

America's four national lakeshore and ten national seashore areas total just over 826,000 acres combined, or about one percent of the National Park System's total acreage. Yet those lands are some of the most visited in the entire system because of their proximity to major urban areas. Understanding how and why they were created provides insights into the National Park Service's history as a whole.

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

GOES TO THE BEACH

In 1955, National Park Service Director Conrad Wirth issued a grave warning to the American people. “One of our greatest recreation resources—the seashore—is rapidly vanishing from public use,” Wirth wrote. “Nearly everyone seems to know this fact, but few do anything to halt the trend.”¹ More Americans were

building homes on the shore than ever before, and most of the country's coasts remained unregulated. Gone were the days when a youngster could “go five miles from the city of Boston, spend the day combing the beach or digging mud clams in the estuaries, and seldom see another human being within shouting distance.”²

To reduce threats of privatization, the National Park Service proposed the purchase of 437 miles of shoreline along U.S. coasts. The crown jewels of America's beaches would become national park sites, and smaller jurisdictions would protect and manage the remainder. The seashore was a “priceless scenic and scientific resource for which there is no substitute,” the Park Service reminded Americans. “Once subdivided and developed, it is lost forever.”³

The Park Service then embarked on a twenty-year push that led to the creation of thirteen of the nation's fourteen national seashores and lakeshores. The shoreline initiative, though often overlooked,

is crucial to understanding the Park Service's expansion, recreational development, approach to cultural landscapes, and land acquisition in the mid-twentieth century. This article examines the origins of the shoreline national park idea and how in the 1960s, after fifty years of stagnation, the U.S. government undertook the most comprehensive coastal conservation initiative in its history.

FLAT NATIONAL PARKS?

The first national parks in the United States were vast, mountainous landscapes. Early parks like Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, and Mount Rainier all featured breathtaking topography, with jagged peaks and deep valleys on a massive scale.⁴ Even the first national park on a coastline, Acadia National Park in Maine, had vertical landscapes where rocks and trees shot from the water's edge to elevations high above the ocean.⁵ Yet as early as 1916, Stephen

BY JACKIE M. M. GONZALES

Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, entertained the notion of a flat national park. In the same year that saw the establishment of the federal agency, Mather pushed for a national park whose highest elevation reached just 130 feet above the surrounding terrain in a state famed for its flatness: Indiana.

Mather led an initiative to create the Sand Dunes National Park on Lake Michigan's southern shoreline, a place called the "birthplace of American ecology."⁶ Sand dunes historically occupied all of Indiana's forty miles of shoreline. But as heavy industry moved into the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, steel companies mechanically removed sand dunes to establish steel mills, ports, and refineries in cities like Gary, Whiting, and East Chicago. Even as Indiana's dunes were becoming a steel production center and facilitating Chicago's growth, both outward in the form of suburbs and upward in the form of skyscrapers, University of Chicago botanists were pioneering the science of ecology. Henry Chandler Cowles, considered "America's first professional ecologist," studied the sand dunes' rich biodiversity and geologic variety to develop notions of ecological succession.⁷

Cowles and other scientists wanted a national park that would protect Indiana's sand dune ecosystems. Advocates for establishing such a park for ecological reasons had a difficult time convincing Congress that a national park could be, well, flat. When midwestern landscape architect Jens Jensen pleaded that Indiana's coast merited protection, even he relied on the trope of vertical landscapes, confident such arguments would persuade a fledgling Park Service to preserve it:

Just think of us poor prairie folks, who have not the Adirondack Mountains, as our good friend from New York, and who have not the mountains of California, as has our good friend Mr. Mather. In fact the only thing in the world that we have that has any similarity at all to the Adirondacks and the Rocky Mountains is our dunes over in Indiana. The 200 feet of Mount Tom look just as big to me as the Rocky Mountains did when I visited them some years ago, and bigger to me, in fact, than did the Berkshires when I made my pilgrimage to those wonderful hills of Massachusetts.⁸

Jensen essentially argued that in Indiana, a sand dune *could* qualify as a vertical landscape. He and others did not attempt to shift the paradigm of what constituted a national park; rather, they tried to fit coastal dunes into the existing model.

Jensen's effort to make a mountain out of a sand dune did not impress Congress, which passed on Mather's Sand Dunes National Park proposal. The onset of World War I stalled any further legislation on the matter, and by the 1920s, Park Service leaders felt that new

industrial development now made Indiana's dunes "unacceptable for National Park status."⁹ The state of Indiana found a much smaller section of dunes worth preserving and bought just over 2,100 acres for an Indiana Dunes State Park in 1926.¹⁰ Still, the federal attempt to create Sand Dunes National Park left lingering questions: could beaches ever be nationally significant landscapes, and if so, would the Park Service take the initiative to protect them?

Park Service leaders abandoned coastal park plans for twenty years following the failure of the Sand Dunes proposal. In the interim, Congress considered, with controversy, another flat national park: the Everglades.¹¹ The very idea seemed revolutionary to a public introduced to national parks through mountainous



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

On October 31, 1916, Steven T. Mather led supporters through the Indiana Dunes a day after attending hearings to gauge public sentiment on a "Sand Dunes National Park." Another fifty years would elapse before the area was set aside as a national park.



Managing national seashores means the Park Service has to consider the humans who live within their boundaries. After Hurricane Isabel removed parts of Hatteras Island in Cape Hatteras National Seashore in 2003, coastal geologists objected to replacing the sand and rebuilding the road because doing so affects the long-term ecological health of the barrier islands. Residents prevailed and the island was restored within two months.

western landscapes: how could a swamp be worth preserving? Again, however, botanists and ecologists argued that special natural features merited federal protection. “Why not,” asked John K. Small of the New York Botanical Garden, “also have a unique area exhilarating by its lack of topography and charming by its matchless vegetation and animal life?”¹² Everglades National Park, approved in 1934, represented the Park Service’s first, reluctant foray into parks with horizontal landscapes. Ecologists and conservationists were delighted.¹³

“THE SEASHORE HAS A STRANGE APPEAL”

While the Park Service hemmed and hawed over whether flat landscapes merited federal protection, Americans hit the beach.¹⁴ Seaside vacations had been popular among the wealthy since the Victorian era, but the automobile democratized tourism and allowed families in the growing middle class to leave the city for a quick day trip to the shore.¹⁵ Before the automobile and asphalt, sandy roads and harsh weather had made even beaches near major cities difficult to reach. When Henry David Thoreau visited Cape Cod in the 1850s, traversing the peninsula from one end to the other took several days, and his carriage had trouble navigating the “heavy” roads until a rain firmed the sand. Asphalt laid in the 1920s shortened the journey across the Cape to only a few hours, making a day trip for Bostonians more feasible.¹⁶

As more Americans visited beaches, federal, state, and local governments wondered how best to accommodate them. Department of the Interior officials in the 1930s acknowledged that “the seashore has a strange appeal to a wide range of the population” yet was not “adequately represented” in the National

Park System. Beachgoers had few choices: less than one percent of the U.S. coast was in public ownership and available for recreational use in 1937.¹⁷ As of 1935, the Park Service administered no sandy beaches. Its only coastal parks were Acadia, the Everglades, Hawaii Volcanoes, and Katmai and Glacier Bay in Alaska—none of which facilitated, let alone encouraged, an easy day at the beach for a family.¹⁸

To address the deficit, in the mid-1930s the Park Service commissioned several surveys on potential coastal parks. Conrad Wirth, who oversaw Interior’s Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) operations (and who would become the agency’s director in the 1950s), pushed to include coasts in overall conservation and recreation planning. Wirth secured New Deal program money—through the CCC, the Public Works Administration, and the Works Progress Administration—to fund studies.¹⁹ Park planners surveyed the nation’s coasts with an eye for beaches that might merit inclusion in the national or state park systems. The resulting studies of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and the Pacific coast soon after that, were published in various reports of the decentralized New Deal programs that funded them. Because no comprehensive report was ever published, many of the separate studies have been lost. Surviving reports include detailed information on acreage, land acquisition costs, projected visitation, and administrative priorities of potential coastal parks.²⁰

As the Park Service finished its shoreline surveys, Congress passed the Park, Parkway, and Recreational Area Study Act of 1936, which directed the agency to increase its recreation efforts. The act’s authorizing language “significantly expanded the range and type of land areas that could be preserved and managed” by the

Park Service.²¹ New parks could now be added for their recreation potential alone. With this new mandate to provide recreational resources for the millions of urban Americans, beaches—especially those near large metropolitan areas—were now eligible for inclusion in the National Park System.²²

Despite the new mandate, Congress authorized only one coastal national park site before World War II: Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina. Cape Hatteras legislation was passed in 1937 thanks to the lobbying of Conrad Wirth, who was especially familiar with Cape Hatteras because of its large CCC camp.²³ Nevertheless, Cape Hatteras National Seashore was not actually established until 1953 because the legislation required the state of North Carolina to acquire, either through purchase or donation, a certain acreage of nonfederal area within the designated seashore boundaries, which the state would then turn over to the Park Service.²⁴ Although Cape Hatteras set a precedent as the original national seashore park, the lag between authorization and establishment was not a model that the Park Service wanted to follow when establishing future seashore parks. On the next go-around, the Park Service would bring money to the table, even if its leaders had to do it themselves.

Conrad Wirth would make sure of that. His vision of beach parks had propelled the 1930s coastal park studies, and he continued his advocacy in the postwar period. When later asked who came up with the seashore idea, one of Wirth's colleagues said the concept originated "pretty much in-house, a Connie Wirth contribution."²⁵ When Wirth became director of the National Park Service in 1951, he resurrected his seashore idea.

BACK TO THE BEACHES

During the war years the Park Service's budget was slashed. In 1942, the agency even lost its national offices: its headquarters were moved from Washington to Chicago to make room for war-related agencies.²⁶ Like civilians, civilian agencies were expected to tighten their belts and do their part. By 1945, the Park Service budget had dropped to \$4.74 million—less than one-seventh its budget in 1940.²⁷ Even if it had been well funded, few Americans could visit national parks during the war years because of gasoline and rubber rations. After the war ended, young families—newly elevated to the middle class thanks to the GI Bill and a strong economy—flocked to national parks...and found them in a state of disrepair.²⁸ After decades of little to no funding, these exponential increases in visitation left the Park Service searching for some way to breathe life into the system again.

Park Service leaders developed a long-term plan that captured the imagination of Congress and the public. They called it Mission 66.²⁹ The Mission 66 initiatives would pump \$1 billion into national parks over a ten-year period culminating in 1966, the golden anniversary of the Park Service, and address recreation, automobile tourism, built infrastructure, and accommodation of huge postwar crowds of tourists.³⁰ Wirth wanted recreational development of beaches to be an integral part of Mission 66. He wanted to commission new surveys of U.S. coasts, since heavy development had rendered the 1930s shoreline reports outdated "ghosts of departed opportunities," but he lacked funding.³¹

Then in 1952, Paul Mellon, son of wealthy industrialist and banker Andrew W. Mellon, initiated a conversation with Wirth about a piece of land in North Carolina that the family hoped to conserve. When that effort fell through, Mellon asked what other

land in North Carolina might be of interest. Wirth quickly suggested the Cape Hatteras project, stalled because North Carolina still lacked funds to purchase the land that would trigger establishment of a national seashore.³² The Mellon family foundations contributed more than \$600,000 for land purchases at Cape Hatteras, making possible Cape Hatteras National Seashore.³³

It was then that Wirth described the out-of-date seashore studies as another opportunity for the Mellon foundations' conservation work. Wirth recounted that Paul Mellon had shown "great interest" in seashore conservation, even before Mission 66,

at a time when the Park Service was suffering low budget problems that resulted from the costly cold war. At Paul Mellon's request we presented to the Old Dominion and Avalon foundations an estimate of the cost of making a restudy of not only the Atlantic and Gulf coasts but also the Pacific coast. The foundations provided the funds for this study and also for a study of the shores of the Great Lakes.³⁴

The Mellons hoped to keep their funding of shoreline studies quiet, especially after news of their Cape Hatteras donations ended up in the headlines despite attempts to keep it under wraps.³⁵ It is now clear that ample funds from the Mellon foundations enabled seashore studies to proceed with renewed vigor and greater momentum than their publicly funded 1930s counterparts. Mellon was continuing a tradition of wealthy industrialists: just as the Rockefeller family had purchased and donated land for early national parks, the Mellon foundations' funds for surveys, studies, and minimal purchases of shorelines enabled the realization of the seashore initiative.³⁶

With funding secured, the Park Service commissioned a comprehensive report on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts in 1955; surveys of the Pacific and Great Lakes coasts followed in 1959.³⁷ The surveys recommended for protection as local, state, or federal seashores 66 areas along the Great Lakes, seventy-seven areas along the Pacific Coast, and fifty-four areas along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Of these, the surveys recommended twenty-six shorelines with nationally significant characteristics for inclusion in the National Park System: sixteen areas on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, five on the Great Lakes, and five on the Pacific.³⁸ Each survey stressed the importance of providing recreation opportunities while also conserving important biological resources, including beaches, marshes, and uplands.³⁹

The Park Service distributed a summary of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts survey aimed at the public. Published in 1955 in an easily understood, illustrated booklet, "A Report on Our Vanishing Shoreline" was distributed in coastal towns across the United States and helped shape public opinion—both support and opposition—for protecting seashores in the late 1950s.⁴⁰ Newspapers published articles and op-eds on the findings of the report, bureaucrats started work on feasibility plans at certain sites, local advocates of particular shorelines asked to see it, and Interior officials rushed to get copies in the hands of politicians with potential seashore parks in their districts.⁴¹

With the press coverage of seashore proposals, residents of affected coastal areas began writing to their elected officials. They wrote of their love for beaches, what some saw as a great need for public coastal land, and their concerns about private property inside proposed parks. Some individuals wrote to request legislative action to establish a coastal park in their backyards—while sparing



About Cape Cod, a visiting Henry David Thoreau opined: “All the aspects of this desert are beautiful, whether you behold it in fair weather or foul, or when the sun is just breaking out after a storm, and shining on its moist surface in the distance, it is so white, and pure, and level, and each slight inequality and track is so distinctly revealed; and when your eyes slide off this, they fall on the ocean.”

their own backyard. Many advocates of seashore preservation referenced “Our Vanishing Shoreline” explicitly, even adopting its language. For example, Maurice Barbash of Fire Island, New York, wrote that “our rapidly vanishing shoreline” was part of “our irreplaceable natural heritage,” and James Randall of Cape Cod wrote to then Senator John Kennedy that “one need only look at our vanishing shoreline with its ever increasing abundance of neon signs, hot dog stands, and other misplaced vulgarity to know that a bill of this nature must take the highest precedence if such natural beauty sports are not to be lost forever.”⁴² The vague but powerful term “our vanishing shoreline” became a catch-all, a way to describe changing economies of coastal towns and a yearning for the past, whatever past that might be.

The 1950s shoreline studies also prompted community activism both for and against national seashores and national lakeshores. The Save the Dunes Council in northern Indiana, which had begun as a women’s group in the early 1950s, pushed forward with renewed energy, capitalizing on the publicity that the shoreline studies generated.⁴³ The national outdoors organization the Izaak Walton League started a “Save Our Seashore” campaign, at the direct request of Kennedy.⁴⁴ The Sierra Club devoted an entire issue to supporting establishment of a Point Reyes National Seashore in 1959, and then three years later published one of its first coffee-table books on Point Reyes.⁴⁵ And the *Cape Codder* newspaper published editorials in favor of a Cape Cod National Seashore Park. In some coastal communities, however, “Our Vanishing Shoreline” galvanized local constituencies against a public park: ranchers opposed Point Reyes, for example, and summer homeowners opposed Sleeping Bear Dunes in Michigan.⁴⁶ The bureaucracy, the public, and private funders all had beaches on their minds. It was time to bring in the politicians.

CONGRESS CONSIDERS SEASHORES

Although the Department of the Interior can study and propose potential park additions, national park units can be created only by an act of Congress or by presidential designation as a national monument. In response to Mission 66, Congress churned out national park legislation in bipartisan fashion: from 1957 to 1972, it authorized more than eighty new Park Service units and the study of countless other potential areas.⁴⁷ Congressional proposals for seashore parks flooded the House and Senate floors a few years after the release of “Our Vanishing Shoreline.” Bills for approximately ten new national seashore or lakeshore units were introduced in the Eighty-fifth Congress (1957–1958), to be followed by dozens more in the Eighty-ninth.⁴⁸

In Washington, Interior officials drove the seashore and lakeshore legislation effort. From their vantage point, the federal government needed to buy coastal land to create parks, and quickly. They fed legislators early bills in a one-size-fits-all format. Legislators also introduced individual bills for seashores in their own states, confusing and potentially slowing a process that Interior wanted to control and expedite. To prevent legislative chaos, Interior asked Senator Richard Neuberger, a noted conservationist, former journalist, and an enthusiastic proponent of the Oregon Dunes National Seashore, to draft an omnibus bill that would both establish several seashores and order the study of others.⁴⁹ S. 2010, which Neuberger introduced in 1959 on behalf of Interior, authorized \$15 million for the acquisition of land for no more than three national seashores, not to exceed 100,000 acres, which the Secretary of the Interior would select after further study.⁵⁰

Residents of potentially affected coastal areas rallied against Neuberger’s bill, protesting application of a one-size-fits-all legislative plan to their varied communities: what was appropriate on Cape



When establishing Point Reyes National Seashore, the federal government had to account for and work with owners of historic dairy farms like this one that dated back to the mid-1800s.

Cod would not necessarily work for Point Reyes' cattle ranchers, and what worked in Indiana's industrial sand dunes might not be amenable to communities on Fire Island or Padre Island in Texas. Neuberger encountered so much opposition to the omnibus approach championed by Interior that he soon opposed his own bill. To ease a constituent's angst over Neuberger's bill, John F. Kennedy reassured him,

The bill has generated no visible support as yet, though it has had no active consideration. Senator Neuberger himself is not a proponent of this legislation and merely introduced it on request by the Department of the Interior.⁵¹

Other omnibus bills for creating national seashores followed. S. 543, introduced in 1961, when several individual seashore bills were already under consideration, would have funded studies of twelve possible coastal national parks and national forest coastal lands that could be suitable for recreational uses.⁵² Like Neuberger's bill, S. 543 never made it out of committee.⁵³

Differences in land use, power structures, local politics, and jurisdiction over beaches versus inland areas made any omnibus bill on seashores politically difficult. A park-by-park legislative approach held more promise. Elected officials began responding to constituents' concerns when drafting the bills, taking some power away from Interior. By the early 1960s, Interior had yielded to a park-by-park approach to creating national seashores, even as agency leaders continued to see the push for buying up coastal land as a concerted national conservation effort.

MISSION 66 ACCOMPLISHED

Seashores played a prominent role in the expansion of the federal park system over the next decade: between 1961 and 1975,

Congress authorized the addition of thirteen national seashores or lakeshores to the National Park System.⁵⁴ Of those, four were within a two-hour drive of major metropolitan areas: Cape Cod (Boston), Fire Island (New York City), Point Reyes (San Francisco), and the Indiana Dunes (Chicago). Although their individual stories merit more than the few paragraphs,⁵⁵ a brief mention of how these four national seashores came into being is nonetheless enlightening for understanding Park Service history as a whole.

Cape Cod was the first national seashore Congress established as a result of the 1950s studies. After years of drafting legislation that would protect homeowners, with the help of many politically connected Cape Cod residents, Congress authorized Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961, and President John F. Kennedy signed it into law in August. In his prepared remarks given at the signing ceremony, Kennedy reinforced the idea that Cape Cod was part of a larger federal seashore effort, stating,

I join the Congress and hope that this will be one of a whole series of great seashore parks which will be for the use and benefit of all of our people... I think we are going to need a good deal more effort like this, particularly in the more highly developed urban areas, where so many millions of people now live... I know that the government and the Congress will work together in seeing how they can carry on similar projects in other parts of the country.⁵⁶

Kennedy's careful mention of how Cape Cod would serve as a model for other parks near metropolitan areas helped propel Interior's actions on other seashore parks.

In 1962, Congress passed legislation authorizing Point Reyes National Seashore, located only a few hours' drive from the booming Bay Area.⁵⁷ Here, dairy farmers owned a good deal of the land slated for acquisition. Arguments among ranchers, Bay Area



JACKIE M. M. GONZALES, ESRI, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, TOMTOM



residents, and Interior turned on whether a national seashore could include continued agricultural use, whether suburban development really threatened the area, and how much buy-in Congress needed from residents of the affected area.

Back on the East Coast, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall publicly squared off with New York's powerful planner Robert Moses over Fire Island.⁵⁸ In 1964 the barrier island became a national seashore rather than a scenic highway, as Moses had wanted, thanks in large part to the strength of the wilderness movement and the desire for more conservation-oriented, roadless parks during the formative years of the environmental movement.⁵⁹

And in 1966, fifty years after establishment of the National Park Service and fifty years after Stephen Mather held hearings on a proposed Sand Dunes National Park, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the act establishing the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.⁶⁰ Heavy industry had continued to encroach on Indiana's biologically unique sand dunes in the intervening half century; by the 1960s, the state of Indiana had its eye on a public port at a sandy ditch in the dunes, a location that would surely require constant dredging but looked newly attractive with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959. In a deft realpolitik move, Illinois Senator Paul Douglas crafted a last-minute legislative compromise in which the state would get federal funding for a port only if the remainder of Indiana's sand dunes became a national lakeshore.⁶¹ The scheme worked, and Indiana got both

a new port and a 15,000-acre national lakeshore only an hour's drive from downtown Chicago.

An effort that started in the most unlikely of places—an industrial zone in the Midwest—grew to encompass lands favored by some of America's wealthiest and most influential citizens that is now accessible to tens of millions of taxpayers. As Americans' values changed as the nation became more urbanized and cities grew in the first half of the twentieth century, attitudes towards beaches and seashore landscapes changed with, or as a result of, this growth. Efforts to include beaches in the national park system began with a fleeting whim of Park Service director Stephen Mather, gained traction in the mid-1930s, and then became a realistic goal in the 1960s because of the interest of Conrad Wirth, wealthy philanthropists, and an agency flush with Mission 66 funding. The personal interest of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in particular seashores (Cape Cod and Padre Island) and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall's recreation- and conservation-focused leadership made seashores and lakeshores a reality. The rapid and extensive federal coastal land acquisition in the 1960s and early 1970s represents the largest concerted coastal conservation initiative in U.S. history. The story of how it happened is vital to understanding not only National Park Service history, but how the United States came to protect and manage its complex and shifting shorelines.

Thus a whim of Director Mather that targeted Indiana's industrialized sand dunes in the 1910s gained traction in the mid-1930s and then became a realistic goal in the 1960s because of the efforts

National Seashores and National Lakeshores

Park	State	Signed into Law	Officially Established	Total Acreage	Federal Acreage
Cape Hatteras NS	NC	August 17, 1937	January 12, 1953	30,350.65	30,350.10
Cape Cod NS	MA	August 7, 1961	June 1, 1966	43,607.14	27,548.99
Point Reyes NS	CA	September 13, 1962	October 20, 1972	71,055.41	65,234.35
Padre Island NS	TX	September 28, 1962	April 6, 1968	130,434.27	130,355.46
Fire Island NS	NY	September 11, 1964	September 11, 1984	19,580.42	6,241.95
Assateague Island NS	MD, VA	September 21, 1965	September 21, 1965	41,346.50	18,928.27
Cape Lookout NS	NC	March 10, 1966	March 10, 1966	28,243.36	25,173.62
Pictured Rocks NL	MI	October 15, 1966	October 5, 1972	73,235.83	35,728.86
Indiana Dunes NL	IN	November 5, 1966	November 5, 1966	15,347.13	11,040.90
Apostle Islands NL	WI	September 26, 1970	September 26, 1970	69,377.43	42,160.70
Sleeping Bear Dunes NL	MI	October 21, 1970	October 21, 1970	71,210.15	57,472.53
Gulf Islands NS	MS, AL, FL	January 8, 1971	January 8, 1971	138,305.52	99,779.27
Cumberland Island NS	GA	October 23, 1972	October 23, 1972	36,346.83	19,524.92
Canaveral NS	FL	January 3, 1975	January 3, 1975	57,661.69	57,647.69

Source: U.S. National Park Service, *The National Parks: Index 1916–2016*

of Director Wirth, the support of philanthropists, federal funding for Mission 66, and the environmentalism of Secretary Udall. The 36-page report “Our Vanishing Shoreline” precipitated a broad federal coastal land acquisition program, and the personal interest of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in Cape Cod and Padre Island, respectively, propelled congressional action on seashores and lakeshores. This rapid, extensive federal coastal land acquisition in the 1960s and early 1970s represents the largest concerted coastal conservation initiative in U.S. history. The story of how it happened is vital to understanding not only National Park Service history, but how the United States came to protect and manage its complex and shifting shorelines. □

Jackie M. M. Gonzales is a research historian with Historical Research Associates, Inc. in Seattle. This article is drawn from her dissertation, “Coastal Parks for a Metropolitan Nation,” which examined the postwar federal initiative to buy America’s beaches.

NOTES

1. Conrad Wirth, Foreword, “A Report on Our Vanishing Shoreline: The Shoreline, The Survey, The Areas,” by U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955), 3.
2. “Our Vanishing Shoreline,” 7–8.
3. “Our Vanishing Shoreline,” 15.
4. Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); see Chapter 3, “Worthless Lands.”
5. For more on the Park Service’s inclination toward vertical landscapes, see Runte, *National Parks*, 197, 210–11; Paul Sadin, *Managing a Land in Motion: An Administrative History of Point Reyes National Seashore* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2007), 40–41. On Acadia, see George B. Dorr, *Acadia National Park: Its Origin and Background* (Bangor: Burr Printing Co., 1942).
6. Robert P. McIntosh, “Ecology Since 1900,” *History of American Ecology*, ed. Frank N. Egerton (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 353–54.
7. Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 207–208; Henry Chandler Cowles, “An

Ecological Study of the Sand Dune Flora of Northern Indiana” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1898).

8. Stephen T. Mather, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “Report on the Proposed Sand Dunes National Park, Indiana” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1917), 24.
9. Quote is from Horace Albright, cited in Kay Franklin and Norma Schaeffer, *Duel for the Dunes: Land Use Conflict on the Shores of Lake Michigan* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 36; on industrial development, see 34–36, 40–42.
10. Ron Cockrell, *A Signature of Time and Eternity: The Administrative History of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Indiana* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), Chapter 1.
11. Runte, *National Parks*, 127–34.
12. Runte, *National Parks*, 136; on the Everglades, 130–36.
13. Robert Sterling Yard to Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 21, 1924. Folder “FDR: Family, Business and Personal, Subject File. National Parks Association,” Box 30, Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt Family, Business and Personal Papers. Subject File. Miscellaneous Memorabilia—Naval Matters. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, NY. On the increased influence of biologists on agency policy in the 1930s, see Richard Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), chap. 4.
14. Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker, *The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth* (New York: Viking, 1998).
15. Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 17–24.
16. Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (1864; repr., New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), 20; Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 201–27.
17. Oscar L. Chapman, Acting Secretary of the Interior, to Honorable Rene L. DeRouen, Chairman, Committee on the Public Lands, July 19, 1937. Report to accompany H.R. 7022, *Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore. August 9, 1937*. Calendar No. 1247, 75th Congress, 1st Session, Senate, Report No. 1196.
18. Larry Dilsaver, *Cumberland Island National Seashore: A History of Conservation Conflict* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 77.
19. Cameron Binkley, *The Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore: The Great Depression through Mission 66* (Atlanta: National Park Service, Southeast Regional Office, 2007), 4; Douglas W. Doe, “New Deal Origins of the Cape Cod National Seashore,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 25(2) (Summer 1997): 144–45.

20. Emerson Knight, *Point Reyes Peninsula, CA: Study of a National Seashore Recreation Area 1935*, 1935, Box 5, Folder 12, Emerson Knight Collection, BANC 79/2 C, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Thomas H. Desmond, "A Proposed Seashore and Historic Parkway on Cape Cod, Massachusetts," commissioned by the National Park Service (Simsbury, CT, 1939), 3–4.
21. Binkley, *Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore*, 32–33.
22. Mary-Louise Quinn, "The History of the Beach Erosion Board, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers, 1930–1963," Miscellaneous Report No. 77–9 (August 1977), Prepared for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Coastal Engineering Research Center.
23. Binkley, *Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore*, 15–26.
24. Conrad Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 260, 328; Binkley, *Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore*, 121–23.
25. George Palmer, former Assistant Mid-Atlantic Regional Director, National Park Service, Interview by Robert F. Gibbs, Francis P. Burling, and Charles H. W. Foster, October 10, 1975, 6–7, Burling papers, Salt Pond Visitor Center, Cape Cod National Seashore, National Park Service.
26. John C. Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 115; Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 151.
27. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 318. The 1940 budget was \$28.8 million.
28. Barry Mackintosh, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1991), 62; Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 129–30.
29. Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers: The History of a Building Type* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2000), 1–6.
30. Roy E. Appleman, *A History of the National Park Service Mission 66 Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958); Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 173–77; Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).
31. "Our Vanishing Shoreline," 9, 23.
32. Wirth recounts his version of this back-and-forth in his memoir, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 55–56.
33. Binkley, *Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore*, 99–101.
34. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 58. The two foundations merged to form the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 1969. See Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, "History," <https://mellon.org/about/history/>, accessed April 18, 2017.
35. Sadin, *Managing a Land in Motion*, 46; Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 55–58, 193; and Binkley, *Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore*, 109–112.
36. Even early leaders were industrial giants and philanthropists: Mather, who had made a fortune in borax mining, supplemented Park Service funding in its early years. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 31, 94; Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 49, 54; Mackintosh, *The National Parks*, 23, 49. After this, the Mellon Foundation continued seashore conservation work: in 1970, it donated \$6 million toward land acquisition at Cumberland Island National Seashore. Dilsaver, *Cumberland Island National Seashore*, 101–02.
37. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "A Report on the Seashore Recreation Area Survey of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955); U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Pacific Coast Recreation Area Survey" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959); U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Our Fourth Shore: Great Lakes Shoreline Recreation Area Survey" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959).
38. "Our Vanishing Shoreline," 27, 35–36; "Report on the Seashore Recreation Area Survey of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts"; "Pacific Coast Recreation Area Survey," 11; "Our Fourth Shore," 6.
39. "Our Fourth Shore," 7–8; "Pacific Coast Recreation Area Survey," 8–10, 13; "Our Vanishing Shoreline," 18–19.
40. Larry Dilsaver writes that these reports "galvanized the campaign for recreation areas, particularly coastal ones." Dilsaver, *Cumberland Island National Seashore*, iv, 80.
41. Letter, Hatfield Chilson, Undersecretary of the Interior, to John F. Kennedy, September 16, 1957, Box 620, "Cape Cod Canal, Cape Cod National Park, 6/11/57–9/16/57" Folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston (hereafter, JFKL); Letter, Leslie Moore, Executive Editor, *Worcester Telegram—The Evening Gazette Sunday Telegram* to Senator John F. Kennedy, March 12, 1957, Box 663, "Cape Cod Canal, Cape Cod National Park, 1/31/56–4/9/57" Folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, JFKL. Letter, E. T. Scoyen, Acting Director, Department of Interior, to Mrs. Adrian Murphey, May 1959, Box 687, "Cape Cod National Park, 4/1/59–6/29/59" Folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, JFKL.
42. Maurice Barbash, Chairman, Citizens' Committee for a Fire Island National Seashore, Senate Committee on Public Lands, Fire Island National Seashore; Hearings, December 11, 1963, 41; James Randall to John Kennedy, September 10, 1959, Box 713, "Cape Cod National Park, 9/7/59–9/29/59" Folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, JFKL.
43. Franklin and Schaeffer, *Duel for the Dunes*, 124–50; Cockrell, *A Signature of Time and Eternity*, Chapter 2.
44. Kennedy wrote to Izaak Walton League Conservation Director Joseph Penfold, "It would be most helpful if the Izaak Walton League will devote special efforts next year to the national seashore issue." John F. Kennedy to J. W. Penfold, Conservation Director, Izaak Walton League of America, September 19, 1959, Box 754, "Cape Cod National Park—Correspondence, 9/11/59–10/30/59" Folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, JFKL.
45. "Report on Point Reyes: Shoreline Park for the Future," *Sierra Club Bulletin* 43 (September 1958); Harold Gilliam, *Island in Time: The Point Reyes Peninsula* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Press, 1962); Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 117–30.
46. Brian C. Kalt, *Sixties Sandstorm: The Fight over Establishment of a Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 1961–1970* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 37–58; Laura Watt, *The Paradox of Preservation: Wilderness and Working Landscapes at Point Reyes National Seashore* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 77–81.
47. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 325–38; Runte, *National Parks*, 111–14.
48. Franklin and Schaeffer, *Duel for the Dunes*, 159; Derek Larson, "Preserving Eden: The Culture of Conservation in Oregon, 1960–1980" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2001), 44; "Fire Island National Park Wins Support," *Suffolk County News (Sayville)*, March 8, 1957, 1; Francis P. Burling, *The Birth of the Cape Cod National Seashore* (Plymouth, MA: Leyden Press, 1978), 11.
49. "National Parks Shouldn't Be Set Up by Decree," editorial, *Saturday Evening Post*, July 18, 1959, 10.
50. 105 Cong. Rec. 8549 (May 20, 1959); Dilsaver, *Cumberland Island National Seashore*, 85–86.
51. John F. Kennedy to Nathaniel Saltonstall, June 29, 1959, Box 713, "Cape Cod National Park, 4/1/59–6/29/59" Folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, JFKL.
52. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Subcommittee on Public Lands, Shoreline Recreation Areas: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Public Lands on S. 543, 87th Cong., 1st sess., March 8 and 9, 1961, 2.
53. Dilsaver, *Cumberland Island National Seashore*, 85–86.
54. For a list of new Park Service units in this time period, see Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People*, 325–28. For dates of Park Service unit authorization and establishment, see U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The National Parks: Index 1916–2016*, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/NPIndex2012-2016.pdf>, accessed April 8, 2017.
55. I am currently completing a manuscript that uses these four sites as case studies to explore how a central federal policy played out in divergent political arenas under the influences of growing megalopolises.
56. John F. Kennedy, Remarks on signing bill authorizing Cape Cod National Seashore, August 7, 1961, Papers of John F. Kennedy, Presidential Papers, President's Office Files, Speech Files, John F. Kennedy Library, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-035-034.aspx>, accessed April 20, 2017.
57. Pub. L. 87–712, Sept. 28, 1962, 76 Stat. 650; Pub. L. 87–657, Sept. 13, 1962, 76 Stat. 540.
58. Ronald Maiorana, "Udall Doubts U.S. Will Buy on L.I.: Suggests It Is Too Late for Purchasing Shore Area," *New York Times*, June 3, 1962, 56.
59. Lee Koppelman and Seth Foreman, *Fire Island National Seashore: A History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).
60. Pub. L. 89–761, November 5, 1966, 80 Stat. 1309.
61. Franklin and Schaeffer, *Duel for the Dunes*, 163–73.