

Along this Dynamic Seascape,

a chain of island strongholds guards against threats from the Gulf of Mexico. Whether facing attacking ships or hurricanes, the military fortifications and barrier islands of Gulf Islands National Seashore have protected these harbors and the mainland through many storms.

Sound

Maritime Forest

Wetland

Islands on the Move

As you explore the barrier islands, can you spot how the landscape changes all around you? Sometimes you will see a gradual edge between two ECOSYSTEMS. Other times, you can step directly from one ecosystem to the next.

Each boundary brings a great variety of plants and animals that are adapted to these ever-changing environments. Note how some species establish themselves across habitat boundaries while others truly live on the edge.

Sand Dunes

Gulf

Warm saltwater areas, shallow and deep, house species, big and small.

Barrier Island

Water and wind shape and move the islands, changing habitats.

Sound

In waterways between the barrier islands and the mainland, saltwater mixes with freshwater.

Estuary

Sediment, saltwater tides, and freshwater streams meet and provide a nursery habitat.

Bayou

Some species live in slow-moving, lowland streams and freshwater marshes of river watersheds.

Coastal Communities

A range of ecosystems and HABITATS develop where the Gulf's salt water and mainland's fresh water mix. Over 400 fish species, 300 bird species, and a dozen federally listed threatened and endangered species make the park their home. Water makes up over 82 percent of the area the park manages and is a key factor in where these species live.

Bottle-nosed dolphin
© NICK SIDLE/HEARTSTONE

Loggerhead turtle hatchling
© STEPHANIE PLUSCHT

Snowy plover
© MICHAEL WOLF

Perdido Key beach mouse
USFWS

Ghost crab
© CAROL POULOS

Red-winged blackbird
© ANDREW LELYLOUST

Osprey adult with juveniles
© MARTIN PASSCHER

Great blue heron
© PAUL GRAUNKE

Diamondback terrapin
© PAT LUBAS

Alligator
© ROSMARIE ALENUS

Watching the Waters

Among natural beauty and recreational opportunities you will find numerous COASTAL FORTIFICATIONS. The park's collection, like its Third System masonry forts, represents over 200 years of innovation in military design, materials, weapons, and strategy.



Fort Barrancas looks over the Spanish Water Battery.
© JOEL CADOFF

Fort Barrancas PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

With Advanced Redoubt and the Spanish Water Battery, Fort Barrancas protected the channel and defended the landward approach to the Pensacola Navy Yard.



Enslaved labor built Fort Pickens.
© JOEL CADOFF

Fort Pickens SANTA ROSA ISLAND, FLORIDA

The park's largest fort, Fort Pickens has been partially restored and reveals how its construction has developed over time.

Fort McRee PERDIDO KEY, FLORIDA

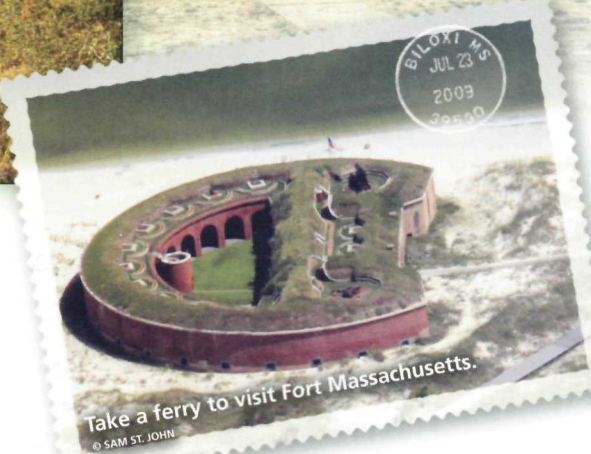
Federal forces almost destroyed Confederate-occupied Fort McRee in 1861-62; departing Confederates burned the rest. The fort's remnants are no longer visible.



Confederate soldiers at Fort McRee
PENSAPEDIA/WIKI

Fort Massachusetts SHIP ISLAND, MISSISSIPPI

Armed secessionists seized Ship Island in 1861; they later exchanged fire with the USS Massachusetts. When the Union recaptured the island, the fort's construction resumed and was completed in 1866.



Take a ferry to visit Fort Massachusetts.
© SAM ST. JOHN

Fort Barrancas and Advanced Redoubt

Fort McRee

Fort Pickens

Defending the Shore

The THIRD SYSTEM of sea-coast defense aimed to fortify major US harbors after the War of 1812. Pensacola Bay was chosen as the site for a navy yard, a depot, mainland and island forts, a naval timber reserve, and more.

The idea was a response to changing warfare technology and strategy—which was also why it was abandoned decades later. Of the nearly 200 forts recommended nationwide, only 42 were built. Today, the park preserves five sites.

Battery Worth
© STUART SCHAEFER

YAUPON HOLLY provides both food and shelter for migrating birds.
© BOB SHRAEDER

LIVE OAKS were ideal for ship building due to the strength and natural curvature of the wood.
© ALLISON RICHARDS

Sea oats
Yaupon holly

Black skimmer
© RICHARD MERRY

American oystercatcher
© BOB MENAK

Seagrass

Black needlerush

Saw palmetto

Slash pine

Live oak



Two States, One Park

Beaches, bayous, and boating are some of the many things you can experience in this two-state, 160-mile park. Fish, swim, hike, bike, picnic, camp, observe wildlife, discover history, and explore two island wilderness areas. The park's staff, website, and newspaper *The Island Breeze* can help plan your visit.

Build sand castles on white quartz beaches.
© CLARK MAXWELL

North

0 10 20 Kilometers
0 10 20 Miles

Trail/boardwalk

Multi-use trail

Florida National Scenic Trail

Gulf Islands National Seashore

Urban area

Fortification

Wheelchair-accessible

Ranger station

Boat launch

Swimming area

Picnic area

Pavilion

Campground

Backcountry camping

Gulf Islands National Seashore is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

Visit the park website at www.nps.gov/guls. Follow us on social media.

MISSISSIPPI AREAS The visitor center has information, exhibits, a bookstore, maps, and films. Closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The **campground** (open year-round) has electricity, water hook-ups, a dump station, a group tent area, a boat launch (fee), and pavilions. Reserve sites at www.recreation.gov. **Hiking trails** are self-guiding. A saltwater fishing license is required for all areas. The Davis Bayou area has a fishing pier. Commercial fishing is prohibited in park waters. Visit the park website for hours and programs.

West Ship Island (Fort Massachusetts) **Know what to expect:** An unshaded, 0.3-mile boardwalk leads to a swim beach, pavilions, restrooms, showers, and snack bar. Facilities are open mid-March through October. Free tours and exhibits are available seasonally. Tours of the fort are not wheelchair-accessible. Take a passenger ferry (fee) from Gulfport or Biloxi from mid-March through October, or dock your boat near the fort during daylight hours only year-round.

Cat, East Ship, Petit Bois, West Petit Bois, and Horn Islands (no facilities) are accessed only by private boat. Use your boat or hire a licensed operator from a list available at the visitor center or our website. Petit Bois and Horn islands are **designated wilderness areas**—lands untrammelled by humans, undeveloped, and retaining a primeval character with only an impermanent human presence. They are protected to preserve their natural conditions and offer opportunities for solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation.

Backcountry camping is allowed on East Ship, Horn, Petit Bois, and West Petit Bois islands. A permit is required for groups of 10 or more on Horn and Petit Bois islands only. Camping on Cat Island is allowed only on park land. Camping on West Ship Island is prohibited. Bring all your food and drinking water. Groups of 10 or more must get a permit. • **Boaters** follow NOAA charts 11372, 11373, and 11374.

FLORIDA AREAS The Fort Pickens Discovery Center and the Fort Barrancas Visitor Center have exhibits, films, and bookstores. Visit the park website for operating hours.

A seasonal ferry service (fee) between downtown Pensacola, Pensacola Beach, and Fort Pickens is available March through October. Visit the park website for programs, hours, and guided tours. **Entrance fees** apply at Fort Pickens, Fort Barrancas, Okaloosa, Opal Beach, and Perdido Key, or show a valid National Parks or Federal Recreational Lands pass. • **Hike self-guiding trails** at Fort Pickens, Fort Barrancas, Perdido Key, and Naval Live Oaks. • **Fish** from Fort Pickens' pier without a license; otherwise, state fishing licensing and regulations apply. • **Camping** reservations are recommended at 877-444-6777 or www.recreation.gov. • Some pavilions can be reserved; call the Special Use Permits Office, 850-934-2605. The Naval Live Oaks Youth Camping Pavilion is for organized groups only. • **Boaters** follow NOAA charts 11378, 11383, and 11384.

ENJOY A SAFE VISIT Never swim alone. Beware of rip currents, barnacle-covered rocks, sharks, jellyfish, and stingrays. • **Watch** for weather extremes, sudden storms, and changing surf conditions. Do not stand on piers, beaches, or fortifications during thunderstorms. • Use caution while exploring forts and batteries. Carry a flashlight for dark passageways. • Some areas and forts close for your safety or wildlife nesting. Avoid walking on dunes and vegetation; obey closure signs. • State boating and fishing regulations apply. Do not fish or boat in swim beach areas. • Glass is prohibited on beaches. • Wear protective clothing. Drink plenty of fluids. Use sunscreen. • Practice "Leave No Trace" principles. • Motor vehicles must stay on paved roads. • Metal detectors and spearfishing are prohibited. • Dogs are prohibited on all Mississippi islands and Florida beaches. • Do not feed or disturb wildlife. • Federal law protects all wildlife, plants, and historic objects. • For all park regulations, including firearms, check our website. • We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. Call or check our website.

Emergencies call 911

National Park Foundation. Join the park community. www.nationalparks.org
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Surf the Gulf of Mexico.
© TOM DIETZ

Photograph the park.
© ELIZABETH EURANKS

Kayak the bayou.
© KEVIN KING

Enjoy the sunset.
NPS

Fish from the beach.
ADONIR/BILLY POPE

Wade the waters.
© DARA BARFIELD

Explore the forts.
© KEVIN KING