotted Seatrout

(*Cynoscion nebulosus*)



Description: Silvery sides, a greenish back, and many dark spots on the upper sides of the body help identify this fish. The mouth is orange and has two distinctive canine teeth in the tip of the upper jaw.

Habitat: These fish frequent shallow waters near sea grass beds, reefs or marshes. Their green color helps them to easily blend with their environments.

Size: This fish averages 1–3 pounds, but may reach 13 pounds.

Fishing tips: Try fishing with live shrimp, live finger mullet, live croaker, or artificial baits that look like shrimp or shad.

How's the Fishing?

Chelsea Aldrich, Park Ranger

THERE ARE NOT TOO MANY THINGS THAT CAN RUIN A DAY of fishing at the PINS, as the National Seashore is referred to by locals and local anglers. Wind and seaweed are two such elements, though, that make it worthwhile to plan your trip in advance. The Sargassum seaweed that washes ashore has been fairly limited so far this year, but the winds have been keeping the fishermen at bay. Nonetheless, the fish are here with warm springtime Gulf waters, and anglers will take advantage of a good weather window any chance they get.

It is presently summer, and the Equinox has brought in the expected high tides that come all the way up to the dunes. These are referred to as the Bull Tides, and are experienced at the island during the spring and fall equinox. Harsh and sometimes impossible driving can be attributed to this natural phenomena. With the Gulf being a nearly land-locked body of water with only two areas opening to the Atlantic Ocean, the tides are largely determined by the wind, along with lunar cycles.

When looking for a fishable weather window, one should watch for good winds, good surf, and little weed. Recently, the winds from the north-northeast have contributed to the spring equinox by bringing the Gulf waters to the dunes. When winds are from the north-northeast, waves have a longer fetch, or the amount of time and distance waves travel over open water, allowing more time for wave action to build. Typically, the Gulf will roar and the surf will display multiple rows of waves several feet high. High winds, along with little rain, have made for poor driving conditions, as well.

The summer typically brings winds from the south-southeast, which make for the hot and humid summers for which Corpus Christi is well-known. Summer is also peak fishing time, though, and this is just a part of the natural annual cycle. So ready your rods, reels, and tackle, along with your water, sunscreen, sunglasses and hat. It's going to be a hot one!

Despite the high winds, the fish are here. People have been catching Red fish, Black drum, Pompano, and Whiting, which are considered some of the best eating fish. Very few Spotted seatrout, known locally as Speckled trout, in the Gulf have been caught, and local researchers are still trying to determine the reasons for the decline in this fishery. Some considerations have been overharvesting in the bay systems, pollution in the Gulf of Mexico, and global climate change. As the water warms, you should be able to get Speckled trout with top-water lures on clear-water days.

Some game fish species have arrived earlier than expected this year. The water temperature rarely dipped below 60 degrees Fahrenheit last winter; therefore, certain game fish species that follow the migratory patterns of their bait have been brought to the coast of Padre Island by way of prematurely warm Gulf waters. Spanish mackerel and Jack Crevalle are rarely seen in the Spring and are already here. Some people have even been sight-casting for them in the surf. Bonita are an oddity, and none were here last year. However, this year is showing positive signs for those seeking a good fight, as these fish arrived ahead of schedule. Sharks are also in, and anglers have been catching Tiger and Blacktip sharks.

Blacktip sharks are in thick because they had their pups in spring, and will stay around through October or November. Be cautious if you land a Blacktip, because they can be aggressive during their pupping months. Bull sharks, along with hammerhead species, should start moving in when the water warms. With the warming waters, stingrays will also be in shallow waters. Take caution and shuffle your feet, rather than taking steps while you are wading through the surf, in order to avoid stepping on and provoking a stingray. Be safe, and happy fishing!

Images courtesy of:



The Threatened Night Sky

Chelsea Aldrich, Park Ranger



Night lights around the world (Photo courtesy of NASA)

HAVE YOU EVER GAZED AT THE MOON, THE STARS, AND THE GLOWING planets that shine from lightyears away? Have you ever witnessed a shooting or falling star? If you have had such opportunities, you are among a mere ten percent of the U.S. population to have access to a clear, unimpaired view of the night sky. Although we may appreciate the beauty of a pure night sky, many species of wildlife depends on it for protection, breeding or migration.

Many animals depend upon natural illumination from the moon, stars, sun and bioluminescent species, to guide their migration. For some fish species, artificial lighting can increase their mortality rates by attracting predatory species. If you have ever gone floundering at night or used lights to attract other fish, you know how effective shining a light can be for your catch. However, the National Park Service is charged with protecting wildlife, and because the use of lights for fishing at night creates an unnatural environment, national park sites prohibit the use of artificial lights for fishing.

Nearly half of North America's bird species land at Padre Island National Seashore during their seasonal migration. Because it provides 70 natural, undeveloped and protected miles of barrier island, birds species rely heavily upon the National Seashore for rest during their long migration, food and nesting grounds. That is, they rely upon it if they can find it.

Most waterbirds are nocturnal and artificial lighting can confuse and disorient birds during their migratory flights, especially when sky conditions are cloudy, causing migrating birds to fly at lower altitudes. Disorientation can cause birds to fly into man-made structures and into vehicles or roadways, resulting in fatal collisions.

Predatory birds that usually feed during the day may also feed during the night, increasing their time spent hunting, thus decreasing the prey species. Similarly, songbirds begin to sing their morning songs earlier, drawing the attention of predators and altering their normal feeding times.

The Kemp's ridley is the main nesting sea turtle species at Padre Island National Seashore and the only sea turtle species that nests primarily during the day. However, it shares the Gulf of Mexico and the beach with four other turtle species that nest mostly at night and have been documented nesting at the National Seashore. Strong lights used on the beach at night can cause sea turtles to nest at the wrong time of day or avoid approaching the beach altogether.

Padre Island National Seashore is taking steps to reduce light pollution. The light produced from the cities of Corpus Christi and Brownsville has crossed into the National Seashore. With the number of migratory species that are dependent upon the park for feeding, resting, breeding, and nesting, park management is determined to protect these species with regulations aimed at reducing the amount of artificial light that is produced at night within the National Seashore boundaries.

In the Superintendent's Compendium, which features the park-specific regulations on-line, the following regulation has been established to protect the National Seashore's night sky: "2.2(e) The park is closed to the use of artificial light for the viewing of wildlife. Giggling is allowed for non-game and non-protected game fish (ie: flounder, black drum, whiting, sheepshead). Submerged attracting lights or lights attached to the end of the spears are allowed."

A few ways that you can reduce light pollution around your home (while saving a few dollars) include: (1) If you aren't using a room or certain area in your home, then keep the lights off in those spaces; (2) Use energy-efficient light bulbs when possible. They are cost- and energy-efficient, saving not only the night sky, but your budget as well. And (3) shield your outdoor lights. Many times, outdoor lights shine down, out and up, when they just need to shine down. A shield can help protect the sky and maximize efficiency of your light by directing the light in one direction.

With the help of all of us, we can protect wildlife from the adverse affects of light pollution while we view the wonders of the night sky.

A Message in a Bottle

By William Botts, Park Ranger

JULY 16, 2003 WAS AN EXCITING DAY FOR 11-YEAR OLD NICOLE TIBBETTS. She and her father, Pete, left the dock from their home on Grand Cayman Island for a short boat ride. Nicole wanted to do an experiment by sending a message in a bottle out to sea, in the hope of finding out where the currents would take it. She and her dad motored a mile or so offshore on their boat, "Island Girl," and Nicole tossed the bottle into the beautiful, clear waters of the Caribbean. Inside was a message promising the bottle's finder a post card from the Cayman Islands if they would contact her and tell her where the bottle washed ashore.

The weeks slowly ticked by and Nicole anxiously awaited, hoping to hear from someone. Each passing day the suspense built as the bottle continued rambling on its way. It traveled north through the Caribbean, bobbing along in the wind-driven currents past the western tip of Cuba until it entered the Gulf of Mexico. Like a liquid conveyor belt, the strong currents pulled the bottle along on its journey. The bottle was by no means alone on the trip. Thousands of objects, such as drifting tropical seeds, dead trees, bird feathers and countless pieces of plastic trash also likely floated along in the currents. As typically happens, the powerful currents continued their northward march across the Gulf before reaching the vicinity of New Orleans. At this point, some of the currents turn eastward and head toward Florida, while others peel off to the west and roll toward Texas. Nicole's bottle was swept up by the westward currents and the slow journey continued.

On September 20, just over two months after the odyssey began, an odd thing happened. The westbound currents passing along the Texas coast collided with a northward moving current that hugs the Mexican coast and turns eastward just as it reaches south Texas. The resulting collision of currents stalled the bottle, and the offshore winds and waves tossed it up on to the beach. Nicole's experiment could have ended with the bottle joining the millions of other forgotten pieces of flotsam, shells, seeds, and other assorted bits of debris that the converging currents dump onto Texas beaches on any given day. What happened instead provided Nicole with an answer to her quest to find out where her bottle would go. It seems that on that particular September 20th in 2003, over 8,100 volunteers were walking the Texas beaches in an attempt to remove some of the trash deposited by the currents. Just as has happened many times before and since, the effort was a success. The participants in the Adopt-A-Beach clean-up removed over 240 tons of garbage. Included among the 472,000 pounds of trash was Nicole's well-traveled bottle with its note tucked safely inside.



A similar bottle that washed in with the tide

What messages Nicole's note in a bottle conveyed! The child's thrill over getting her note answered is something every visitor can relate to. Nicole ended up on the front page of her hometown newspaper, as the people of Grand Cayman marveled over her experiment and her good fortune. That note in a bottle speaks volumes not only about human curiosity and the thirst for knowledge, but also sends another equally powerful message. It illustrates in a simple way the journey that many of the items on this beach took to reach the Texas shores. If it was all beautiful drifting tropical seeds, perhaps some rafts of "seaweed," and an occasional note in a bottle, then Padre Island National Seashore would be a much better place for it. Unfortunately, those very currents that transport the natural debris now carry millions of pieces of plastic from distant places that wash ashore every day.

The unusual convergence of currents off of Padre Island brings trash from near and far, exotic and not so exotic. The origins are as varied as the trash. Different trash items may be thrown off of ships, carried down rivers from inland areas, or the result of the tremendous power of a hurricane, as was demonstrated in September of 2008, when Hurricane Ike hammered east Texas. Within a week, countless tons of debris from thousands of shattered lives and homes piled up on Padre Island. After over six months of hard work, almost half of the beach within the National Seashore remains to be cleaned. If you travel south along the beach about 30 miles into the four-wheel drive portion of the park, you can still see a beach covered with everything from bowling balls to vending machines to computer screens. Let's not forget the plastics. Tons and tons of plastics in every size and shape imaginable stretch for as far as the eye can see.

Regardless of where it originates, the final destination for much of the marine debris entering the western Gulf of Mexico is here at the National Seashore. The currents have become the proverbial "blessing and a curse." The very currents that bring the vast amounts of sand needed to form and sustain the world's longest barrier island, today bombard the coast with a relentless assortment of mankind's creations. While an occasional drifting bottle with a note in it still comes ashore and can be truly interesting to discover, most of the debris is anything but glamorous. Little did Nicole realize how powerful her message in that bottle truly was.

Oil and Gas Development at Padre Island National Seashore

By Wade Stablein, Park Ranger

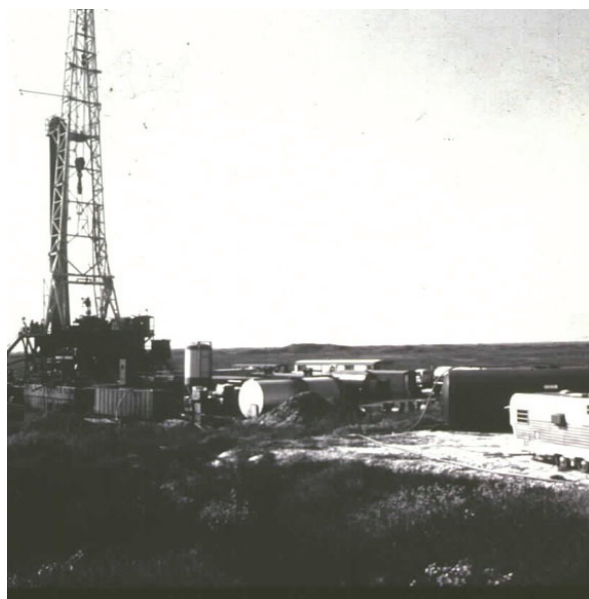
MANY VISITORS TO PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE WONDER WHY THEY are seeing evidence of oil and gas development in a National Park Service (NPS) unit. In fact, Padre Island NS is one of 13 NPS units with enabling legislation which specifically allows oil and gas exploration and development activities to occur within park boundaries. The federal government owns the surface rights of Padre Island NS, but the minerals are privately owned, and the NPS is mandated to allow development of nonfederal oil and gas rights held by individuals, companies, nonprofit organizations, and state and local governments that pre-date the park's establishment.

Based on authorities granted to the secretary of the interior by the U.S. Congress, the National Park Service created regulations at 36 CFR Part 9, Subpart B ("9B regulations") in December 1978 to protect parklands. The 9B regulations govern oil and gas activities associated with the exploration and development of nonfederal oil and gas rights located within park boundaries where access is on, across, or through federally owned or controlled lands or waters.

Under the 9B regulations, any operator who intends to develop an oil and/or gas interest must first submit a plan of operations to the NPS describing all of the activities (from exploration to site reclamation) that will occur. The NPS uses this information to determine the effects of proposed operations on natural and cultural resources and values within the park, including sea turtles, vegetation, shorebirds, visitor use, cultural sites, and natural soundscapes—to name a few. After the NPS has completed its review and environmental compliance responsibilities, it may approve the operator's plan.

If a proposed operation cannot be sufficiently modified to prevent the impairment of park resources and values, the NPS may seek to eliminate the associated mineral right by purchasing it, subject to the appropriation of funds from Congress. Where funds are available, this option eliminates the possibility of oil and gas development.

Exploration, development, and production of oil and gas minerals have occurred on Padre Island since the early 1950s. Ninety-three operations have been conducted to date, including 60 abandoned and plugged wells, nine seismic operations, five pipelines, eight active gas wells, one water well, and two new proposed drilling operations. Most of these operations took place between 1951 and 1981, with at least 14 operations pre-dating the establishment of Padre Island NS in 1962. The park is presently reviewing one plan of operation for permitting three new wells over approximately the next 12 months.



Gas Production at Padre Island during 1950's

The 12 other NPS units where oil and gas development activities are allowed to occur are those at Alibates Flint Quarries, Aztec Ruins, Big Cypress, Big South Fork, Big Thicket, Cuyahoga Valley, Gauley River, Jean Lafitte, Lake Meredith, New River Gorge, Obed, and Tallgrass Prairie. These areas include national parks, monuments, preserves, recreation areas, rivers, wild and scenic rivers, and an historical park. At the other 377 NPS units, mineral resources are owned by the federal government and are protected from development unless authorized by Congress.

Padre Island National Seashore prides itself on proactive management of oil and gas operations within the park. Park staff and managers constantly strive to utilize cutting-edge technology, review and update established mitigation measures, evaluate past practices, apply current research findings, incorporate public comment, and coordinate with partners to ensure the preservation and protection of park resources. These actions help provide an enjoyable visitor experience and protect park natural and cultural resources while still allowing congressionally mandated access to nonfederal oil and gas minerals.

Your Fee Dollars at Work

By Philip Slattery, Park Ranger

YOU MAY HAVE OCCASIONALLY SEEN SIGNS POSTED AROUND THE PARK that state: "Your Fee Demo Dollars at Work" and wondered what exactly that means. Fee Demonstration is a project with which the National Park Service (NPS) has been experimenting for several years, as a means of financing the facilities and operations of parks. For years, all of the income generated by parks was sent to the NPS Washington office, where it was put into a large fund from which all parks were financed. Under the Fee Demonstration project (or "Fee Demo" as it is commonly known), a certain percentage of the revenues a park generates is allocated to that park for its upkeep, projects, or improvements on the stipulation that these returning revenues directly benefit visitors. Padre Island National Seashore is what is known as an "80% park," meaning 80% of its revenues return to it.

Since August, 2007, Fee Demo dollars have been used to benefit visitors in several ways.

Last fall the park built a new pavilion in the Malaquite Visitor Center parking lot in order to provide visitors with an alternative location for parties, weddings, school field trips, and other group functions, instead of the visitor center deck, which is sometimes crowded with other visitors or groups. Construction of this pavilion will enable two large functions to take place simultaneously with a minimum amount of traffic congestion. It will also provide visitors with shelter from the rain during unexpected showers.



Malaquite Picnic Shelter

Last year, the park removed the rarely-used northern four acres of the visitor center parking lot, so that the four-acre area could be restored to native grassland, thereby enhancing the park's natural beauty for visitor enjoyment. Removal of this area also allows the park to provide other facilities in addition to the above-mentioned pavilion. An additional vault toilet of the same design as seen at the entrance to South Beach will be built in the edge of the restored area so that visitors utilizing the pavilion will have nearby restroom facilities. The new vault toilet will also provide visitors with facilities when the Malaquite Visitor Center restrooms are closed for cleaning. The park has also applied for a grant to construct a small night-sky viewing area between the pavilion and the vault toilet. This "observatory" will consist of a 30' X 40' concrete pad surrounded by a six-foot high fence. This will enable astronomers to set up their telescopes at the park's star parties on a solid surface in order to minimize vibration while affording protection from wind, salt spray, and the headlights of approaching vehicles.

This year, the park will update its radio system in order to provide improved emergency services for visitors throughout the park—even as distant as the Mansfield Channel. The upgrade will also enhance the capabilities of the park's law enforcement division to interact with local, state, and other federal agencies in conducting operations within the park against such illegal activities as smuggling, poaching, and destruction of natural resources. The park will also replace all park garbage cans and recycling bins with receptacles less susceptible to corrosion, improving the park's general appearance.

Finally, the park will replace the deteriorating fence around park headquarters in order to improve the park scenery. Upcoming projects which have been submitted for support by Fee Demonstration funds include:

- (1) Upgrading the program area/campfire circle at the Malaquite Campground, including better seating, a viewing screen and electricity for presentations, and also lighting along an improved walkway, enhancing visitor safety;
- (2) Installing new barbeque pits and picnic tables at each site in the Malaquite Campground; and
- (3) Replacing the current boardwalk from the Malaquite Visitor Center to the beach with one that goes over the dunes, rather than cutting through them. This will allow that dune to restore itself to its natural state. This will also allow visitors on the boardwalk to have a better view of the dunes and beach from an elevated position. Visitors may expect to see these projects start to take shape as soon as the park receives the requested funds.

Kid's Corner

Word Find

These shells were all found at Padre Island National Seashore. How many have you found? Some are hard to find on the beach, but you can find all of them in the word find.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Quahog | k. Baby's Ear |
| b. Bay Scallop | l. Atlantic Winged Oyster |
| c. Atlantic Cockle | m. Heart Urchin |
| d. Disk Dosinia | n. Saw-toothed Pen Shell |
| e. Angel Wing | o. Lettered Olive |
| f. Incongruous Ark | p. Sundial |
| g. Scotch Bonnet | q. Turkey Wing |
| h. Sanddollar | r. Eastern Murex |
| i. Spiny Jewel Box | s. Florida Fighting Conch |
| j. Moon Snail | t. Lightning Whelk |



E J E B U T M E S S K L T U W K D I P O B X Y D M
V M E I T N S E T B D I S K D O S I N I A N T B Y
T I M O M A T L A N T I C W I N G E D O Y S T E R
B I S C O T C H B O N N E T A Q E T D E S L L E R
O T F L O R I D A F I G H T I N G C O N C H I M E
N E T A N G E L W I N G T E W T I Y O L A A G S Y
S H E L S A W T O O T H E D P E N S H E L L H O Y
L E S U N D I A L A T L S I T A C U C T L A T T Y
C A T L A N T I C C O C K L E S O Z R T O X N Y O
E R A Y I E D L E Y K G B N W T N R V E P E I M Q
I T S R L F K T Y L Z W E R N E G Y I R E D N U P
T U R K E Y W I N G J E I P S R R F E E L E G W M
O R V R U M S E H J Q K T U W N U I B D A D W F E
T C D C H E K D T U P A D N R M O E B O L W H L L
C H P E Q U A H O G S E E K Y U U D E L T P E I T
G I M M E R S A N D D O L L A R S R Y I S C L I T
I N Y U W C T N E L O R C X Y E A T H V E F K B E
U S S P I N E Y J E W E L B O X R O S E F R P M C
Q P D U M E D B V F S Y J E V N K Y S M X R U Q S

WESTERN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION



The Padre Island National Seashore Passport Stamp

It's Here, It's Here!

The Passport to Your National Parks 2009 Stamp Series has arrived! And for the first time, Padre Island National Seashore is featured as an official Passport Stamp. We have had so many visitors ask throughout the years why our park didn't have one. The only way for a park to receive a stamp is by entering a photo contest, hosted by Eastern National Parks Association. If your photo wins for your region, then the Passport Stamp is included in the next series.

Tracy Parris, who is the Bookstore Manager at the Malaquite Visitor Center, took the beautiful picture that won the contest. She has worked for the Western National Parks Association for two years. The picturesque scenery is just one of many benefits of working at the beach. Meeting people from all around the world is another satisfying aspect of working at Padre Island National Seashore.

So, the next time you come and visit the National Seashore stop by the visitor center and check out our outstanding selection of books. And, don't forget to buy the 2009 Passport to Your National Parks Stamp Series!

At the Malaquite Visitor Center, the Western National Parks Association operates a small bookstore. The Malaquite Beach Bookstore carries postcards, magnets, posters, bookmarks, and a wide variety of books on local history, birds, sea turtles, other local wildlife, and much more. You can visit the bookstore when you enter the Malaquite Visitor Center, as it is co-located with the park museum and information desk.

Please note that school teachers are eligible for a 20% discount at the Malaquite Beach Bookstore.

For more information, contact the Malaquite Visitor Center at 361.949.8068.

20% Discount

For all teachers and homeschool educators. When you check out at the Malaquite Visitor Center Bookstore, mention that you are a teacher or a homeschool educator and get a 20% discount on all of your educational purchases!

Forget something?

During your recent visit to Padre Island National Seashore, did you check out our bookstore, but forgot your wallet or credit card? Check out the Western National Parks Association website to order your favorite publications and help support your parks.

<http://www.wnpa.org>

Health and Safety Tips

Swimming

Use caution when swimming and never swim alone. Strong currents flowing parallel to the beach, tides flowing to and from the beach, and sudden drop-offs in the surf can be dangerous for swimmers and waders alike. If caught in a riptide, 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. You will not make it.

Hazardous materials

These 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.

Metal detectors

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. Collection of live sea creatures is prohibited.

Pets

Pets must be on a leash and under physical restraint at all times. Pets are not permitted at the Malaquite Visitor Center area, including the designated swim beach in front of the visitor center. Pet waste is becoming a growing problem. Please clean up after your animals.

Gray water and sewage

Gray water and sewage must be disposed of only at the dump station at the Malaquite Beach campground.

Driving

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. Drive with caution and strictly observe posted speed limits. Pedestrians have the right-of-way at all times and do not always watch for approaching vehicles.

Portuguese Man-of-War

These amazing creatures are found at the park throughout the year. These attractive, blue jellyfish like creatures cause a painful sting, which is usually accompanied by redness and some swelling of the affected skin area. If stung, seek first aid. A very small percentage of those stung will experience an allergic reaction, which can cause difficulty breathing, numbness in the arms, legs or elsewhere, severe pain, and/or disorientation or unconsciousness. Visitors experiencing these or other symptoms should notify a park ranger immediately and seek medical attention.

Sting Rays

These relatives of the shark; can inflict a puncture wound in the lower leg that can be extremely painful. If you are in the water, we recommend doing the "sting-ray shuffle"; instead of walking, shuffle along, so instead of stepping on a sting ray you actually nudge it, thereby causing it to swim away.

Rattlesnakes

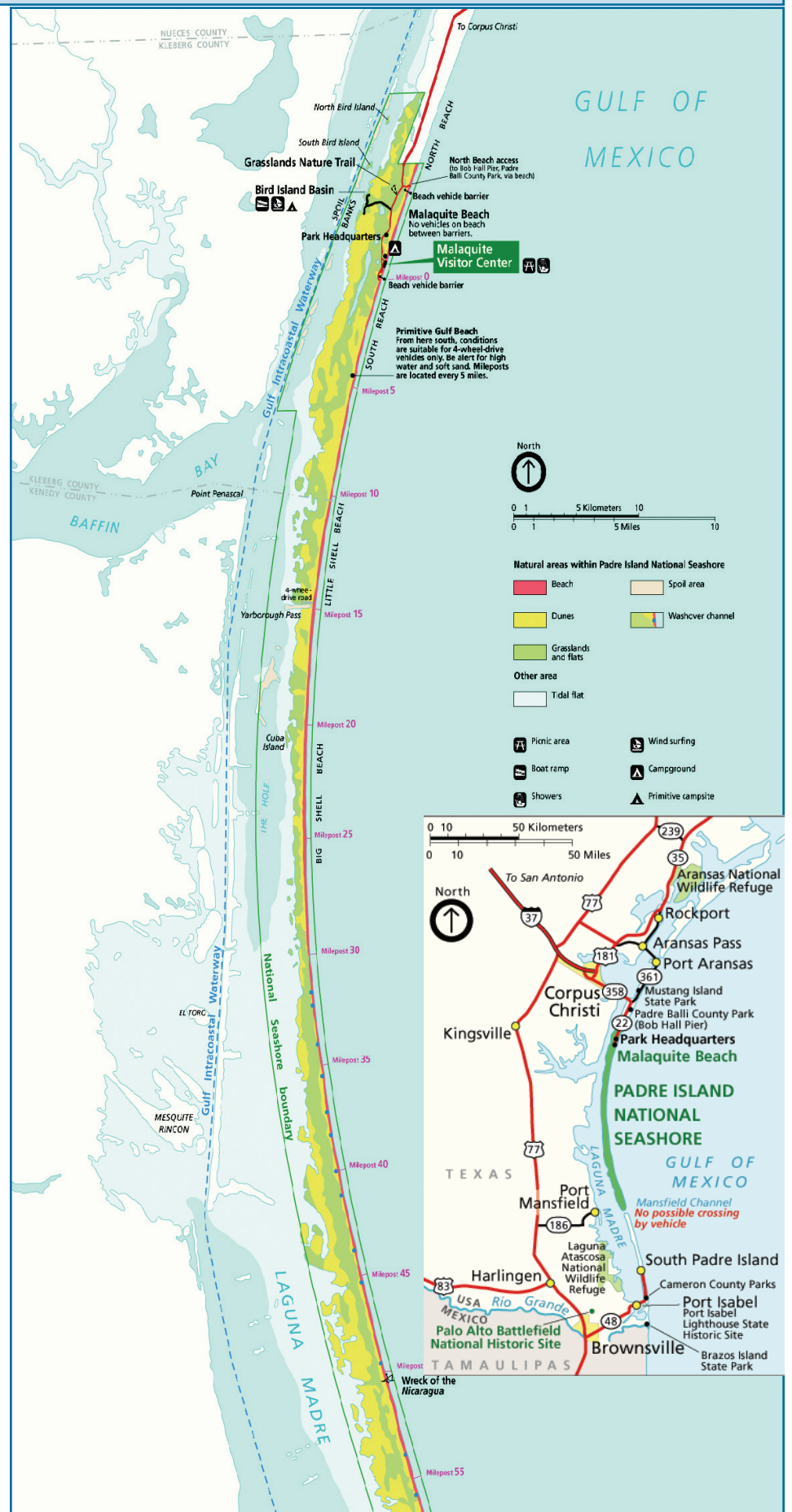
Rattlesnakes live in the dunes, grasslands, and mudflats. Visitors should use extreme caution when walking in these areas.

Hunting

Hunting is not permitted in the park, except for the taking of waterfowl 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.

Loaded firearms are strictly prohibited. A Concealed Handgun License, issued under the authority of the State of Texas, or another state is not valid at Padre Island National Seashore.

Jet skis, air boats, and kite surfing are prohibited.



IN CASE OF MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If you have a medical emergency during your visit, contact a park ranger immediately or go to the First Aid station at the Malaquite Visitor Center. If an employee is not immediately available, you may summon assistance for any emergency by dialing 911.

The closest hospital is Bay Area Medical Center, located at the corner of South Padre Island Drive and Rodd Field Road in Corpus Christi. This facility is 24 miles from the visitor center.