



# The Last Lonely Shore: Nature, Man, and the Making of Assateague Island National Seashore

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On September 21, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation establishing the Assateague Island National Seashore on Maryland's Eastern Shore. "One-fifth of all the people in our nation live within an easy day's drive of Assateague," he remarked, in tribute to the bill's congressional sponsors. "And now, as a result of your labors . . . these wide sandy beaches will be the peoples' to enjoy forever." In the ensuing decades, Assateague Island's natural scenery would charm hundreds of thousands of visitors, evoking the sentiments, if not the verse, of the nineteenth-century British romantic, Lord Byron. "There is a rapture on the lonely shore; There is society where none intrudes; by the deep sea, and music in its roar."<sup>1</sup>

Most visitors know little about how Assateague became a national seashore. Accounts in newspapers and environmental magazines usually, and somewhat misleadingly, credit William E. Green, a local resident, with leading an almost one-man crusade to preserve the island. Yet this interpretation ignores the fact that Green died in 1963, two years before the area gained status as a national

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1. White House press release, "Remarks of the President at the Signing Ceremony for Assateague Island National Seashore Park Bill," September 21, 1965, folder 2, box 125, Stewart L. Udall Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of Arizona (hereinafter cited Udall Papers); "Last Lonely Shore," *Washington Star*, June 6, 1963.

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*Street sign, Assateague Island. (Courtesy Assateague Island National Seashore.)*

seashore. It also neglects another reality—by the 1960s, the fate of Assateague had become a “hotly contested” national issue pitting advocates of outdoor recreation and wilderness preservation against those who wanted to develop the island for private residential and commercial purposes. The struggle thus brought together what the historian Samuel P. Hays has called the three competing forces of environmental politics, namely, “individuals and groups motivated to protect the environment, the environmental opposition, and the institutions of policy development.” In the end, the opponents of development triumphed, with crucial assistance from the federal government. By 1967, accomplishments such as Assateague Island National Seashore enabled Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall to proclaim that “A necklace of six national seashores has been placed around our country.”<sup>2</sup>

As the “necklace” analogy suggests, the federal government’s campaign to take charge of Assateague and other “precious” seashores and “string” them together was by design, not accident. Assateague, the last (and largest) undeveloped beach between North Carolina and Massachusetts, offered an ideal recreation venue for residents of the Baltimore and the Washington, D.C., areas. Passage of the Assateague National Seashore Act coincided with a drive, particularly strong between 1958 and 1965, to enhance outdoor recreation and preserve the natural environment for human enjoyment. Yet the founding of this national seashore suggested that these two aims were not identical and that the movement for wilderness preservation had not exactly peaked by 1965. Resistance to the Assateague Act proved fierce, and the law, by permitting token commercial development, kept the permanence of the island’s near-pristine status in doubt. Not until the mid-1970s, after a decade of environmental activism and landmark legislation, would Congress further confirm Assateague’s “raw” status.<sup>3</sup>

2. “Assateague—The Nation’s Newest Seashore Park,” *Chester River Press*, November 10, 1965; Linda G. Weimer, “The Irascible Savior of Assateague Island,” *Sierra* (May/June, 1986): 64–70; Oren Beatty Oral History, 178, John F. Kennedy Library (hereinafter cited Kennedy Library); Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 2; “Proposed Statement by Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall Concerning Achievements During the Last 81 Months,” no date (late 1967), folder 11, box 133, Udall Papers.

3. “Last Lonely Shore,” *Washington Star*, June 6, 1963; Samuel P. Hays, *Explorations in Environmental History: Essays by Samuel P. Hays* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 343; Vaughn Davis Bornet, *The Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1983), 136–46; Martin V. Melosi, “Lyndon Johnson and Environmental Policy” in *The Johnson Years, Vol. 2: Vietnam, the Environment, and Science*, ed. Robert A. Divine (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 113–49; Lewis L. Gould, *Lady Bird Johnson and the Environment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), xi; Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 261–306; Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230.

Nevertheless, passage of the Assateague Island National Seashore Act represented an important breakthrough, one made possible by both natural events and farseeing policy-makers. In 1962 the effect of a destructive hurricane reinforced doubts about the island's ability to sustain development. As renewed interest to expand outdoor recreation and public parks gathered momentum, Udall, more than any other individual, pushed for a law to designate Assateague Island as a national seashore. Maryland lawmakers, led by Representative Rogers C. B. Morton, a Republican, replied with their own bill. Bipartisan discussions produced a measure that reserved six hundred acres of the national seashore for road construction and accommodations. Johnson's message on natural beauty, issued in 1965, boosted the bill's prospects for passage and helped transform Udall's vision into reality.

To some extent, one notices a reversal of the familiar story whereby environmentally conscious easterners strove to protect the natural treasures of the West. Regarding Assateague, some of the principal players, especially Senator Daniel Brewster, who sponsored the national seashore act, were Maryland natives. Others, however, including Udall, an Arizonan, Johnson, a Texan, and even Morton, originally from Kentucky, came from points west of Maryland. They were politicians of national outlook more than cause-driven activists and, as such, were apt to compromise to further an agenda. Their contributions to saving Assateague Island, of course, varied. And yet, together, they thwarted the forces of private development and helped preserve the Atlantic Coast's last remaining stretch of unprotected beach.

Like barrier islands themselves, the debate on Assateague's future would shift over time. The struggle over the island posed two questions—the simple and direct question of whether or not the island should be developed for residential purposes and the more complicated matter of the national seashore's future. Specifically, would it be chiefly a venue for outdoor recreation or a wilderness area with limited public access? The Assateague National Seashore Act resolved the former debate but not the latter. In fielding both questions, Udall performed a delicate balancing act. The secretary rejected private development, paid more than lip service to demands for added recreation areas, but shaped the Assateague Act in such a way as to limit human use. In succeeding years, visitors found that they liked the island's primitive state, and policy-makers successfully preserved it "as is." Udall's vision—and actions—had cast long shadows indeed.

Assateague Island stretches thirty-seven miles from north to south. The northern part, twenty-two miles in length, lies in Maryland and the southern part, approximately fifteen miles long, is in Virginia. The island consists of three distinct entities. Assateague State Park, over six hundred acres of land operated by the State of Maryland, is situated on the upper third of the island, flanked, on the north and south, by Assateague Island National Seashore. To the south, one finds Chincoteague



*Cottages and road before the 1962 storm. (Dr. William Wroten Papers, Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture, Salisbury University.)*

National Wildlife Refuge, an area managed, along with the National Seashore, by the federal government.<sup>4</sup>

Assateague is part of a chain of low relief, sand-covered barrier islands extending from New England to Mexico. Although their topography varies—some are high and wide with forests, others are narrow with scattered trees, and a few are no more than strips of sand—barrier islands are moving, shifting, and, to developers, treacherous. On the East and Gulf Coasts, where the ground slopes gradually toward the sea, the cumulative effect of wind, sun, surf, and low sea level loosens the sand, allowing waves to alter these islands, often gently but at times noticeably. “The barrier islands which protect most of the Gulf and East coasts have existed continuously for thousands of years,” write geologists Wallace Kaufman and Orrin H. Pilkey Jr., “but they have retreated many miles.” Barrier islands, of course, are something more than scientific curiosities, and they do more than “protect” the mainland. Curtis J. Badger and Rick Kellam, authors of a photographic study of America’s barrier islands, described the chain of islands near Virginia’s Eastern Shore as “a national treasure, a wilderness system just as vital and awe-inspiring as the mountains and canyons of the West.”<sup>5</sup>

4. Barry Mackintosh, *Assateague Island National Seashore: An Administrative History* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), 1, 81–82, 101–2.

5. Cornelia Dean, *Against the Tide: The Battle for America’s Beaches* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 22–27; Wallace Kaufman and Orrin Pilkey Jr., *The Beaches Are Moving:*

Assateague itself is known for many things, beginning with its unspoiled scenery. Along with the other barrier islands along the Delmarva Peninsula's southern coastline, the island formed during the glacial and sub-glacial periods and lies just yards from the mainland, a fact underscored by its name, an Indian word meaning "across" or "place across." Assateague is home to nearly one hundred species of birds, including snow geese and ospreys, and herds of hardy, wild ponies which, according to legends, were originally set ashore either by pirates, a shipwrecked Spanish galleon, or the English in Virginia. Human contact with the island has proven sporadic. Native American tribes, including the Assateague, Nanticoke, and Pocomoke, came to hunt and fish, not to settle. In 1524 the peninsula's "long, thin, sandy islands," surrounded by shoal waters, failed to impress explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano who, at best, visited them briefly before sailing north to New York. Settled by the English in the 1660s, Maryland's Eastern Shore remained agricultural and lagged behind its western counterpart economically, allowing Assateague to remain isolated for over two centuries.<sup>6</sup>

The island's fragile terrain also hindered its development. Assateague possesses low elevation, a slender, approximately one-mile width, and an unstable shoreline, where dunes of sands rise no higher than ten or fifteen feet. The land, with the exceptions of grazing and hunting waterfowl, had few uses and was taxed at a pittance—fifty cents an acre during the early twentieth century. The region's rural economy began to change following the emergence of Ocean City, on the middle part of the island, as Maryland's first seaside resort. A venture to transform the southern part into "Atlantic City, Maryland" lured 2,500 investors, but then collapsed with the onset of hard times in the immediate aftermath of World War I.

Years later a hurricane reminded the public of Assateague's tenuous topography. The "Great Storm of '33" battered the Atlantic Coast with heavy rains and high breaking waves called "tidal bores," one of which struck the southern tip of Ocean City, forming an inlet twelve feet deep, two hundred feet wide. The bore

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*The Drowning of America's Shoreline* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983), 24; Curtis J. Badger and Rick Kellam, *The Barrier Islands: A Photographic History of Life on Hog, Cobb, Smith, Cedar, Parramore, Metompkin & Assateague* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1989), xi.

6. William H. Wroten Jr., *Assateague*, 2nd Edition (Centreville, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1972), 1; "Assateague of the Past," unpublished paper, no date [1969], 1, Worcester Room, Vertical File: Assateague, Worcester County Public Library, Snow Hill, Maryland (hereinafter cited Worcester Library); Wroten, *Assateague*, 27–30, 7–10; "Assateague of the Past," 2, Worcester Library; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 299. Verrazzano landed in a lush, wooded area that he called Arcadia. Although Morison argues that Arcadia was located near present-day Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, some Maryland historians believe that the explorer had, in fact, landed in modern-day Worcester County, opposite Assateague Island. See Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages*, 295; Wroten, *Assateague*, 11–12; Reginald



During the 1950s and 1960s, developers tried to build a private residential area on the island. (Courtesy Assateague Island National Seashore.)

Styled as the "New Atlantic Coast Playground," Ocean Beach's streets, like those of Ocean City, would be laid out in a grid, and access to its shoreline would be restricted to residents and their guests. Ackerman's group distributed brochures

sliced the barrier island, originally sixty-five miles long, in two. The upper half consists of Fenwick Island, Delaware, and Ocean City, Maryland. The lower half is Assateague Island. In 1943 the federal government established Chincoteague Wildlife Preserve on the Virginia portion of Assateague. The island's northern part, situated, along with Ocean City, in Maryland's Worcester County, remained both undeveloped and unprotected. Proposals for public ownership, whether at the federal or state level, floundered during the 1930s and 1940s, leaving Assateague's future in doubt.<sup>7</sup>

In 1952 the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge linking Maryland's western and eastern shores encouraged real estate developers to give Assateague a second look. Investors from Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, led by Leon Ackerman, a lawyer from Silver Spring, Maryland, acquired much of the island, and then subdivided and marketed it to the public. Ackerman proposed forming "Ocean Beach, Maryland," a new community of privately owned homes.

V. Truitt and Millard G. Les Callette, *Worcester County: Maryland's Arcadia* (Snow Hill, Md.: Worcester County Historical Society, 1977), 6–9; Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634–1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 159–60; Truitt and Les Callette, *Worcester County*, 59–62, 77–83.

7. Wroten, *Assateague*, 1–3; Truitt and Les Callette, *Worcester County*, 108–29; "Assateague Island," lecture given by Dr. and Mrs. Reginald V. Truitt before the Caroline County Garden Club, January 31, 1966, Worcester Library; Federal Writers' Project, Work Progress Administration, *Maryland: A Guide to the Old Line State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 381; "Assateague Has a Checkered Past," *Salisbury Daily Times*, April 5, 1992.

that appealed to investors' eyes, with a cover featuring a buxom, smiling female bather waving from a sunny seashore, and text that stressed Ocean Beach's "easy motoring distance" less than three hours from Baltimore, Washington, and Philadelphia. Nearly 3,600 people purchased 8,000 lots on Assateague, a sales campaign that the U.S. Department of the Interior thought "successful." For that reason, perhaps, the federal government temporarily lost interest in transforming the island into a national park.<sup>8</sup>

Efforts at private development faced a familiar obstacle. Accessible by ferry alone, Assateague struck potential investors as too remote from the mainland. Moreover, businesses in Ocean City, concerned about a rival community springing up to their south, showed little enthusiasm for the island's development. Partly as a result, no more than fifty homes, mainly summer cottages, were ever constructed on Assateague. By 1958 the island had one road, twenty-two buildings, "a few wild cows, wild ponies, and an overabundance of meaningless, white street markers on nonexistent streets." When property owners on Assateague formed a corporation to finance a bridge connecting "Ocean Beach" with the mainland, they attracted insufficient private funds and a warm, then cool, response from Worcester County officials, one of whom surmised that the county had no legal right to place its faith and credit behind the project. At the same time, however, the prospect of a second Ocean City, from which Worcester County derived a sizeable portion of its tax revenues, continued to animate the three-member county commission.<sup>9</sup>

By the mid-1950s a single activist had taken the lead in resisting the plans of promoters. William E. Green, a retired heating contractor from New York, observed the efforts to develop Assateague from his home on the Sinepuxent Bay, opposite the island. To Green, the "Ocean Beach" scheme was nothing more than a "swindle." "These poor suckers bought land thinking a private bridge would be built to the island," he sneered. "They should live so long." Dedicated, driven, and lacking in subtlety, Green spent his fortune of \$300,000 on a publicity campaign to stymie the entire project.<sup>10</sup>

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8. Brugger, *Maryland*, 575–77; "Assateague Has a Checkered Past," *Salisbury Daily Times*, April 5, 1992; "Ocean Beach, Maryland: New Atlantic Coast Playground," no date, folder 11, box 1.1, Rogers C. B. Morton Papers, Department of Special Collections, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington (hereinafter cited Morton Papers); "Assateague Island National Seashore," Department of the Interior Administrative History, Vol. I, Part II [1 of 2], box 2, Administrative Histories, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereinafter cited Johnson Library); "Assateague Has a Checkered Past," *Salisbury Daily Times*, April 5, 1992.

9. "Assateague Island National Seashore," Johnson Library; news clipping, "State Rapped on Island's Development," November 24, 1958, Worcester Library; news clipping, "County Backing for Bridge Is Called Illegal," no date, Worcester Room, Vertical File, Assateague, Worcester Library; Weimer, "The Irascible Savior of Assateague Island," 66.

10. "Financial Drain Won't Stop—1 Man Assateague Crusade," *Baltimore Sun*, October 8,

It would be wrong, however, to portray Green as a farsighted environmentalist struggling to preserve the island's natural state. He was more interested in advancing the "public interest" by protecting the rights of small investors against the avarice of fast-talking developers. He also worked toward enhancing outdoor recreation for all citizens. For Green, Assateague's future lay in a public authority possessing the power to build roads, sewers, boat harbors, parks, beaches, and concessions similar to those on Jones Beach, Long Island. "That this last virgin beach on the eastern seaboard should someday be developed [is] inevitable," he asserted, in a page-long newspaper notice. Green's greatest accomplishment was placing the question of Assateague Island's future before the state legislature. Beginning in 1955, he annually prodded the state government, and the general public, to enact his program. In 1957, B. Herman Adkins and Reginald V. Truitt formed the Worcester County Committee with fifty volunteers. As did Green, the group recommended "sharing this great asset with the thousands . . . of people who want precisely what Assateague has to offer." Green's chief shortcoming was his abrasiveness. "Once the novelty wore off, he found it difficult to buttonhole listeners," one correspondent recalled. "So he tried harder." That meant additional publicity efforts and more trips to the state capital.<sup>11</sup>

In 1959, J. Millard Tawes, Maryland's Democratic governor, entered the fray by naming a panel to examine ways of financing a bridge linking Assateague to the rest of the state. Tawes, a native of Crisfield on the Eastern Shore, grasped the need to balance fiscal discipline against economic boosterism, particularly for his "vigorous," "thriving," "progressive," and, paradoxically, "up-and-coming" native region. The governor also professed his "great interest in the development and growth of Ocean City."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, in 1961, he signed legislation to construct a \$1.5 million concrete and steel bridge for Assateague, financed with state and county monies. To appease, perhaps, opponents of private development, Tawes

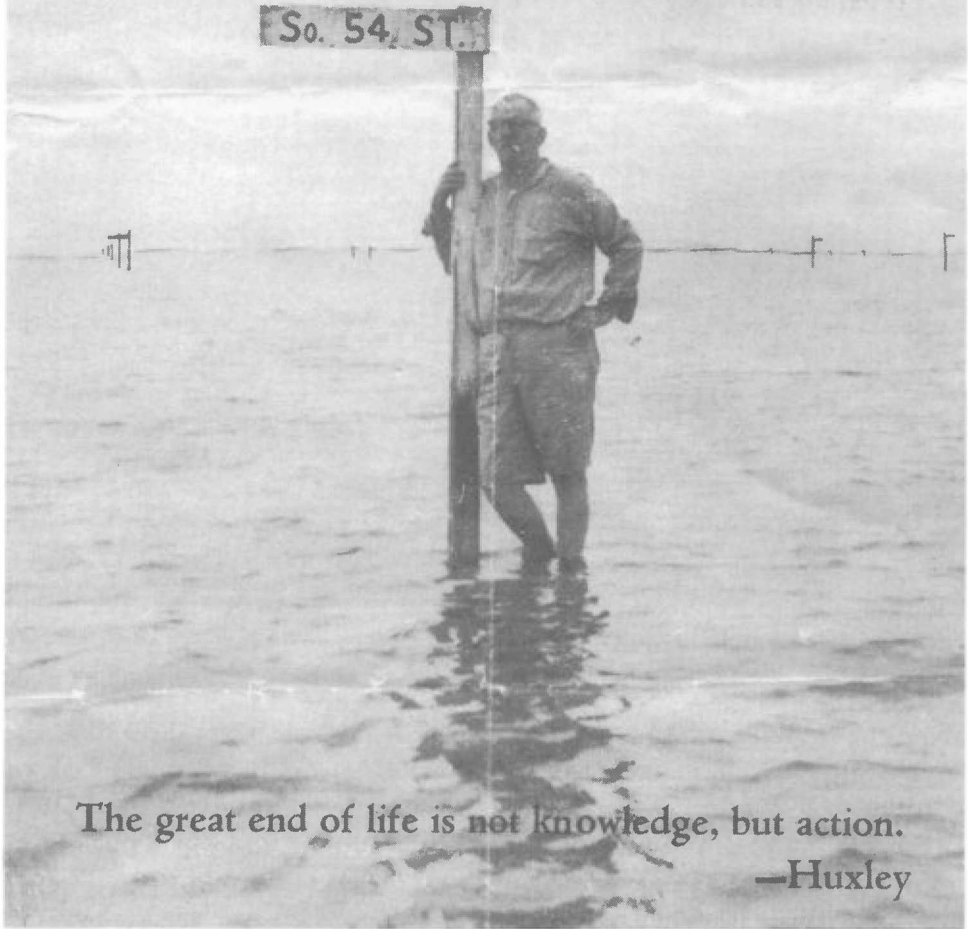
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1961; "William Green's Dream for Assateague Has Come True," *Cambridge Daily Banner*, September 23, 1965, Assateague Island, Maryland Vertical Files, Blackwell Library, Salisbury University, Salisbury, Maryland (hereinafter cited Blackwell Library).

11. William E. Green, "Why You Should Care About Assateague Island," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, February 14, 1957; Reginald V. Truitt, *Assateague . . . The "Place Across": A Saga of Assateague Island* (College Park, Md.: Natural Resources Institute, 1971), 41; "William Green's Dream for Assateague Has Come True," *Cambridge Daily Banner*, September 23, 1965.

12. "Tawes Selects Assateague Isle Study Group," *Salisbury Daily Times*, May 24, 1961; Richard Walsh and William Lloyd Fox, eds., *Maryland: A History, 1632-1974* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1974), 828-30, 842-43; Brugger, *Maryland*, 604-6; "Address, Economic Development in Talbot County, Easton," March 28, 1960, Conley H. Dillon, ed., *Messages, Addresses, and Public Papers of J. Millard Tawes, Governor of Maryland 1959-1963*, Vol. I (Annapolis: State of Maryland, 1967), 165; J. Millard Tawes to Harry W. Kelly, March 30, 1962, Worcester County, J. Millard Tawes Papers, Governor J. Millard Tawes Library, Crisfield, Maryland (hereinafter cited Tawes Papers).

# ASSATEAGUE ISLAND



William E. Green. (Courtesy Assateague Island National Seashore.)

also approved legislation to form a small state park on the island's northern end. Unmoved, Green charged the state with misusing taxpayer dollars in order to boost property values on Assateague.<sup>13</sup>

Nature transformed the debate on the island's future. In 1962 plans for a bridge linking Assateague to the mainland progressed to the drawing board, and the state prepared to acquire a nine-mile strip of beach on the island's upper half for its park. Yet, the effect of another hurricane, in March, reawakened doubts

13. "Tawes to Sign Assateague Bill," *Salisbury Daily Times*, April 26, 1961; "Gov. Tawes Blasted in Assateague Row," *Salisbury Daily Times*, July 14, 1959.



*Prior to the 1962 storm, Assateague's only paved road. (Courtesy Edward H. Nabb Center, Salisbury University.)*

about the feasibility of human settlement on Assateague. Over three days, the “Ash Wednesday” storm, one of the worst nor’easters in memory, pounded the coastline from Virginia to Long Island. In as many as five places, the Atlantic Ocean swept across Assateague and into Chincoteague Bay, wiped out dunes, overran swamps with sand, and demolished “all but a dozen of the island’s forty buildings.” The storm obliterated the only paved road on Assateague—now described as both “sinking and migrating toward the west.” Public awareness of the possible danger of hurricanes to the island predated this disaster. Earlier, Green had distributed a photograph of himself in summer attire and nonchalant pose, his teeth clenching a cigarette, his arm clasp ing a makeshift street sign, standing in a submerged lot following a storm. The salt water, covering his ankles and extending into the horizon, visually underscored Green’s argument that Assateague could not sustain extensive development. Yet, since the picture’s subject had so often reiterated this point, one wonders how many Marylanders, until 1962, had paid attention.<sup>14</sup>

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14. “Construction of Bridge to Assateague May Start in February,” *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, January 3, 1962; news clippings, “Fair Weather Island,” no date, and “Udall Raises

The hurricane of 1962 marked a turning point in three respects. First, the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey confirmed that the nor'easter had shifted the island's shoreline 420 feet west at the northern inlet and 290 feet west one mile south. Accordingly, the national press attacked the folly of private developers. The *Washington Post* derided would-be Assateague residents as "gamblers in hip boots." The *New York Herald Tribune* agreed that the hurricane had exposed "great stretches of our Atlantic coast" as "vulnerable" and warned against "overbuilding on the beaches." The storm also roused additional foes of private development. For example, Irston R. Barnes, chairman of the Audubon Naturalist Society, denounced any private construction on Assateague as "an invitation to destruction and possibly loss of life." Most important, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall urged Tawes to defer action on the bridge that would undoubtedly facilitate Assateague's development. Udall instead invited the governor to pool state and federal resources to study conservation opportunities on Assateague. This seemingly innocuous proposal belied a radically different vision for the island's future.<sup>15</sup>

In Udall, the private developers faced a formidable adversary, one who possessed some of the best qualities of John F. Kennedy, Theodore Roosevelt, and Herbert Hoover. As a congressman from Arizona, Udall had backed JFK's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. Kennedy later rewarded him with the post at the Department of the Interior, a job traditionally reserved for westerners. "We want young, bright, tough-minded people," Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy reminded Udall. The forty-year-old interior secretary soon emerged as a "Kennedy type," someone who, like the president, exuded political savvy, intellect, industry, and grace under pressure. Like Theodore Roosevelt, the "trim and hard-muscled" Udall led a most strenuous life. This one-time University of Arizona basketball player preferred stairs to elevators and brisk walks to taxicabs. He enjoyed outdoor recreation, particularly jogging, hiking, rafting, and canoeing. His energy helped revive a lesser-known office in a manner reminiscent of Herbert Hoover when he led the Department of Commerce during the 1920s. And like Hoover, Udall meddled in other departments, publicized his ideas, (both men wrote well-received books while serving in the cabinet) and won admirers. In 1965 one reporter credited him with transforming Interior into "a truly national department of conservation."<sup>16</sup>

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Storm Over Storm-Buffered Island," August 5, 1963, both in folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers; "One Man's Fight for an Island," *Baltimore Sun*, April 28, 1963.

15. "Assateague's Shore Recarved by Storm," *Washington Post*, April 25, 1962; "Gamblers in Hip Boots," *Washington Post*, no date, and "Between Land and Sea," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 23, 1962, both in folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers; "Public Interest and Assateague," *Washington Post*, June 2, 1963; Stewart L. Udall to Tawes, no date [March 1962], and Udall to Tawes, April 24, 1962, both in folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers.

16. Stewart Udall notes for journal, December 2, 1960, folder 1, box 80, Udall Papers; Vincent

Udall, of course, did not work alone. By the early 1960s, public pressures to offer added venues for recreation and to preserve wilderness environs had accelerated in tandem with urban growth. "Our recreation resources," President Dwight D. Eisenhower asserted, "are as much a part of our national resources as are our minerals, our fuels, and our forests." Eisenhower named the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, to study the matter. Early in 1962 the group reported its findings, including a critique of the government for providing insufficient recreation space, particularly near coastal areas, and a plea for action "to reserve or acquire additional water, beach and shoreline areas, especially near centers of population." Members of Congress began drafting bills for new national parks in their districts, and President Kennedy vowed to save the nation's "rapidly disappearing recreation resources."<sup>17</sup>

By the early 1960s, it seems fair to say, programs to expand outdoor recreation were more apt to please a large number of citizens than one designed to keep wilderness areas in their pristine state.<sup>18</sup> JFK, like many politicians of his era,

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J. Burke, United Press International dispatch, December 7, 1960 and *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, April 19, 1964, in memorandum "What They Say About Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall," no date, folder 5, box 117, Udall Papers; "Press conference anecdotes, February 14, 1961 and Charles K. Boatner to Jerome Goldstein, February 13, 1968, box 1, Human Interest Files 1961–68, General Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior—Stewart L. Udall, Record Group (RG) 48, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland (hereinafter cited Udall Record Group); "Interior Secretary," *New York Times*, December 8, 1960; "Ubiquitous Udall," *Wall Street Journal*, October 11, 1965; "Udall's Aim: An America Worth Living In," *Yuma Sun*, April 20, 1967, and "Udall, Once Called Weak, Climbs to Fore in Cabinet," *Phoenix Gazette*, March 27, 1967. Hoover's book, *American Individualism* (1922) dealt with the domestic economy and won critical acclaim while Udall's environmental treatise, *The Quiet Crisis* (1963), became a bestseller. See Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 55–57 and Udall to John F. Kennedy (JFK), November 12, 1963, folder 7, box 107, Udall Papers; news clipping, "Secretary Udall, 'Mr. Conservation,'" February 14, 1965, Box 1, Human Interest Files, Udall Record Group.

17. "Program and Policy Objectives of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission: Preliminary Draft," no date, Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission 1959, box 878, Clinton P. Anderson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited Anderson Papers); "Latest Idea—More, Better U.S. Parks," *U.S. News and World Report*, no date [1962], box 1, Article Files 1961–68, Udall Record Group; National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, *Assateague Island National Seashore: A Proposal* 1965, 7, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers; JFK to Gaylord Nelson, October 1, 1962, PA3 Parks, box 657, White House Central Subject Files, Kennedy Library (hereinafter cited Central Subject Files).

18. The 1960s also marked the rise of a mass-based environmental movement. Long-established organizations grew at phenomenal rates. Membership in the Sierra Club, for example, doubled during the 1950s, doubled again between 1960 and 1965 and tripled between 1965 and 1970. The decade saw several environmental treatises become bestsellers. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) exposed the dangerous effects of pesticides; a chapter in Ralph Nader's

either ranked expanded recreation ahead of wilderness preservation or conflated the two aims. The bill to found Cape Cod National Seashore, which Kennedy, as a senator, had cosponsored, called for developing recreation facilities and then preserving the rest of the Cape as "primitive wilderness." When Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., a professor at Harvard University, objected to talk that this unspoiled beach must be preserved primarily for recreational purposes, Kennedy defended the law. "We cannot accept as inevitable a harsh conflict between 'recreation' and 'conservation,'" he asserted. "A balance must be struck."<sup>19</sup> Kennedy knew that the federal government could not take charge of a wilderness area and then deny the public access. Ultimately, he maintained, protecting Cape Cod was more likely to occur through government involvement, such as a national seashore, than through private development. By the time he signed this act, in 1961, President Kennedy cast a wider net and proposed other projects similar to the one at Cape Cod.<sup>20</sup>

Yet Kennedy, unlike Udall, never put his heart into either outdoor recreation or wilderness preservation. Rational and detached, the president was unsuited to leading a conservation crusade. Urbane, bookish, and in poor health, he had little contact with the outdoors, save for sailing near Cape Cod, sunbathing at his family's home in Florida, or playing an occasional game of touch football. Pre-

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*Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965) assailed corporate polluters in the automobile industry; and Paul R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1969) elevated concerns about population growth to near-crisis proportions. Moreover, environmentalism evolved as the events of the 1960s unfolded. At the outset, liberal academics and politicians championed environmental protection, partly to complete the agenda of the New Deal and partly to enhance Americans' quality of life during a time of affluence. President Johnson, for example, signed into law more than three hundred conservation-related bills. Meanwhile, middle-class women viewed pollution and other threats to the environment as hazardous to their homes and families and gave the movement an added push. Their concerns encouraged women's magazines to cover environmental issues, and, in 1969, women founded a grassroots organization called GOO—Get Oil Out—in response to an oil spill near Santa Barbara, California. By decade's end, both the counterculture and New Left had infused the values and tactics of the youth rebellion into environmentalism. Hippies in Eugene, Oregon, founded CRAP—Cyclists Revolting Against Pollution—to discourage automobile use, and, in April 1970, during an Earth Day demonstration in Washington, D.C., thousands of people sang the refrain: "All we are saying is give earth a chance." The drive for environmental protection had made great strides in ten years. Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *Journal of American History* 90 (September 2003): 525, 528, 534, 537, 538, 541–54; Bernstein, *Guns or Butter*, 261–65.

19. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. to Serge Chermayeff, December 6, 1960, Schlesinger to Clinton P. Anderson, May 6, 1960, and JFK to Schlesinger, May 27, 1960, all in folder: Cape Cod Park Correspondence, box P-1, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Papers, Kennedy Library (hereinafter cited Schlesinger Papers).

20. White House press release, "Remarks of the President on Signing S.857," August 7, 1961, Cape Cod Park Press Release 8/7/61, folder: Cape Cod Correspondence, box P-1, Schlesinger Papers.



*Assateague after a heavy rain, before the 1962 storm. (Courtesy Edward H. Nabb Research Center, Salisbury University.)*

serving wilderness areas remained, for this president, a lesser concern, an issue better left to Congress. During the 1960 presidential campaign and the first month of his administration, he took no position on a wilderness bill pending in the Senate. "He lacks the conservation-preservation insights of FDR & TR, and it will take some work to sharpen his thinking & *interest*," Udall conceded.<sup>21</sup>

Udall, too, often conflated recreation with wilderness preservation; yet unlike Kennedy he waxed passionate, even poetic, on the subject of the environment. He wrote that Americans "must be able to see an occasional tree or flower, stretch out once in a while with the earth firm beneath them." Udall championed a "new conservation" effort to succeed Theodore Roosevelt's program that had saved specific landmarks and Franklin D. Roosevelt's policies that had husbanded resources to promote economic recovery. Udall's strategy was national in scope and human-centered in purpose. "No longer is peripheral action, the 'saving' of a forest, a park, a refuge for wildlife, isolated from the mainstream. The total envi-

21. Anderson to Fred Smith, February 14, 1961, NORRRC General 1961, box 875, Anderson Papers; Thomas G. Smith, "John Kennedy, Stewart Udall, and New Frontier Conservation," *Pacific Historical Review* 64 (August 1995): 3, 345.

ronment is now the concern, and the new conservation makes man, himself, the subject." Simply stated, the interior secretary would preserve wilderness areas for public enjoyment.<sup>22</sup>

Udall wanted to "round out the national parks system" and expand its presence near populated areas in the East, Midwest, and South. Although the concept of national seashores was, he admitted, "relatively new," Udall quickly grasped their potential as "great playgrounds." Upon taking office, the interior secretary put Cape Cod at the top of his list of "important seashore proposals" and proposed a \$500 million fund to enable Interior to purchase lands for recreation, national parks, and wildlife refugees. Over the coming decade, Udall, backed first by Kennedy, then by Johnson, began putting "parks where the people are," with new national seashores and lakeshores located near Boston (Cape Cod), Houston (Padre Island), San Francisco (Point Reyes), Chicago (Indiana Dunes), and New York (Fire Island).<sup>23</sup>

The Baltimore-Washington area could not be left out of this plan. Assateague Island, along with Fire Island, had moved onto the interior secretary's agenda because, as he explained, both "lie close to urban areas" and "are two of the finest seashore areas left on the Atlantic Coast." Yet concerning development on Assateague, an issue that emerged early during JFK's presidency, Udall proceeded cautiously and in response to events. Two weeks following the 1962 storm, he proposed a joint federal-state effort to reestablish sand dunes on the barrier islands from North Carolina to New York. "Now that nature has struck back," he suggested, the time may have arrived to obtain "these restored beach areas [for] public use." A month later, after the National Park Service labeled Assateague "unsuitable for permanent development," Udall derided plans to build a bridge as "unfortunate." The secretary urged the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation to join Maryland state officials in a study of the island, and the head of the National Park Service promised "to do all that we can to keep interest in Assateague alive." By June, Udall had persuaded Tawes to examine the matter and state officials to delay accepting bids on their bridge.<sup>24</sup>

22. Stewart L. Udall, "Will It Be 'America the Beautiful' for Our Children?" *Food and Home*, October 1965; Udall to Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ), October 17, 1969, Box 1, Program Accomplishments 1962–1968, Udall Record Group.

23. Stewart L. Udall Oral History, 37, Kennedy Library; "Secretary Udall Interviewed on the Today Show," June 16, 1966, folder 9, box 127, Udall Papers; Carl Albert to Eric Cutler, February 21, 1961, folder 26, box 51, Legislative Series, Carl Albert Collection, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman; Stewart L. Udall, "How We Hope to Solve the Growing Crisis of Our Dwindling Recreation Lands," no date [1962], box 1, Article Files 1961–1968, Udall Record Group; "Udall, Once Called Weak, Climbs to Fore in Cabinet," *Phoenix Gazette*, March 27, 1967.

24. Press conference, "Udall—Recreation," June 27, 1963, box 1, Press Conferences, Udall Record Group; U.S. Department of the Interior press release, March 26, 1962, folder 16, box

Udall's handling of the Assateague issue both confirmed and challenged his critics, some of whom depicted him as a poor and guileless administrator. In this situation one notices the interior secretary's trademark devotion to a cause, a trait that, when pressed, irritated elected office-holders. The secretary made little effort to confer with local officials in Worcester County and did not dispatch a representative to brief the board of county commissioners until after the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation had drafted its proposal for a national seashore. Yet he was neither a lofty idealist nor a maladroit political novice. Udall capitalized on the 1962 storm to "float" the idea of a national seashore and then relied on the testimony of federal officials to bolster his position. By consulting officials in Maryland, including Governor Tawes, he paid homage to state's rights and acknowledged the need to enlist partners. To succeed in politics, Udall later wrote, "you must have an understanding and a respect for compromise, and preferably a talent for it." He possessed both.<sup>25</sup>

Udall's courtship of state officials soon paid dividends. In June 1963, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation unveiled its plans for Assateague. A state park would be built on the island's northern part and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge would receive added roads to accommodate recreation enthusiasts. The federal government proposed to spend \$12.3 million to acquire Assateague's remaining fifteen miles and to maintain them for public use. To disarm critics, Interior pledged to pay "fair market" price for all property in private hands. Furthermore, citing a study by Robert R. Nathan Associates, the department predicted that as a national seashore, the island would spur tourism and hotel construction, thereby boosting Worcester County's tax base by as much as \$40 million by 1975. Economic development officials in Maryland praised and seconded the proposal. The "cleanliness and attractiveness" of national seashores will make Assateague "one of Maryland's most valuable assets." Accordingly, when Udall inspected the island, Louis L. Goldstein, Maryland's comptroller, accompanied him, becoming the first statewide elected office-holder to endorse the national seashore.<sup>26</sup>

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156, Udall Papers; "Assateague's Shore Recarved by Storm," *Washington Post*, April 25, 1962; "Assateague Action Urged," *Baltimore Sun*, April 29, 1962; Edward C. Crafts to Udall, September 10, 1962, and Conrad L. Wirth to Udall, May 3, 1962, folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers; "U.S.—State Assateague Planning Due," *Baltimore Sun*, June 19, 1963.

25. "Interior Department in Disarray Under Udall," *Desert News*, June 6, 1966; "Ubiquitous Udall," *Wall Street Journal*, October 11, 1965; Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners, April 30, 1963, Worcester County Courthouse, Snow Hill, Maryland (hereinafter cited Worcester Court); Udall to Craig C. Cater, August 29, 1968, box 1, Human Interest Files 1961–1968, Udall Record Group.

26. "Interior Outlines Plan for Assateague Island," *Washington Post*, April 21, 1963; Harry A. Boswell Jr. and George R. Hubley Jr. to Tawes, July 22, 1963, folder 7, box 2, Morton Papers; "Assateague Visited by Udall as Goldstein Tells of Park Support," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, June 27, 1963.

Although Interior justified its plan on the need to expand outdoor recreation, Udall wanted Assateague to remain as primitive as possible. He appealed to recreation enthusiasts by noting the island's proximity to Baltimore, Washington, and Philadelphia and by predicting upwards of three million visitors annually. But the interior secretary also recognized a "growing" movement in favor of wilderness preservation, and he understood the chief dilemma of the National Park Service—"Can we keep these areas unspoiled and still let people use them, see them, enjoy them?" Regarding Assateague, he favored enhanced recreation opportunities "with limited development." The final version of the Assateague bill, as we will see, restricted concession areas to just six hundred acres and kept them under federal ownership. Udall initially resisted a provision for a north-to-south road across the island. Then, after Congress adopted this amendment, he never authorized the road's construction. The interior secretary's commitment to wilderness protection became transparent early in 1965, when he praised Maryland state officials for "trying to preserve [Assateague's] status quo insofar as possible."<sup>27</sup>

Plans for the national seashore gratified grassroots conservationists. Even before Udall had disclosed his intentions, the Maryland Wildlife Federation, in 1962, had endorsed the idea of a public recreation area on Assateague. Likewise, Mabel Cohen, a Worcester County resident and a leader of the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, had urged President Kennedy to put a national park there to halt the island's "desecration." Meanwhile, William Green became anxious. He applauded Udall's remarks on behalf of a national seashore but second-guessed the interior secretary's "deference" to Maryland state officials, whom he distrusted. Only following the release of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's plans and Udall's visit to the island did Green decide to celebrate—with yet another appearance before Worcester County's board of commissioners.<sup>28</sup>

27. "Udall Asks Congress to Act Fast to Make Assateague Seashore Area," *Cambridge Banner*, August 11, 1964; "Udall Sees Assateague Park Drawing 3 Million Yearly," *Salisbury Daily Times*, March 18, 1965; "Secretary Udall Interviewed on the Today Show," June 16, 1966, folder 9, box 127, Udall Papers. The phrase "limited development" cropped up in more than one place. Department of the Interior press release, March 17, 1965, Worcester Room, Vertical File, Assateague, Worcester Library. In 1965, one version of the Assateague Act (S.1121) contained a provision for a road and another did not (S.20). Udall favored the latter version. See attachment to Udall to Henry M. Jackson, March 15, 1965, folder 1, box 4, 89th Congress, Paul Fannin Papers, Charles Trumbell Hayden Library, Arizona State University, Tempe (hereinafter cited Fannin Papers); "Udall Sees Assateague Park Drawing Three Million Yearly," *Salisbury Daily Times*, March 18, 1965; "Udall Urges Assateague Bill Passage," *Salisbury Daily Times*, Assateague Vertical File, Blackwell Library; Udall to George B. Hartzog, August 31, 1966, folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers; Transcript of Stewart Udall press conference, folder 9, box 122, Udall Papers.

28. "Advice Is Cheap," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, September 20, 1962; Mabel Cohen to JFK, March 29, 1963, folder PA 2-21-63, box 657, Central Subject Files, Kennedy Library; W. E. Green to JFK, April 8, 1963, Worcester Room, Vertical File, Assateague, Worcester Library; Minutes, June 25, 1963, Worcester Court.

Interior's proposal, and Green's apparent gloating, displeased local officials. After Heaton Underhill, the assistant director of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, presented Interior's plans for a national seashore, the board of county commissioners, along with Worcester County's representatives in the state legislature, "reiterated their stand for a State Park for part of the Island and private development for the rest of it." County leaders envisioned generating greater tax revenues from Assateague if the island became a residential area rather than a national seashore. They also catered to angry lot owners who jealously guarded their property rights and felt uneasy about any large expansion of federal power. Had Udall's perspective triumphed, complained Philip King, the head of Ocean Beach, during the secretary's visit to Assateague, the Pilgrims "would have had to go back to Holland." "If your attitude had prevailed," Udall responded, "there would be no National Park system." Needing allies, Worcester County commissioners elected to join with Ocean Beach leaders and prepare a study "showing the advantages of private development for Assateague Island."<sup>29</sup>

The fruit of their labors, "Assateague . . . Worcester's Answer," attempted to achieve three things. First, it sought to discredit Interior's argument by claiming, among other things, that the East Coast did not want for public beaches. Second, the county asserted that the island's fifteen-mile stretch, left in private hands, could support development. (The unstable northern end, near the inlet, was already slated to become a state park.) Last and most important, the county defended its rights and those of private property owners. The authors argued that local and state agencies had been at work to solve the island's road, water supply, and sewage disposal problems. "Worcester County," the report affirmed, "believes that Assateague Island should be privately developed with private capital, initiative, and energy in the American way, and not by socialistic bureaucrats desiring public ownership." Such remarks reflected the outlook of most Worcester County residents—most of whom were conservative southern Democrats devoted to private enterprise and local autonomy and suspicious of federal power.<sup>30</sup>

The county's report, however, undermined its own arguments and slighted other points of view. The group decried the meddling of "socialistic" bureaucrats, lauded the promise of private "energy," and yet still "welcomed" federal assistance

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29. Minutes, April 30, 1963, Worcester Court; "Hands Off Our Pocketbooks," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, April 11, 1963; "Statement in Behalf of the Ocean Beach, Inc., Assateague Island Project," August 15, 1963, folder 7, box 2, Morton Papers; "Udall Landowners Argue Over Assateague's Future," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1963; Minutes, May 21, 1963, Worcester Court.

30. County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland, "Assateague . . . Worcester's Answer," June 13–14, 1963, folder 11, box 2, Morton Papers; "Udall Landowners Argue," *Washington Post*, June 25, 1963. Beneath such headlines as "Udall's 412 Million Fiasco," "Are We Uncle Sam's Stepchild," and "84% of Owners Want Assateague Privately Owned," the local *Democratic Messenger* parroted county officials, April 25, June 2, and July 4, 1963.

to stem beach erosion on Assateague. How was it possible to oppose one form of federal intervention and back another? After describing dune restoration efforts at Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge, the county asserted that humans deserved the same assistance "as birds, if not more." County officials might have acted more shrewdly if they had asked the question of whether Udall considered recreation or wilderness preservation a higher priority. By restricting Assateague to "daytime recreational activities," Interior limited the volume of visitors. Residents of New York City, for example, were unlikely to undertake a twelve-hour journey for a few hours of pleasure. Ocean Beach leaders earlier had raised this argument, that may have tempered recreation enthusiasts, but it is inexplicably absent from the county commissioners' report.<sup>31</sup>

In general, Worcester County leaders, unlike Udall, misunderstood the allure of preserving Assateague. The board of county commissioners belittled the national seashore idea as a scheme to leave the island barren and "useful only to bird watchers." Preserving it for wildlife, joked the editor of the local *Democratic Messenger*, might even inspire a feature film, "The Birdman From Assateague." Udall, in contrast, took conservation ideas seriously. "The concern over clean air, clean water, the preservation of natural beauty, seashores, and the threat to wildlife has already come to a climax in the East," he advised his friend Robert F. Kennedy in 1964, while RFK was running for the United States Senate from New York. In so advising, the Arizonan showed that he had remained, at one level, a politician with a national perspective.<sup>32</sup>

The same description might have applied to Congressman Rogers C. B. Morton, a Republican who, beginning in 1963, represented Maryland's Eastern Shore in the House of Representatives. Morton, somewhat of an anomaly as a Republican in a Democratic district, came from a wealthy, politically active family in Kentucky and settled in Easton, on the Eastern Shore, in 1952. The newcomer overcame such handicaps with a mainly conservative voting record, a genial persona—he joked that his initials stood for "Chesapeake Bay"—and a gift for balancing party loyalty against compromise. He shared his constituents' desire to boost economic development and recognized Worcester County's dependence on tourism. But, as an outdoorsman who navigated the Chesapeake Bay aboard a forty-foot yacht, the former Kentuckian appreciated Maryland's many "fine beaches," ranking them "among the prime assets of the state." For Morton, Assateague posed both a challenge and an opportunity. As a member of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, the freshman congressman could not

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31. County Commissioners, "Assateague . . . Worcester's Answer," 11; "Statement in Behalf," folder 7, box 2, Morton Papers.

32. County Commissioners, "Assateague . . . Worcester's Answer," 13; *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, September 13, 1962; Udall to Robert Kennedy, September 14, 1964, folder 1, box 116, Udall Papers.

avoid the issue. At the same time, fashioning an alternative acceptable to both Udall and Worcester County leaders could only enhance his standing, nationally and locally.<sup>33</sup>

The congressman unveiled the so-called Morton Plan, drafted in the hope of achieving compromise, in September 1963. The plan placed recreation ahead of both wilderness preservation and private development and proposed three separate communities on Assateague, each separated by "miles of beach conserved in its natural state" under federal charge, anchored by a "National Seashore Recreation facility," and surrounded by restaurants, hotels, stores, and private homes. A cultural center, in the northern portion of the island, would appeal to aficionados of fine arts and theater and an Olympic-style village, located in the middle part, would seek to improve the physical fitness of the nation's youth. Lastly, Chincoteague, in the south, was to become a "Mecca" for wildlife enthusiasts with a museum and auditorium "for showing wildlife films." A commission of federal, state, and county officials, as well as property-owners, would oversee Assateague. Like Udall, Morton defended his plan by citing the need to situate recreation areas near cities, and he even spoke of bringing "conservation closer to the people . . . who have never heard the honk of the goose or seen a flock of ducks." Unlike Udall, however, Morton championed "maximum public utilization" in his belief that most visitors to Assateague would "seek more of an experience than simply a response to nature in the raw."<sup>34</sup>

From the standpoint of preserving Assateague, the strength of the Morton Plan was that it acknowledged personal property rights and encouraged lot owners to consider an alternative to the Ocean Beach venture. "The plan is not concerned with bailing out any property owners nor does it recognize any speculative interests," Morton affirmed. A property owner could choose between either selling their land to the federal government or exchanging it for a comparable tract near one of the island's proposed activity centers. Many of the lot owners liked the Morton Plan. One of them expressed gratitude that "at long last, someone in authority is convinced that the federal government should not take over this area and effectively remove it from normal development." In agreement, one Ocean beach project leader, Jack Calvin P. Pruitt, assured Morton of his support. Within

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33. "Rogers Clark Ballard Morton," *Current Biography Yearbook 1971*, ed. Charles Moritz et al. (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1971), 287–89; Dean J. Kotlowski, "Rogers C. B. Morton," *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15:958–59; "Congressman Morton Speaks at Pocomoke Lincoln Day Dinner," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, February 14, 1963; Rogers C. B. Morton to Al Quinn, December 9, 1963 and Morton to Herman Stevens, December 2, 1963, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers; "Morton Urges Survey on Beach Erosion," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, February 28, 1963.

34. "County Commissioners Endorse Morton's Plans," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, September 26, 1963; "Synopsis—The Morton Plan for Assateague," undated, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers; Morton to Charles McC. Mathias, September 27, 1963, *ibid*.

this setting, the commissioners of Worcester County lined up behind Morton's plan. The congressman argued that his plan commanded "strong local support" and prodded Maryland senators Daniel B. Brewster, a Democrat, and J. Glenn Beall, a Republican, to support it.<sup>35</sup>

The Morton Plan, however, did not provide for limited use of Assateague and conservationists denounced it. Morton wooed these critics, arguing that eighty-five percent of the island would be "preserved in its natural state" and that construction of the three activity centers came second to accomplishing that end. But the congressman's own remarks, in which he dismissed Interior's alternative as "putting the island in a pickle jar," called his own commitment to conservation into question. Garden Club chapters across Maryland protested Morton's plan, and Delaware's *Wilmington Evening Star* declared its support for "Assateague in the Raw," that is, stripped of any private development, a play on Morton's earlier comments. Maryland newspapers, including the *Baltimore Sun* and the *Cambridge Banner*, echoed such sentiments. Meanwhile, both Brewster and Beall endorsed Udall's proposed national seashore. During a speech in Baltimore, Udall chastised Morton's alternative, describing Assateague as the scene of "ill-advised speculation" and "short-sighted conservation planning."<sup>36</sup>

Morton's position shifted with the prevailing winds. He privately admitted that pressures for a national seashore without private holdings were "mounting daily." With officials at the national and state levels, including Governor Tawes, opposing the Morton Plan, the congressman realized that it stood little chance of passage. Early in 1964 he retreated, rationalizing that his proposal was really not so different from the national seashore bill that Brewster and Beall, with Udall's support, had endorsed. Morton met with officials at Interior a month later to reconcile his plan with Udall's. The congressman later promised local conservationists a bill that the Garden Clubs would find acceptable.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Morton to Charles I. Wiles, October 3, 1963, W. W. Sacara to Morton, September 20, 1963, Jack Calvin P. Pruitt to Morton, September 20, 1963, Ray F. Redden to Morton, September 24, 1963, John L. Sanford to Tawes, September 20, 1963, Morton to Daniel B. Brewster and J. Glenn Beall, October 8, 1963, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers.

36. Morton to William A. Dryden, October 9, 1963, Morton to Mrs. G. Howard Dana, October 10, 1963, Morton to Charles I. Wiles, October 3, 1963, Morton to editor, *Wilmington (Delaware) Evening Journal*, October 9, 1963, and Morton to Herman Stevens, December 2, 1963, all in folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers; Daniel B. Brewster press release, September 11, 1963, J. Glenn Beall press release, August 11, 1964, Assateague Island 1963-1968, box 4, series 4.1, Charles McC. Mathias Papers, Department of Special Collections, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, Johns Hopkins University (hereinafter cited Mathias Papers); U.S. Department of the Interior press release, October 30, 1963, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers.

37. Morton to John H. Pigman, April 30, 1964, folder 7, box 2; Rogers C. B. Morton press release: "A Special Report on Assateague Island Proposals," May 4, 1964, Morton to Udall, February 11, 1964, folder 11, box 1.1; Morton to Thomas J. Patton, March 3, 1964 and Morton to Mrs. Wilmer Fell Davis, April 14, 1964, folder 7, box 2, all in Morton Papers.

For Morton, the final product represented surrender, not compromise. The congressman agreed to introduce legislation to establish Assateague Island National Seashore, an area that would be owned exclusively by the federal government. The Department of the Interior, in exchange, would reserve less than one square mile of the island for concession facilities, to be run by the National Park Service. And Maryland's government would continue to operate the small park on Assateague's northern end. Morton sought to reconcile his philosophical commitment to local authority with this particular expansion of federal power through an appeal to state's rights. He maintained that the government of Maryland had "invited" the National Park Service to create a national seashore on the island. Udall's earlier courtship of state officials continued to pay dividends.<sup>38</sup>

Morton's support for a national seashore on Assateague was as courageous as it was significant. Local opposition to the establishment of national parks was something that Udall, and others, had come to expect. In this case, the reaction was visceral. One man, for example, worried that opening Assateague to the public would encourage African Americans from urban areas to frequent the island. Worcester County officials considered extreme measures to stop the national seashore. For example, they tried to bulldoze the roads leading to Assateague's beachfront until state leaders won an injunction and halted the effort. Meanwhile, U.S. Senate candidate James P. Gleason, during the 1964 Republican primary, bid for votes in Worcester County by criticizing Morton, the county's sole representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, for supporting the national seashore. "There are many people in Worcester County who want no part of Federal intervention or Federal acquisition," Morton privately conceded. "Our compromise plan is in open opposition to their desires."<sup>39</sup>

Morton's contribution to winning the Assateague fight was to clear the path for the national seashore. Udall noted that establishing a national park inevitably proceeded more smoothly when a member of Congress ignored local opposition and "played for the larger constituency." In this case, Morton was imaginative enough to propose his own plan, pragmatic enough to abandon it amid federal, state, and conservationist resistance, nationally focused enough to accept Interior's "compromise," and courageous enough to go against the will of Worcester County residents. The congressman, without intending to do so at the onset, had lured

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38. Morton to Wayne Aspinall and Morton to Beall, both May 7, 1964, folder 7, box 2, Morton Papers; Rogers C. B. Morton press release: "A Special Report on Assateague Island Proposals," May 4, 1964, Morton to Udall, February 11, 1964, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers.

39. U.S. Department of the Interior press release, October 30, 1963 and Abernathy to Morton, September 24, 1963, folder 11, box 1.1, Morton Papers; "Maryland Balks Isle Developers," *New York Times*, November 19, 1964; "Gleason Opposes U.S. Assateague Acquisition," May 1, 1964, Assateague vertical file, Blackwell Library; Morton to Mrs. Wilmer Fell Davis, April 14, 1964, folder 7, box 2, Morton Papers.

local officials into backing his plan. Then, when they had no other advocate at the federal level, he defected to the other side. It is no wonder that, in 1964, Morton's reelection campaign literature avoided the Assateague issue.<sup>40</sup>

With the tide running against them, opponents of the national seashore looked to time and development forces as allies. In autumn 1964 the state and county opened the long-delayed bridge linking Assateague to the mainland. The span promised to ease the shipment of building supplies to the island, foster its development, and boost property values. Opponents of the national seashore hoped that the escalating cost of compensating lot owners might then dissuade Congress from committing the resources to preserve the island in its natural state. The Associated Press, in a spasm of pessimism, even lamented that the "dream" of William Green, who had died in 1963, was about to slip away from Assateague. Udall considered the bridge a serious threat. When Congress convened in 1965, he rallied his supporters, including Brewster, Beall, and Morton, while prodding the chairs of the House and Senate interior committees to accord Assateague their "highest priority."<sup>41</sup>

Udall was fortunate to have President Johnson as an ally. If Kennedy's priorities had been on national parks, outdoor recreation, and lastly, wilderness preservation, LBJ endorsed a wide-ranging environmental program under the catchword "beautification." Under Johnson, Congress passed the Wilderness Act of 1964. For the first time in the nation's history, the federal government established a system for preserving areas in their natural state. And the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, under Lady Bird Johnson's leadership, attacked commercial blight along roadsides. Johnson later called a White House conference on natural beauty and prodded states to convene similar gatherings. Yet he remained restless. Although, in 1964, LBJ dubbed the eighty-eighth Congress the greatest in the field of conservation "since T.R.," he believed that laws such as the Wilderness Act represented "pebbles in an ocean compared to the overall problem." In another effort to address conservation issues, Johnson named a task force to study and make recommendations on the subject of natural beauty.<sup>42</sup>

At the first meeting of the Presidential Task Force on Natural Beauty, in July 1964, Johnson spoke of his regard for the environment. "We have," he asserted, referring to the Texas Hill Country, where he had grown up and had built his ranch, "only broken rocks and scrubby trees, but it has a great beauty of its own."

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40. Udall Oral History, 106, Kennedy Library; brochure, "Re-Elect Congressman Morton," no date, author's possession.

41. "U.S. to Push Assateague Park Plans," December 20, 1964, Assateague Vertical File, Blackwell Library; "Uncertainties Surround Assateague Island," *Salisbury Daily Times*, December 30, 1963; "Udall Voices Assateague Park Hope," *Baltimore Sun*, January 7, 1965.

42. LBJ to Tawes, January 17, 1966, Johnson Correspondence, Tawes Papers; James Reston Jr. to Udall, July 31, 1964, folder 10, box 115, Udall Papers.

The president expressed concern about the erosion of natural beauty. "I have a lot of land, and I only wish that all the people could have the chance to experience the same joys that I can." He instructed the task force to paint a portrait "of how we can preserve a beautiful America." James Reston, Jr., the son of the *New York Times* columnist, had heard stories from his parents of LBJ's affinity for the land, of how the president and his wife "often rode up to the hills to watch the sun set in the distance." Although Reston had been skeptical of such accounts, this session left him "very much impressed" with Johnson's commitment to preserving natural beauty.<sup>43</sup>

The report of the president's task force on natural beauty, completed in November 1964, boosted the cause of preserving Assateague: "Natural beauty should be brought closer to the eye of the beholder." That meant cleaner air and water, fewer billboards along highways, better-managed parks, expanded open spaces in urban areas, and more scenic rivers, streams, forests, and beaches. Johnson, in a message to Congress on natural beauty, expanded upon these recommendations and defined the new conservation as more than the "protection and development" of natural resources. "Its concern is not with nature alone, but with the total relation between man and the world around him," the president affirmed. "Its object is not just man's welfare but the dignity of man's spirit." Highway beautification, urban conservation, pollution controls, and enhanced outdoor recreation were among the laws that Johnson asked Congress to enact. He also proposed using dollars from the Land and Wildlife Conservation Fund, established by Congress in 1964, to create twelve new national parks, lakeshores, and seashores—including one on Assateague Island. Johnson's statement sparked an overwhelmingly favorable response in the press. The *Washington Post* hailed "the president's great message." The *Boston Herald* lauded it as "the greatest thing that has happened to the [conservation] movement since President Theodore Roosevelt."<sup>44</sup>

But the president's message cut two ways. LBJ's rhetoric about enhancing public access to parks and seashores encouraged Morton, in 1965, to offer an amendment to the Assateague bill that mandated a road to join the northern and southern end of the island and 600 acres for commercial development. In so doing, the congressman risked unraveling the finely woven compromise he had accepted earlier in order to enhance access to Assateague, one goal of the ill-starred Morton Plan. At the same time, the Assateague national seashore bill, contrary to Udall's hopes, was no "sure bet" for "early action" by Congress. The extent and

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43. All quotations come from Reston to Udall, August 5, 1964, folder 10, box 115, Udall Papers.

44. "Report of the Task Force on the Preservation of Natural Beauty," November 18, 1964, box 2, Task Force Reports, Johnson Library; Democratic National Committee press release, "Facts for Democrats," February 9, 1965, box 1242, George S. McGovern Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University; "Conservation Plea Gets Mixed Response," *Washington News*, February 9, 1965; "The President's Great Message," *Washington Post*, February 9, 1965 and "Towards a New Conservation," *Boston Herald*, February 9, 1965.

cost—\$127 million—of Johnson's beautification program raised the ire of fiscal conservatives on Capitol Hill. More importantly, Senator Alan Bible, Democrat of Nevada and chair of the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, was receiving messages from the bill's opponents that caused him, in part, to express his "reservations" about the proposed legislation.<sup>45</sup>

Bible's foot-dragging effort played into the hands of developers and frustrated both Brewster and Joseph D. Tydings, Beall's Democratic successor in the Senate. Adding to their concerns, Maryland's highest court, in May 1965, upheld the right of developers to put a sewage system on Assateague. "Like the fabled coach in 'Cinderella,'" the president of one Washington, D.C. radio station fretted, "the Assateague dream is about to become a pumpkin."<sup>46</sup>

Udall and his allies, particularly Brewster, lobbied and compromised to save their vision for the island. Maryland's senior senator enlisted fourteen of his colleagues, from states as far away as Alaska, as cosponsors for S. 20, the "Assateague Island National Seashore Bill." In March 1965, a week before the Senate held hearings on the bill, Brewster and Morton opened an exhibition of sketches and photographs in the rotunda of the Old Senate Office Building that depicted "the natural beauties of Assateague Island." Moreover, Brewster knew that a fight over Morton's proposed road could "delay or defeat this legislation." He accepted the change and explained that "A National Seashore with a road is better than no National Seashore."<sup>47</sup>

Winning Bible's support proved somewhat more difficult. Brewster began the effort in March 1965 and invited his colleague to visit Assateague. Meanwhile, aided by the Maryland senator, a range of conservation organizations, including the Izaak Walton League, Federated Garden Clubs, Delaware Wildlife Federation, and Citizen's Committee for the Preservation of Assateague Island, sent lawmakers, including Bible, messages in favor of S. 20. Brewster went further and arranged for the chair of Worcester County's economic development committee

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45. "Morton Requests New Road In Assateague Bill," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, January 14, 1965; Udall to LBJ, March 16, 1965, folder 7, box 121, Udall Papers; "Conservation Plea," *Washington News*, February 9, 1965; Wallace M. Smith to Alan Bible, May 10, 1965, folder: Parks and Recreation, box 713, Anderson Papers, Library of Congress; Udall to Bill Moyers, May 6, 1965, Name File: Assateague Island, White House Central Files, Johnson Library.

46. Edward C. Crafts to Udall, May 5, 1965, folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers; "Emergency at Assateague," *Washington Post*, undated, Name File: Assateague Island, Central Files, Johnson Library; WWDC editorial, "Assateague: Dream or Pumpkin," May 7, 1965, folder 1, box 4, 89th Congress, Fannin Papers.

47. Brewster to Maurine Neuberger et al., January 29 and February 1, 1965 and Brewster press release, March 10, 1965, series 1, box 8; Brewster to Harry E. Uhler, April 26, 1965, and Brewster to Charlton Ogburn, August 3, 1965, series 1, box 9—all in Daniel Brewster Papers, Department of Special Collections, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park (hereinafter Brewster Papers).



*Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall walks with members of an official party after landing on Assateague via helicopter. Left to right: Louis Goldstein, Representative Friedel, Udall, Representative Lankford, Senator Brewster, Representative Morton. (Courtesy Assateague Island National Seashore.)*

to meet with Bible and assure him that the national seashore had local support. In the end, gentle prodding, and excellent timing, tipped the scales in the bill's favor. After conferring with Bible for an hour, Udall urged a "few words" of praise from the White House. "Alan is our best workhorse," the secretary affirmed. Presidential assistant Bill Moyers then telephoned the Nevadan who, as fate would have it, was peeved with the chief opponent of S. 20 in the Senate. Bible eventually agreed to back the bill, in part because it contained a proviso for a road across Assateague and also because the government would pay "full and fair market value" to property owners. "Unless something radically changes," an aide reported to Udall on June 2, "the bill virtually became a reality in the Senator's office this morning."<sup>48</sup>

48. "Five Inspect Assateague," *Baltimore Sun*, March 14, 1965; Brewster to Wiles, January 12, 1965, Edmund H. Harvey to Brewster, January 7, 1965, Brewster to C. A. Porter Hopkins, May 24, 1965, series 1, box 9, Brewster Papers; William G. Kerbin Jr. to Brewster, March 31, 1965, series 1, box 8, *ibid.*; handwritten comment on Udall to Moyers, May 6, 1965, Name File: Assateague, Central Files, Johnson Library; Robert C. McConnell to Udall, June 2, 1965, folder 11, box 121, Udall Papers.

Events over the next few months confirmed that prediction. In June, the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs approved S. 20, and the full chamber, by voice vote, followed suit. The House passed the bill on September 7, and when, two weeks later, the president signed it, America's newest national seashore began to take shape. Supporters of the bill expressed relief—and joy. With a motel already under construction on Assateague, the *New York Times* compared this drama's "breath-taking finish" to something worthy of the "Perils of Pauline." In Maryland, the *Cambridge Banner* forecast national rejoicing. The executive director of the National Wildlife Federation agreed and hailed the Assateague bill as "one of the major conservation accomplishments of the 89th Congress"—high praise indeed. In addition to the Assateague Island Act, Congress, during 1965, approved several notable conservation laws, including the Highway Beautification Act, Water Pollution Control Act, and Water Resources Planning Act—a record the *Washington Post* deemed "remarkable."<sup>49</sup>

For recreation enthusiasts, Assateague Island National Seashore soon became, in Udall's words, a "rousing success." Waves of campers inundated Assateague in such high numbers that Bert C. Roberts, the superintendent of the seashore, had to restrict overnight access. By 1968, rising demand forced the seashore to limit its lectures and interpretative programs. That year, as the number of visitors approached one million, members of the press predicted upwards of six million visitors to the island annually. Accordingly, Roberts worried about Assateague "being loved to death."<sup>50</sup>

The popularity of the national seashore cut two ways. At one level, it spurred plans to further develop Assateague as a recreation center. In 1969, the National Park Service proposed to divide the island into seven areas and leave two in their natural state. Five paved parking lots—with spaces for 14,000 vehicles—as well as a dozen concession shops, two motels, and added bathing, picnicking, fishing, and camping facilities were among projects planned for Assateague. Roberts

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49. Joseph D. Tydings press release, June 10, 1965, Press Releases—Maryland (1964–66), 1, series IV, box 11, Joseph D. Tydings Papers, University of Maryland College Park (hereinafter cited Tydings Papers); "Bill Passed in Senate for Park on Assateague," *Snow Hill Democratic Messenger*, June 24, 1965; Daniel B. Brewster press release, September 7, 1965, series 1, box 9, Brewster Papers; "Preserving a Bit of Shoreline," *New York Times*, September 12, 1965; "Compromise on Assateague," *Cambridge Banner*, September 12, 1965; Thomas L. Kimball to Brewster, September 17, 1965, series 1, box 9, Brewster Papers; "Congress and Conservation: A Remarkable Record," *Washington Post*, November 7, 1965.

50. Udall to Assistant Secretary Can and National Park Service Director Hartzog, September 11, 1967, folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers; "Camping Pressure on Assateague is Heavy," *Salisbury Daily Times*, July 3, 1969; "1968 Season Assateague Brochure Supplement," no date, box 38, John P. Saylor Papers, Indiana University of Pennsylvania; "Six Million Soon on Assateague," *Wilmington Morning News*, February 4, 1969; "Camping Pressure on Assateague is Heavy," *Salisbury Daily Times*, July 3, 1969.

deemed these proposals consistent with the Assateague Act and supported road construction and limited accommodations on the island. (As did Morton, who perhaps saw a chance to revive his bygone plan, albeit on a more modest scale.) Roberts's stand also reflected a Park Service priority, dating to the 1950s, which stressed the importance of accommodating tourists. The plan, however, deviated from department policy regarding Assateague in which Udall had made road construction "a low priority." (The secretary never mustered any enthusiasm for constructing a road on Assateague, regardless of the act's requirements). Udall had also tried, without success, to expand the national seashore by acquiring Assateague State Park.<sup>51</sup>

At another level, however, the general public favored the island "as is" and resisted further development. "God knows why the National Park Service can't leave well enough alone," one editor fumed. An Annapolis woman, whose family enjoyed camping on Assateague, reminded her local newspaper that anyone desiring the luxury of a motel had sufficient choices in nearby Ocean City. The National Parks Association, a private conservationist group, opposed the Park Service's plans. Senator Tydings also rejected the plan and predicted that it would "ruin the island's primitive beauty" and violate the purpose of having a national seashore. A similar response greeted the state government in 1971, when the legislature planned to expand camping and parking areas in the state park. "It is important to keep Assateague just the way it is," exclaimed the *Eastern Shore Times*, a newspaper based in Worcester County. In round two of this post-1965 debate on Assateague's future, the preservationists failed to achieve their principal aim, the federal government's acquisition of the state park. But, in the end, the state agreed to refrain from building additional campsites and to restrict development of its park to day use. Maryland's legislators also pressed Congress to approve plans to remove the requirements for a road and overnight accommodations. Congress agreed to the compromise in 1976.<sup>52</sup>

The latter struggle over Assateague's future underscored how debate had shifted in favor of wilderness preservation. Between 1962 and 1965, developers, backed by county officials, resisted efforts to save the island for public recreation. With private property owners out of the picture, the contest between 1969 and 1976 pitted

51. "Tydings Criticizes Assateague Plans," *Washington Post*, May 10, 1969; "A Sliver of Sand Touches Off Squabble Over U.S. Park Policy," *National Observer*, June 16, 1969; "CJ" to Mathias, June 21, 1969, box 4, series 4.1, Mathias Papers; Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 386; Udall to Hartzog, August 31, 1966, folder 9, box 156, Udall Papers.

52. "Hands Off Assateague," *Daily News*, May 13, 1969; Diana Jarrell to the editor, *Annapolis Evening Capital*, May 21, 1969; "Assateague Revisited," undated (winter 1970), Worcester Room, Vertical File, Assateague, Worcester Library; "Tydings Criticizes Assateague Plans," *Washington Post*, May 10, 1969; "Keep Assateague the Way It Is," *Eastern Shore Times*, February 18, 1971; "Assateague to Remain Under State Ownership," *Eastern Shore Times*, April 13, 1972; "Compromise Reached on Assateague Shore Bill," *Baltimore Sun*, June 30, 1976.



President Johnson signs the the Assateague Island National Seashore Act, September 21, 1965. (Abbie Rowe photograph #79AR9423-B, National Archives, College Park.)

recreation enthusiasts, particularly surf fisherman demanding greater access to the island, against preservationists who wanted minimal human presence on Assateague. In 1975, the *Washington Post* downplayed recreation, emphasized preservation, and hailed Assateague as “a natural laboratory,” one best “left alone for people to visit and enjoy on nature’s terms.” In 1974, the *Salisbury Daily Times*, a newspaper that earlier had supported the Morton Plan, now argued that the volume of visitors had to be limited so as to preserve Assateague’s primitive state. After at first ducking the issue, Senator Charles McC. Mathias, Brewster’s Republican successor, emerged as an ardent preservationist and co-sponsored the legislation to remove the road and accommodations provisions from the original act. Although the 1976 amendments to the Assateague Island National Seashore Act failed to designate the island a wilderness area, the legislation ended any serious threat of road and motel construction.<sup>53</sup>

53. “Preserving an Island . . .,” *Washington Post*, April 27, 1975; “Assateague Island Again,” *Salisbury Daily Times*, April 22, 1974; Mathias to Hugh Brown, March 19, 1969, box 31, series 4.2, Mathias Papers; Mathias to Paul E. Smith, May 9, 1974, box 57, series 4.2, Mathias Papers; Mathias press releases, April 19, 1974, May 12, 1975, box 8, series 7.1, Mathias Papers; “Assateague Amendments Pass,” *Easton Star Democrat*, October 6, 1976.

Over the succeeding two decades, Assateague Island became a paradox, an area still vulnerable but increasingly protected. The island's fragile topography has remained subject to nature, especially the nor'easters that periodically pound the Atlantic Coast. After a pair of storms struck the island in the 1990s, the *Salisbury Daily Times* asked, "Can Assateague Survive?" The answer is "yes," mainly due to on-going federal intervention. In 1994, Congress spent nearly \$2 million to curb erosion on the island's northern inlet and to purchase one of the lots that still remained in private hands. Senator Paul S. Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland, praised the appropriation as necessary to protect "a treasure for Maryland and the nation." In 2000, President Bill Clinton visited Assateague where, flanked by sand and surf, he unveiled new initiatives to protect America's coastlines. The island, once the scene of heated battles between commercial developers and conservationists and, later, between recreation enthusiasts and wilderness preservationists, had emerged, by century's end, as an important political symbol of humankind's ability to protect and appreciate pristine areas.<sup>54</sup>

Assateague Island National Seashore is more the product of Stewart Udall's vision than William Green's. Green sought a public authority to develop the island as a recreational center, not to preserve it as a primitive area. His model was Long Island's Jones Beach, the brainchild of New York City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, a man with no use for wilderness preservation. (At one point, Green even proposed naming Assateague's public authority "Robert Moses Seashore" in honor of the man who, in his opinion, had made "recreation available on a large scale for urban populations.") In resisting the private developers, Green's integrity, courage, and stamina—writing letters to President Kennedy from a wheelchair, as cancer consumed his lungs—are beyond reproach. He made the island a political issue during the 1950s, long before the federal government's involvement. But, not unlike the Morton Plan, he championed maximum use for Assateague, whose development, in one form or another, he mistakenly deemed inevitable. Moreover, Green's efforts remained eccentric and almost as lonely as the island itself. Given the tenacity of commercial developers and local officials, it is difficult to see how Assateague could have become a national seashore without the commitment of officials in the nation's capital.<sup>55</sup>

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54. "Study: North Tip of Assateague Island Doomed," *Salisbury Daily Times*, April 3, 1987; "Can Assateague Survive?" *Salisbury Daily Times*, undated, Wicomico County Library; "1.8 Million Set to Expand Assateague National Park," *Maryland Times Press*, July 7, 1994; "Clinton Offers Plan to Protect Nation's Shorelines," *New York Times*, May 27, 2000.

55. By securing, in 1964, legislation to found a national seashore on Fire Island, near Long Island, Udall incurred the wrath of Moses, who had earmarked the island for a four-lane highway. See Udall Oral History, 107, Kennedy Library; Green to JFK, April 8, 1963, Worcester Room, Vertical File, Assateague, Worcester Library; Weimer, "The Irascible Savior of Assateague Island," 64–70.

In contrast to Green's efforts, Udall's contribution to preserving Assateague proved less dramatic but more enduring. While Green looked backward to the massive recreational public works projects of 1920s and 1930s, Udall anticipated the emerging environmental movement and looked forward, envisioning Assateague as a primitive area restricted to day-use by humans. To further his cause, the secretary took advantage of natural events, particularly the "Ash Wednesday" storm, and unlike Green, he secured the backing of state officials as well as Brewster, Beall, and LBJ. Without losing sight of his larger aim, Udall also compromised with those, such as Morton, who saw Assateague primarily as a recreation venue, not a wilderness. Then, after the Assateague Act passed Congress, he postponed construction of a road to traverse the island and set the stage for later policy-makers to take further steps to preserve Assateague's pristine state. By tethering a clear end with an assortment of means, Udall displayed effective leadership.

The story of Assateague Island underscores how political institutions can be harnessed to preserve a scenic treasure. The case brought together a variety of forces, including grassroots activists, natural events, a politically adroit secretary of the interior, and members of Congress committed to protecting the environment or, at the very least, willing to defy local developers. For centuries, geography had shielded this island from development. By the 1960s, with urban growth accelerating, the federal government stepped in and, over time, took steps to maintain Assateague "in the raw" for humans to enjoy. This "last" shore would remain primitive, but far from lonely.