

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION
RELATIVE TO
THE PROPOSED
CAPE HATTERAS NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA
JULY 20, 1950

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

GEORGE R. ROSS, DIRECTOR

RALEIGH

July 28, 1950

TO GOVERNOR W. KERR SCOTT, AS DIRECTOR OF THE BUDGET,
AND MEMBERS OF THE N. C. CAPE HATTERAS SEASHORE COMMISSION:

After the meeting of the Commission and visit of Messrs. Wirth and Allen of the National Park Service on March 8, and as a result of communications by telephone and letter, it was mutually agreed between Messrs. Wirth and Allen and your Chairman that some local work should be done immediately to determine the areas of the local communities and the wishes of the local people for the protection of the future development of the several villages should the National Park be established. I quote from Mr. Allen's letter of March 16, 1950:

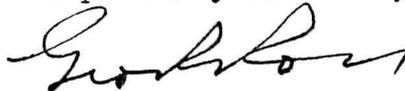
"Following the meeting at Nags Head, Mr. Wirth and I accompanied you to a meeting in Avon where all communities were well represented and later we visited Ocracoke with you and Carleton Kelly. Among the questions put to us at Avon, were some concerned with the exact project boundaries proposed adjacent to the villages. This, we agreed, should be studied and discussed in detail by someone with time to spend at each village.

"Until the State of North Carolina decides to assign its land acquisition program to the National Park Service, we are without authority or funds to handle any negotiations with the villages or to place a representative in such negotiations. Nevertheless, it is important that you do everything possible to follow through on the Avon meeting and conduct such studies. If you find it possible to finance a representative on the Banks for this purpose, we will be very happy to arrange that your man secure the advice and guidance of our Kill Devil Hill representative while he is there and will, in addition, send a man from this office to meet with him and start him off well."

You are familiar with the letter of March 23 from me, as Director of the Department of Conservation and Development, to Mr. Allen, copy of which was sent to each of you.

As a result, I hand you herewith the report made on the Islands by Mr. Marion J. Shuffler which, I think, offers a suitable basis for present discussions and action by the Commission.

Respectfully submitted,



George R. Ross, Chairman
N. C. Cape Hatteras Seashore
Commission

I would feel remiss in the assignment did I fail to write briefly of the present physical and economical aspects of Hatteras Island as I have found them.

GEOGRAPHICALLY

At the present time Hatteras Island is only slightly less isolated from the mainland than it was a century ago. It has a hard surface road of approximately twenty miles in length, connecting the villages of Avon, Buxton and Hatteras. A ferry operates between the village of Hatteras on the Island and Engelhard on the mainland, making round trips three times a week part of the year, and daily except Sunday for the remainder. It leaves Hatteras at 8:45 A. M., returning at 6 P. M., and can accomodate three automobiles and a limited number of passengers. A bus operates daily between Hatteras and Manteo, leaving Hatteras at 8 A. M., and returning at 7 P. M. After the ferry and bus have gone, it is impossible to get off the Island except with the most favorable tide and wind conditions. With the pending advent of hard surface roads, modern air travel and communications, that isolation is coming to its end, and the Island must look ahead to a new era and face it with vision or its destruction could be irreparable.

I am told by older residents of the Island that they can recall when large and marketable timber prevailed throughout the length and breadth of the Island. This timber was cut many years ago without regard to conservation methods. Large stumps can now be found as evidence of this. The Island now has only a small acreage of wooded land in the Buxton-Frisco area, the young pines planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the State Park area, and a grove of young pines, about three miles in length, planted by the Public Works Administration, just south of the village of Salvo. Other than this the prevailing vegetation is sea grass.

The sand ridges in the Pea Island National Game Refuge and those built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the State Park area are all that remain as protection against beach erosion. The Island is subject to strong winds and high tides, so much so, that several times each year the waters from the Atlantic Ocean cross the Island to Pamlico Sound, except in a few small areas.

Very little of the Island area outside of the present villages is conducive to residential or other construction. An example of this is the Club House property (Tract 43), located about mid-way between the villages of Avon and Buxton. The site of the club house was surrounded on the north, east and south by high sand ridges, and did contain a valuable club house and other buildings. In 1944 the buildings were carried into Pamlico Sound by high tides and wind and nothing remains other than the crumbling concrete foundations.

It is a prevailing practice on the Island to haul sand from any convenient dune or ridge for construction use. I have observed this practice. It has been reported to me that employees of the State Highway and Public Works Commission do the same in road repair. I have not seen this. Ample sand for any present or future construction could be secured under intelligent control without causing any erosion, as is done in the vicinity of Jennett's Pier on Bodie Island, where sand is hauled from the strand and is replaced by wind and tide.

I have carefully inspected the area of Hatteras Island and am constrained to express the lay opinion that in a few years the Island will become a chain of small islands connected by sand bars if thrown open to competitive development without scientific control of sand and beach erosion. Attention is called to New Inlet which broke through on the northern end of the Island several years ago, and the areas that have practically eroded down to

Hatteras Island, unlike most of the Outer Banks area, has an extremely wide expanse of Sound water to the north and west, leaving it open to wind and tides, so that it is not conducive to beach development such as that at Nags Head where the Island is uniformly wider and is protected to the west by Roanoke Island. Further, the only water available on the Island for household use, outside the Buxton-Frisco area, is rain water from roof tops and stored in cisterns.

Historically, Hatteras Island is reputed as one of the burial grounds for Pirate Gold. It could end its place in history as a burial ground for Fools Gold.

ECONOMICALLY

From the settlement of this Island its residents have almost entirely depended upon fishing, seafaring, and service in the Coast Guard and Light House Service for their livelihood. For the past several years commercial fishermen have barely eked out a living. Seafaring, in the type of vessels for which they are fitted by environment and training, no longer ply the seas. With modern communications, boats and equipment, Coast Guard and Light House Service is not dependent upon strong men acquainted with storms at sea, and oarsmen manning a life boat have written their pages in history at the Grave Yard of Ships.

The Island is not suitable for any present day industrial development, not even the processing of sea products. There is no agriculture on the Island. A small number of vegetable gardens in Buxton and Frisco. A few chickens and ducks, and no livestock. All of which points to the conclusion that residents of the Island must look to the tourist and sportsman.