



The Life of a Barrier Island

Gulf Islands National Seashore is a place of myriad riches. There are sparkling blue waters, magnificent snowy-white beaches, and fertile coastal marshes. In the national seashore there are 19th century forts, shaded picnic areas, winding nature trails, and comfortable campgrounds. Diverse and abounding with wildlife, the park is not a single block of land—it is a mosaic. It includes 11 separate units stretching eastward 150 miles from West Ship Island, Mississippi, to the eastern tip of Santa Rosa Island, Florida.

Congress established Gulf Islands National Seashore in 1971. The purposes of the park are to provide recreation for visitors and to protect the wildlife, barrier islands, salt marshes, historic structures, and archeological sites along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico. Although more than 80 percent of the park is submerged lands, the barrier

islands are the outstanding features to most visitors. Composed of brilliant white sand carried seaward by rivers draining the Appalachian Mountains, the islands are long and narrow. They are called barrier islands because they serve as blockades to ocean waves and violent storms that would otherwise strike the mainland coast with greater force. Besides the islands, Gulf Islands National Seashore includes parcels of land on the Florida and Mississippi mainlands. Here you can find fortifications built by Spaniards and Americans. You will also find the site of the first federal tree farm established in 1829, archeological traces of American Indians, and forest and marshes teeming with wildlife.

When Europeans first visited the northern Gulf of Mexico in the early 1500s, they found American Indian settlements that were populous

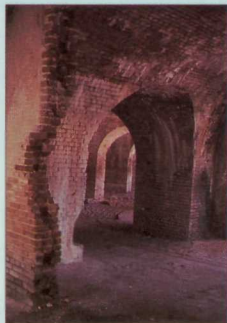
and thriving. At the Naval Live Oaks Area in Florida, middens (rubbish piles) and other remains help archeologists understand and chronicle the long period of Indian settlement. All the park's archeological sites, historic sites, and artifacts are protected by federal law and must not be disturbed.

Along the Gulf of Mexico, discovery by Europeans was followed by a long struggle for the region's control. Spain, in 1559, established a settlement in Florida on Pensacola Bay, but the place was abandoned soon afterward. Spaniards revived the settlement in 1698, surrendered it to the French in 1719, regained it by treaty in 1722, ceded it to the English in 1763, and repossessed it by force in 1781. Meanwhile in Mississippi, sovereignty shifted from France to England and from England to Spain. Eventually, Florida and Mississippi joined the United

States. In 1825, the U.S. Government began to develop Pensacola as a major naval base guarded by fortifications, and in 1859 work began on a fort on Ship Island, Mississippi. The forts saw brief action during the Civil War. In later years, fortifications and weapons systems along the coast were updated and expanded. They remained active until the end of World War II, when modern weapons made traditional coastal defense obsolete.

Gulf Islands National Seashore, a park rich in natural and cultural resources, is yours to enjoy and protect. Whatever you do while here or however long you stay, we hope you enjoy your visit.

How the barrier islands were formed is something of a mystery. All theories involve the work of waves, winds, and fluctuating sea levels. Whatever their origin, the barrier islands are always changing. Alongshore currents wear away the islands on their eastern ends while building them up on the west. As a result, the islands shift steadily westward. More changes are made by violent storms that overwash the islands and rearrange the sand, and by winds that shift and sculpt the dunes. Such changes are constant. They are slowed only by the protective covering of grasses and plants that grow on the dunes and in the island interiors. The sea oat, which has an elaborate stem and root system, plays a vital role in holding the islands together. Long stretches of beach ring the barrier islands and provide visitors with wonderful places to swim, relax, and reflect.



Recipe for a fort: begin with an important location, add a skilled work force, season with arches and cisterns, and stir in millions of bricks and a vast supply of mortar.



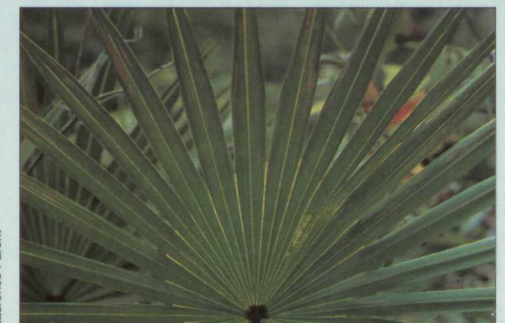
Misty mornings, cool, quiet, and peaceful, can be the best time to view birds, catch a fish, or meditate on the beauty of nature.



Dunes of snow-white sand give a distinctive look to the barrier islands of Gulf Islands National Seashore. Held together by a fragile network of stems and roots, the dunes are composed of fine quartz sand that originated in distant mountains.

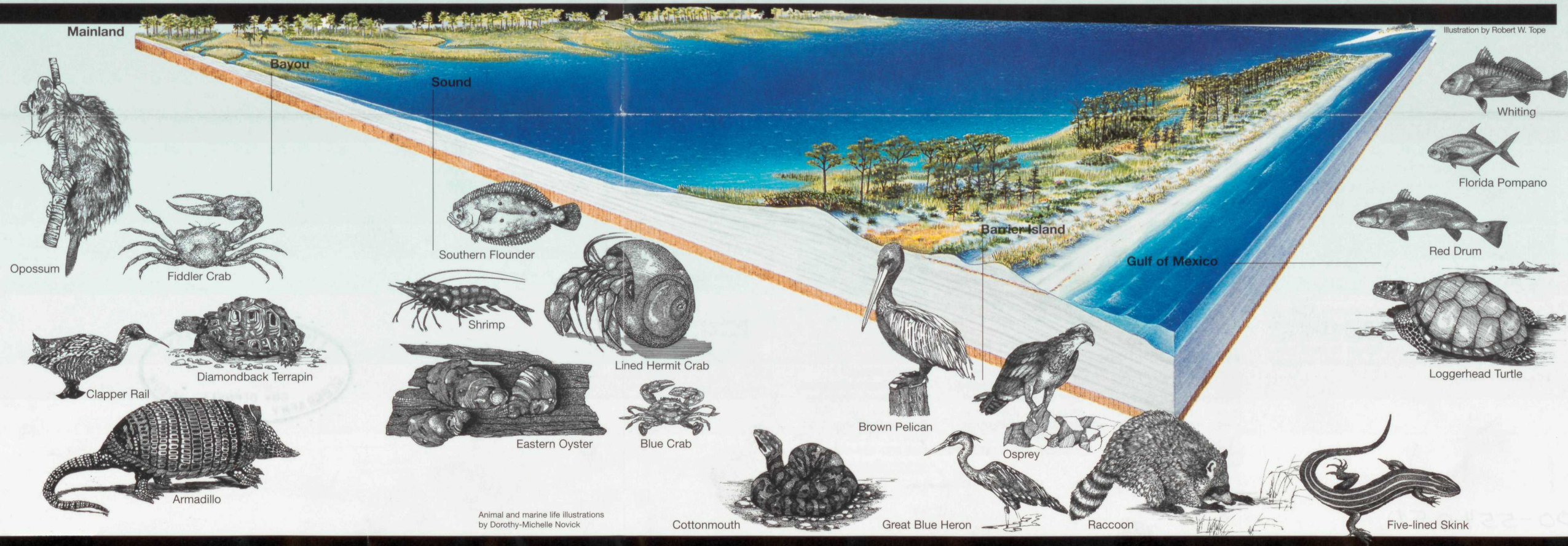


Look closely to find animals who live in the marsh from small fiddler crabs to stately great blue herons. The marsh provides a home to many creatures.



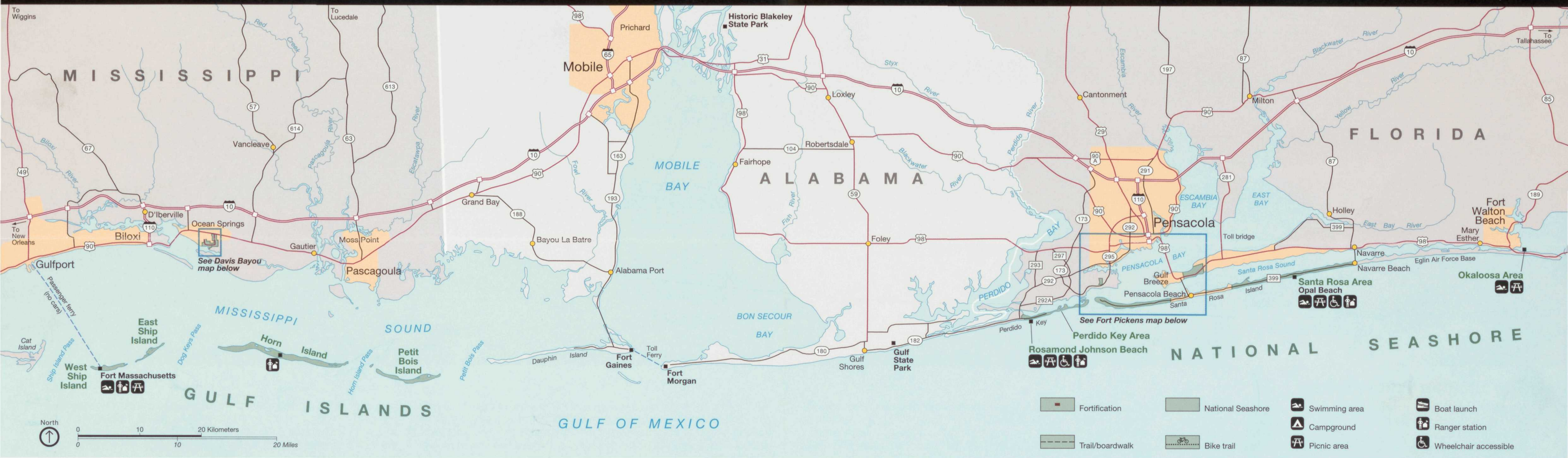
Find the saw palmetto under stands of pine and oak trees. Coastal Indians found uses for the berries, as does medicine today.

Barrier islands are special places. Continually changing, they provide habitat for wildlife and buffer the mainland from storms. Storms may cause an island to change shape or disappear. In 1969 Hurricane Camille split Ship Island in two. Subsequent hurricanes have made significant alterations to the islands. Despite the changes, life clings tenaciously to the islands. Near the water, plants such as sea oats and cordgrass, which are tolerant of high salt levels, flourish. Behind the primary dunes, shrubs and some trees grow, but they stand little higher than the dunes that protect them from salt spray. In the island interiors, marshes collect fresh rainwater and support diverse communities of plants and animals. Behind these islands, waters of the sounds, bays, and bayous are less salty than the waters of the Gulf. Nutrients washed down from the mainland give rise to a wealth of marine life. Here shrimp and fish valuable to commercial fishing pass portions of their lives, and creatures such as herons, egrets, alligators, and fiddler crabs reproduce and flourish. Without the protection afforded by the barrier islands, the plant and animal communities of the mainland coasts would not be as rich.



Animal and marine life illustrations
by Dorothy-Michelle Novick

Exploring Gulf Islands



Visiting the Mississippi District

Getting There To reach Davis Bayou on the mainland in Ocean Springs, follow the signs for Gulf Islands National Seashore along I-10 and U.S. 90. The islands in the Mississippi district are about 10 miles offshore and can be reached only by boat. During the spring, summer, and fall, excursion boat trips from Gulfport to West Ship Island are offered by a concessioner. The schedules change with the seasons; consult the concessioner's printed schedule for frequency and times, or call 228-864-1014. Private boats may dock near Fort Massachusetts on West Ship Island year-round, but only during daylight hours. Information about boats licensed to carry passengers to the wilderness islands (East Ship, Horn, and Petit Bois) is available at the William M. Colmer Visitor Center at Davis Bayou.

The Mainland Davis Bayou has many year-round facilities, including a 51-site campground (first-come, first-served). Electric and non-electric sites, water hookups, and a sewage dump station are available in the campground. The area also has a group tent area, picnic shelters, a ball field, self-guiding nature trail, and a boat launch. There is no beach. The Colmer Visitor Center features an information desk, a bookstore, exhibits, and an auditorium that shows orientation films.

The Islands The islands offer dramatic scenery but limited facilities. On East Ship, Horn, and Petit Bois islands, primitive camping is permitted, but food and drinking water must be packed in and all trash removed. On West Ship Island, limited food service and water are available at the concession stand. Park rangers can answer your

questions or give help in an emergency at the ranger station. Guided tours of Fort Massachusetts on West Ship Island are given in summer. Visitors to the fort will find exhibits, informational publications, and a small bookstore. A boardwalk, about 1/3-mile long, goes from the boat dock across to the south side of the island. There you can find a swimming beach with a bathhouse, a snack bar, restrooms, indoor and outdoor showers, and a picnic pavilion. The sun on the islands is intense; visitors are advised to wear protective clothing, drink plenty of fluids, and always use a sunscreen. Watch for changing weather and surf conditions. Fishing is permitted except in swimming areas. Check state laws for license requirements. Boaters should consult NOAA charts 11372 and 11374.

Visiting the Florida District

Getting There To reach the historic mainland forts and the National Museum of Naval Aviation, use the main entrance of Pensacola Naval Air Station about one mile south of Barrancas Avenue (Fla. 292) on Navy Boulevard (Fla. 295). Fla. 292 leads southwest from Pensacola to the Perdido Key Area. On the island turn left onto Johnson Beach Road. The Perdido Key Area has an entrance fee. To get to the Naval Live Oaks, Fort Pickens, and Santa Rosa areas take U. S. 98 east from Pensacola. The Naval Live Oaks Area is just east of Gulf Breeze on U.S. 98. To reach Fort Pickens and Santa Rosa, take Fla. 399 from Gulf Breeze to Pensacola Beach. From there, Fort Pickens is nine miles west, while the Santa Rosa Area is 10 miles east. The Okaloosa Area is on U.S. 98 east of Fort Walton Beach.

Swimming, Fishing, Boating, Hiking Swimming areas with outdoor showers are at Rosamond Johnson Beach on Perdido Key, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Fort Pickens. No fishing license is required on the Fort Pickens Fishing Pier. To use the pier after the park is closed, a night owl permit is required and is available for purchase. Do not spearfish around jetties, piers, or where people are swimming. Do not swim in the shipping channels. Check state laws for license requirements. For navigating these waters, boaters should use NOAA chart 11378. All hikers are advised that certain dune areas may be closed to restore damage. Park rangers conduct programs year-round.

Entrance Fee Entrance fees are charged at the Perdido Key, Fort Pickens, and Santa Rosa areas. The annual Park Pass and the Golden Age, Golden

Access, and Golden Eagle passes are honored. Night owl permits maybe purchased for after-hours entrance to the Perdido Key and Fort Pickens areas.

Camping and Other Facilities Visitor centers are at Naval Live Oaks, Fort Barrancas, and Fort Pickens. All have exhibits, information, and bookstores. Near Fort Pickens a 200-site campground is open daily; some sites have electricity. Reservations are accepted—call: 800-365-2267; Internet: www.reservations.nps.gov. Supplies and a laundry are available at the campground store. Picnic areas are located at each area in Florida. Snack bars are open seasonally at Rosamond Johnson Beach on Perdido Key and at Fort Pickens. Self guiding nature trails are at Fort Pickens, Naval Live Oaks, Fort Barrancas, and Perdido Key.



There is no beach at the national seashore's Davis Bayou Area, but public beaches are nearby in Ocean Springs. From the park entrance, take U.S. 90 west for 2.9 miles, turn south at the Ocean Springs business district onto Washington Avenue, and proceed 0.8 mile to Front Beach.

Regulations and Safety

For your safety and to protect the park, follow these regulations:

- Do not swim alone. Be cautious about rip currents, Portuguese man-of-war, sting rays, jellyfish, and barnacle-covered rocks.
- Boaters should be familiar with the "Rules of the Road."
- Be alert for sudden storms. During thunderstorms, do not remain on piers, beaches, or fortifications.
- Notify a

ranger promptly of any boating or diving accidents.- Use caution if exploring forts and batteries. Take a flashlight; some passageways are dimly lit. Some fortifications are closed for safety and all are closed sunset to 8 a.m.
- Glass containers are prohibited on all beaches in the national seashore; all trash must be removed as you leave.
- All animals, plants, and historic objects in the park

are protected by federal law.- Motor vehicles must stay on the roads.
- Metal detectors are prohibited.
- Bird nesting areas may be posted as closed to entry during nesting seasons.
- Keep pets on leashes; they are not allowed on beaches in Florida, at the designated swimming area of Ship Island, on any tour boats, in historic structures, or in buildings.
- Do not feed or disturb wildlife.

Wilderness Area

On November 10, 1978, Congress set aside Horn and Petit Bois islands as wilderness areas. This recognized these islands as being among the last of the untouched and undeveloped barrier islands on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. As wilderness areas, their delicate bal-

ance is maintained free from human interference. They provide habitats for the uncommon species of birds, animals, and marine life and a place where the future generations can appreciate this country's rich natural heritage. Before visiting the islands check with

a ranger about regulations for visiting a wilderness area and the difficulties involved in going to an area where there is no water, shelter, communication, or any facilities. Rewards of such a trip can outweigh any difficulty. Park rangers can help you plan carefully.

More Information

Gulf Islands National Seashore, a unit of the National Park System, is one of more than 370 parks that are important examples of our nation's natural and cultural heritage. Find more information at www.nps.gov/guis on the Internet.

Mississippi District—Write: Superintendent, Gulf Islands National Seashore, 3500 Park Road, Ocean Springs, MS 39564-9709. Call 228-875-9057.

Florida District—Write: Superintendent, Gulf Islands National Seashore, 1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561-5000. Call 850-934-2600.

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Fort Pickens, Fort Barrancas, Advanced Redoubt, and Naval Live Oaks (Florida)

