

HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
CAPE HATTERAS NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

At the request of the Secretary of the Interior the National Park Service made a survey in 1934 of the seashores of the continental United States to ascertain whether there were remaining relatively unimpaired areas of such outstanding character and magnitude as to be worthy of acquisition and preservation by the people of the United States as National Seashores. The survey revealed that the barrier islands off the coast of North Carolina, extending in both directions from Cape Hatteras, presented one of the finest opportunities to establish and preserve as a National Seashore an area of great biological interest, scenic beauty, historical value, and recreational appeal. The National Park Service recommended that this undeveloped seashore be preserved as an addition to the National Park System.

Legislation

A large measure of the credit for advancing the cause of a National Seashore is due United States Congressman Lindsay C. Warren, later Comptroller of the United States, who introduced a bill in May 1937 to establish the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The Act of August 17, 1937 (50 Stat. 669) authorized establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore and required that the necessary

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lands be obtained by public or private donation. The subsequent Act of June 29, 1940 (54 Stat. 702) changed the name to Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area and provided that hunting be permitted on certain designated lands under regulations prescribed by the Secretary.

The Act of March 6, 1946 (60 Stat. 32) extended to August 17, 1952 the authority to accept and establish a minimum area (10,000 acres) or release it if the whole project should fall through. This act did not alter the continuing basic authorization of the 1937 act, which gave the the Secretary the discretion to designate boundaries, accept lands, or abandon the project if found not feasible. The Congress reaffirmed the establishment of the National Seashore by the Act of June 3, 1948 (62 Stat. 301) by transferring existing Federal property in Dare County to the National Park Service for administration as a part of the area.

Many complex problems had to be solved before the National Seashore could become a reality. The General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, by the Act of March 30, 1939 (Chapter 257, Public Laws of North Carolina, 1939) created the Cape Hatteras Seashore Commission, authorizing conveyance to the United States of the lands to be acquired, and appropriating \$20,000. This implemented the 1937 congressional authorization of the project. In 1943 the State Legislature amended its 1939 act to provide for the continuing

function of the State Commission and granting the Governor power to provide funds for land acquisition from available contingency and emergency funds. During the period March 1945 to March 1949, by direction of the State Legislature, land acquisition for the project was suspended to facilitate explorations for oil and gas. None was found, but the action, together with the impact of war, stalled the project.

Scope of Proposal

The area originally recommended for the National Seashore included some 62,000 acres of land of the outer banks, excluding the villages and a developed section of shoreline in the Nags Head section. The nucleus for the seashore area had already been started as a State park under the directorship of Thomas W. Morse. Through the generosity of the Phipps family, a large tract of land at Cape Hatteras Point was donated to the State for eventual transfer to the Federal Government.

During the years that the project was inactive, many developments took place which indicated the need to scale down the extent of the project if there was to be any likelihood of its being carried through. The construction of a State road on Hatteras Island which brought with it a real estate boom in waterfront lots was the main threat to the project. It appeared that the southern two-thirds of the original proposed area was all

that could be hoped for, but it was considered that even with this reduction the project was still eminently worth while. A joint meeting of the Seashore Commission and Service representatives was held in August 1950 to determine new boundaries. The boundary for the project was reduced from 62,000 acres to approximately 30,000 acres, and the property between Whalebone Junction and the Virginia State Line was eliminated because of the commercial developments on the waterfront.

Early Progress

In the early years there was great interest by local and nonresidents in the seashore project, as they thought the National Park Service would build a road and improve the Oregon Inlet ferry service. The State appropriated some monies, but no substantial progress was made in land acquisition, although some tracts were acquired.

In 1949, after the oil and gas explorations had proved disappointing, local supporters revived interest in the project. All went well for a while and then came to a standstill again in spite of our best efforts to keep it going. In January 1950 Governor W. Kerr Scott reactivated the Cape Hatteras Seashore Commission. Progress was negligible due to local opposition, which was largely fostered by speculative interests, and the greatly increased cost of the land which put it beyond the resources of the State alone to acquire. It is interesting to note that in 1953 that 82% of property remaining to be acquired was in non-local ownership.

Funds Provided for Land Acquisition

In April 1952 Representative Herbert C. Bonner and Comptroller General Lindsay Warren paved the way for a meeting with Governor Scott and Conservation Director George Ross to discuss a proposal for securing funds to purchase lands for the National Seashore. The Service had estimated that \$1,300,000 was needed to acquire the necessary lands. Director Wirth suggested that if the State would guarantee half the amount needed, the Service would attempt to match it. Private funds had been pledged by the Old Dominion Foundation and the Avalon Foundation to match whatever funds the State could provide. As a result of this meeting the Council of State, by resolution adopted on June 23, 1952, made available to the Seashore Commission the sum of \$618,000 of State funds to purchase lands. Donated funds were made available on June 27, 1952. Under this arrangement, the Avalon and Old Dominion Foundations and the State of North Carolina have both added an additional \$200,000 each to complete the land acquisition program. It was necessary to reveal the names of the donors because of a rumor that the Stick family of Kill Devil Hill, supporters of the project, were backing it so that other real estate interests would not be able to develop the area.

In July 1952 an agreement was entered into between the National Park Service and the State of North Carolina outlining the responsibilities of the State and the Service with respect to

the land acquisition program. Under this agreement the National Park Service assumed acquisition of the privately owned lands involved. Condemnation proceedings were initiated to effect land purchases in some instances, and in many cases to assure that the United States acquired clear title to the land.

Public Hearings

Misunderstandings and misrepresentations about the project were causing concern among the local people. So in October 1952 a series of public hearings were held in the villages of Ocracoke, Frisco, Buxton, Waves, Salvo and Avon to explain the details of the project. Director Wirth, Congressman Herbert C. Bonner and representatives of the Seashore Commission and the Service attended. A statement by the Director summarizing information presented at the hearings, and maps showing the boundary of the National Seashore appeared in the October 31, 1952 issue of The Coastland Times (Manteo, N.C.) newspaper. The editor arranged to have a copy of this issue with its four page spread delivered to every family on Ocracoke, Hatteras, and Bodie Islands, south of Whale Bone. The project and its purposes were largely clarified by the meetings and news release. Some boundary changes were made as a result of the hearings to provide ample room for expansion of the villages, and to make the exact boundary conform to land lines and suitable natural boundaries. The total acreage to be acquired was further reduced to about 28,500 acres—the change was approved by the Advisory Board.

As a result of some further opposition to the project from a few nonresident landowners, the Department held meetings to discuss the proposal. The Service's handling of the project was supported.

In January 1953, the Secretary issued an order instructing the National Park Service to assume administration of 12,414 acres of federally owned lands within the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area. On January 1, 1961 about 24,700 acres of land had been acquired.

From 1934 until its official establishment in 1958, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore project had the support of all administrations, Federal and State. Many individuals gave unselfishly of their time and effort to advance the cause of the National Seashore. The United States Coast Guard, the Navy Department, and organizations such as the Coastal Institute of Louisiana University were very helpful in giving assistance and information for the development and operation of the seashore area.

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