

Issue: Access to Cumberland Island National Seashore

Challenges:

Visitation: Demand for access to Cumberland Island is steadily increasing, and over 150 visitors were turned away in a one-month period due to the restrictions imposed by the General Management Plan (GMP). Request for reservations on the ferry concession have exceeded the 300 per day limit set in the 1984 GMP on numerous occasions (15 times in March 2006). Commercial operations on Jekyll Island and Fernando have requested permission to take visitors to the island. Private boater and kayak visitation has increased substantially. Camping request regularly exceed the capacity of the campgrounds.

- The park is planning to amend the GMP to allow more visitors. This will require public participation through the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process. This is costly and time-consuming process, but is required by law and policy.
- New and upgraded facilities will be required on the island to support increased visitation; such as restrooms, water-treatment, shelters, boardwalks, trails, and campsites.
- The park is currently staffed to provide minimal support for the current limit of 300 visitors per day. In order to provide for the health and safety needs of the visitors we will need increased maintenance, ranger, and other support staff. We will also need to increase the number of concessions operations providing visitor services.

Plum Orchard: There is a tremendous increase in requests to visit Plum Orchard. In addition Plum Orchard is the logical point of access for visits to the Settlement on the north end of the island. Utilizing Plum as a visitor center/museum would take pressure off Sea Camp and Dungeness. This would allow visitation to be concentrated in three geographically small areas eliminating human pressure on the vast majority of the islands natural resources.

Transportation: There is currently no public transportation system on the island, and this eliminates access to the island for a large portion of the general population. We began the planning process (NEPA) for taking visitors to the Settlement in January 2006. The park needs to complete a similar process for the south end of the island. When the preferred alternatives are selected the park will need the resources to provide the desired transportation systems.

Beach Access: Cumberland Island has seventeen miles of beautiful unspoiled beach that most visitors are unable to enjoy because it is an arduous one-mile hike over dirt roads and three sets of sand dunes. In conjunction with some form of transportation system we need to build a boardwalk and rest area at the Dungeness beach access.

Land Protection Plan: The number one priority in the CUIS Land Protection Plan is the acquisition of tract 05-108 located at 103 Wheeler Street. This tract needs to be acquired for additional parking for visitors. The downtown historic district is small and parking is limited.

Designation Planned Benefits

Increased Tourism: Allowing more visitations will have a significant economic impact on Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida.

Action: Provide resources necessary to meet challenges.

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