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REPORT
of
SPECIFIC AREA STUDY
GULF ISLANDS
ALABAMA AND MISSISSIPPI

United States
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Region One

February 1962

Recreation Resource Planning

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
SUMMARY	1
CONCLUSION	1
RECOMMENDATIONS	2
DESCRIPTION	3
Dauphin Island	3
Petit Bois Island	4
Map of Petit Bois Island	5
Horn Island	6
Map of Horn Island	7
Ship Island	8
Cat Island	8
LAND USE AND POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT	9
POTENTIAL OR PROPOSED ADVERSE USE	10
LOCATION MAP - GULF ISLANDS	12
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES	13

SUMMARY

Dauphin Island has been so highly developed for private home sites and beach cottages that it no longer possesses any appreciable potential for public recreation.

Petit Bois and Horn Islands are partially owned by the Fish and Wildlife Service and acquisition of the remaining private property on both for use and management as wildlife refuge areas is planned.

All of the islands are nesting, resting and feeding areas for numerous water fowl.

The islands of Petit Bois, Horn, Ship and Cat are subject to hurricanes of considerable magnitude at about ten-year intervals and are of such low elevation as to be inundated by tidal action of the Gulf even when not directly in the path of such storms.

The islands have migrated to the westward approximately one and one-half miles during the past century. Eroding on the eastern ends and land building on the western ends indicates the process is continuing.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that developments on Dauphin Island, present and planned ownership of Petit Bois and Horn Islands, the constant threat of destructive hurricanes, the inaccessibility of the entire group

and the general lack of sufficient area for development, administration and use as a public recreation area precludes further consideration of the Gulf Islands as a National Seashore.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

Public recreation on Dauphin Island be left to the discretion of the Dauphin Island Park and Recreation Board.

Management and protection of Petit Bois and Horn Islands as units of Gulf Islands National Wildlife Refuges remain with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Further study be made of Cat Island by an appropriate agency to determine its potentialities for wildlife refuge purposes.

Although Ship Island is of less than national significance, public recreational opportunities should be continued and further developed.

No further consideration as a potential National Seashore be given this island group.

DESCRIPTION

Gulf Islands, as considered in this report, consists of five islands located in the Gulf of Mexico offshore from Alabama and Mississippi. One, Dauphin, is connected to the mainland by a causeway, while the others, Petit Bois, Horn, Ship and Cat, are accessible only by boat.

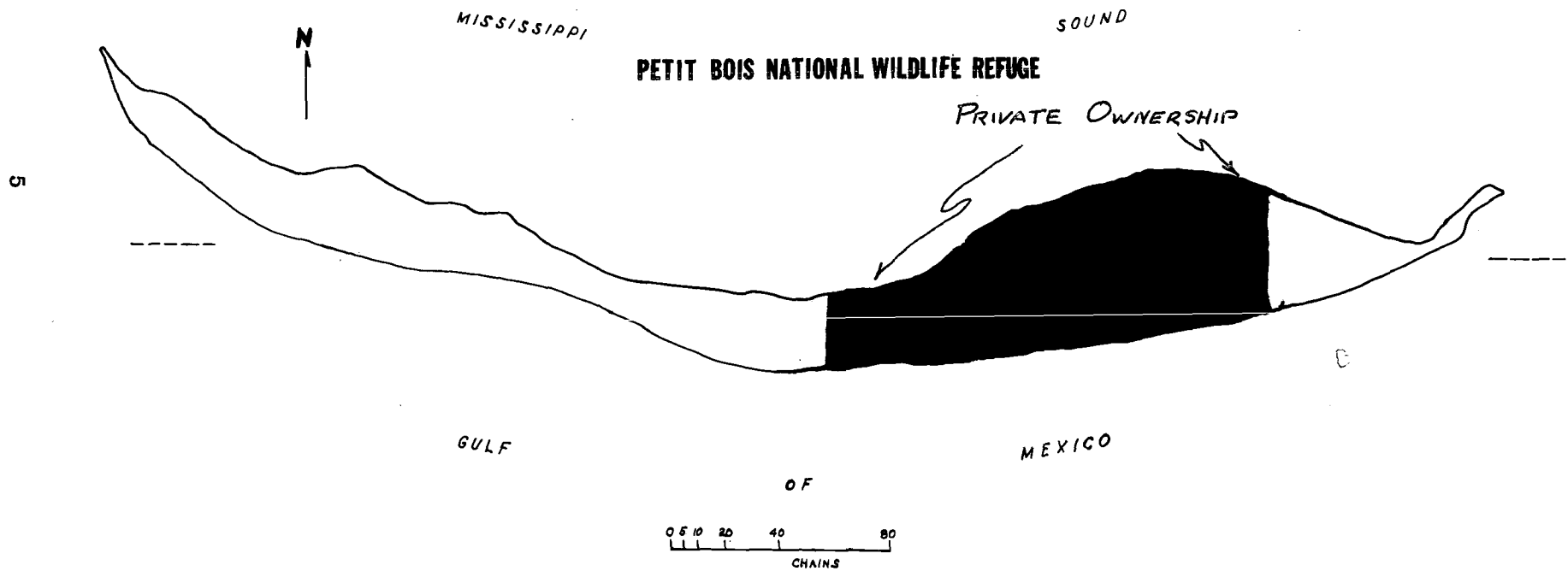
Dauphin Island

This barrier reef island, fifteen miles long and from one-half to one mile in width, lies off the coast of Alabama, between Petit Bois and the main seaward passage to Mobile Bay. The eastern portion of the island is wooded and heavily developed with private homes and commercial enterprise. A parkway-type road leads from the three and one-half million dollar causeway, to Fort Gaines where a military radar installation exists. Fort Gaines is developed as a public use area along with beach frontage. An eighteen foot road also runs westerly for five miles with access to subdivided lots that are occupied to within eight miles of the westerly end of the island. This area is sparsely vegetated. Spoil is being used to increase the acreage and homesite use of the island and to provide anchorage for small craft. Refuse is being dumped along a two-mile stretch of unimproved road running westerly from the last subdivided lots. The remaining six miles of unspoiled island with

sand beaches should be retained for public recreation. This appears to be the best use for this section since all subdivided lots have signs posted designating that beach frontage is closed to the public and enforced by county authorities. The round trip toll fee to cross the causeway has been raised from \$1.00 to \$1.25 recently because of insufficient funds to defray the cost of construction and operation.

Petit Bois Island

This island, nearly eight miles long but less than one-half mile wide, lies ten miles southeast of Pascagoula, Mississippi. It is nearly devoid of trees, has fresh and saltwater marshes, a few fresh water ponds and some areas of palmetto. The beach is wide, flat and shell littered. The Fish and Wildlife Service owns nearly half the acreage of the island divided by a privately owned strip near the wider portion. (See attached sketch.) It is the intention of the Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire the remainder of the island to provide nesting areas for heron, American and snowy egret, laughing gull, and royal, sandwich and least terns. Migratory fresh water ducks also use this island as a feeding station.



PETIT BOIS ISLAND

Horn Island

Horn Island is southeast of Biloxi, Mississippi and west of Petit Bois Island. This is the largest of the island group, containing 4,500 acres in its twelve-mile length and one-half mile average width. The beach is wide, gently sloping, and has a fairly steep foreshore. The sand is clear and white, and the water clear and calm. Elevated areas are covered with slash pine and live oaks. Considerable portions of the island are marsh grass and there are a few fresh water ponds. An artesian water system has been developed on the island but water is sulphurous to smell and taste. Dunes have a maximum height of thirty-five feet and are moderately high on the Gulf side of the island. The Fish and Wildlife Service owns over one-half the island and intends to acquire the remaining privately owned land in the near future. (See attached sketch.) The island is used as a nesting area by the least tern, osprey, sea turtles and a few alligators. Red head, swamp, ringneck and fresh water ducks as well as snow and blue geese feed on the island.



HORN ISLAND

Ship Island

This island is eleven miles south of Biloxi, Mississippi and between Cat and Horn Islands. It is eight to nine miles long and from 500 to 4,000 feet wide containing 1,380 acres of land. The eastern portion of the island is forested with slash pine and live oak, while the balance is low marsh and unstable dunes with very little cover. Water has been found on the island and is reported to be potable. While the western portion of land is low, unstable and has little cover, considerable numbers of migratory birdlife use the island. Colonial nesting birds would probably use the island if they were undisturbed.

Reefer Air Force Base maintains a recreation area on the island for military personnel. The Joe Morgan American Legion Post of Gulfport owns most of the island including Fort Massachusetts.

In spite of the inadequate facilities the beach area and fort receive considerable use and it is reported that the ferries from Gulfport and Biloxi often travel to the island with "standing room only".

Cat Island

This T-shaped island lies eight miles off the mainland, south of the Gulfport and Pass Christian. It is marshy throughout its length with scattered woods on higher ground. It is devoid of vegetation across the "top" of the "T". This latter portion has wide clean

beaches, low, drifting dunes, and an irregular deeply pocketed offshore. The southern tip of the island is awash at high tide. The island is undeveloped except for three buildings, a pier and a meandering jeep road. Numerous ducks were using the island when observed. It is reported to be under one ownership and it is understood he will sell to the highest bidder.

LAND USE AND POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

The islands do not appear to lend themselves, individually or collectively, to any large scale recreational development.

When consideration is given to the possibility of connecting the islands together and to the mainland by causeways with a road along the length of each, difficulties of considerable magnitude at once become apparent. The harmful effect on the islands and on the bird-life now using them would be of first importance. Low lying and narrow, none are particularly adaptable to supporting a highway and its usual roadside developments. Much of the present natural value of the land would be destroyed simply by the act of road construction. Even small scale recreation developments would cause some if not all large flocks of birds to abandon the islands and go elsewhere for resting, nesting and feeding.

If causeways connecting the islands together and to the mainland, and road construction across each one were deemed a suitable step to take in making the islands accessible, it would appear that costs

would be so high, for the benefits received, as to be prohibitive. Based on cost of construction of the present causeway built to Dauphin Island several years ago, this project would probably cost more than \$50,000,000.

POTENTIAL OR PROPOSED ADVERSE USE

Elsewhere it has been pointed out that Dauphin Island is already developed to the point where only limited opportunity for public recreation remains. There probably will be additional development if the favorable market for waterfront lots and beach cottages continues and it is conceivable that all the most desirable beach will someday be lost to public recreation use.

Insofar as Petit Bois and Horn Islands are concerned, they are uninhabited, are out of sight of land, are essentially unaltered and provide a natural area suitable to colonial nesting birds and other waterfowl. Certainly they should be preserved in as natural a condition as possible in order to preserve areas such as these from passing from the American scene. Acquisition of private property on both of these islands as now planned by the Fish and Wildlife Service will effectively remove potential threats of real estate development, and allow preservation.

Ship Island, now owned in part by the Joe Morgan American Legion Post, is already receiving heavy recreational use during the summer season. It is in fact the only one of the five islands where scheduled

ferries from Gulfport and Biloxi provide accessibility by boat. Posing some threat to the public use of the beach is a plan being proposed by the Legion Post and Ship Island Port, Inc., a development corporation, whereby a change in the status of ownership of Ship Island would be made, a causeway built to the island, and desirable beach cottages and homesites developed under private ownership. The attached clippings indicate the thinking and intentions of the Legion Post and Development Corporation for the island's eventual use. This plan would limit the recreational use of Ship Island and would not be in the best public interest.

Although no particular threat to Cat Island is known, this island at the same time possesses less recreational beach potential than the others. However, as a means of preservation through public ownership, acquisition by the Fish and Wildlife Service would appear to be in the public interest if it is at some time determined that it would be a desirable addition to the Gulf Islands National Wildlife Refuges.

GULFPORT

BILOXI

SHIP CHANNEL

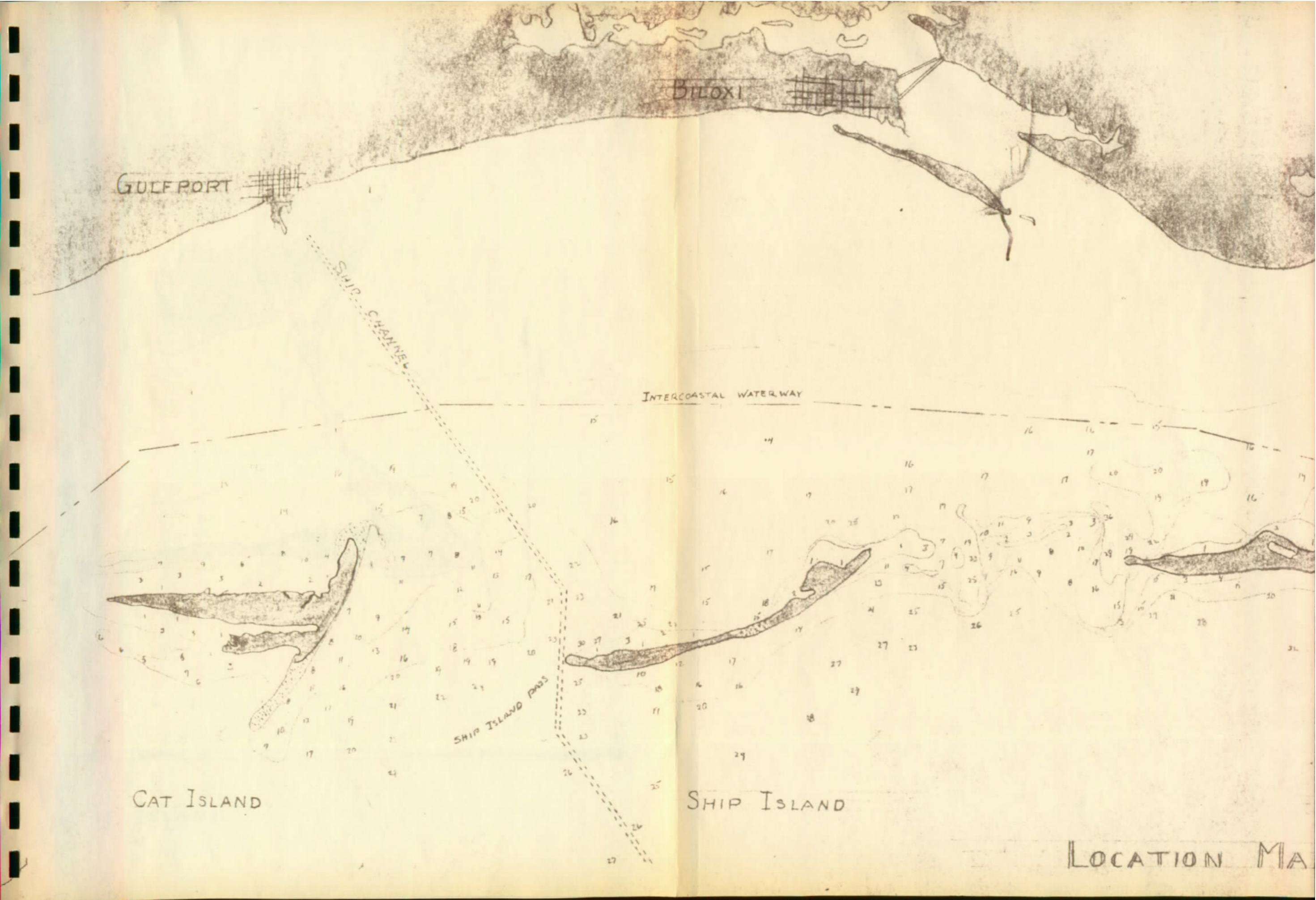
INTERCOASTAL WATERWAY

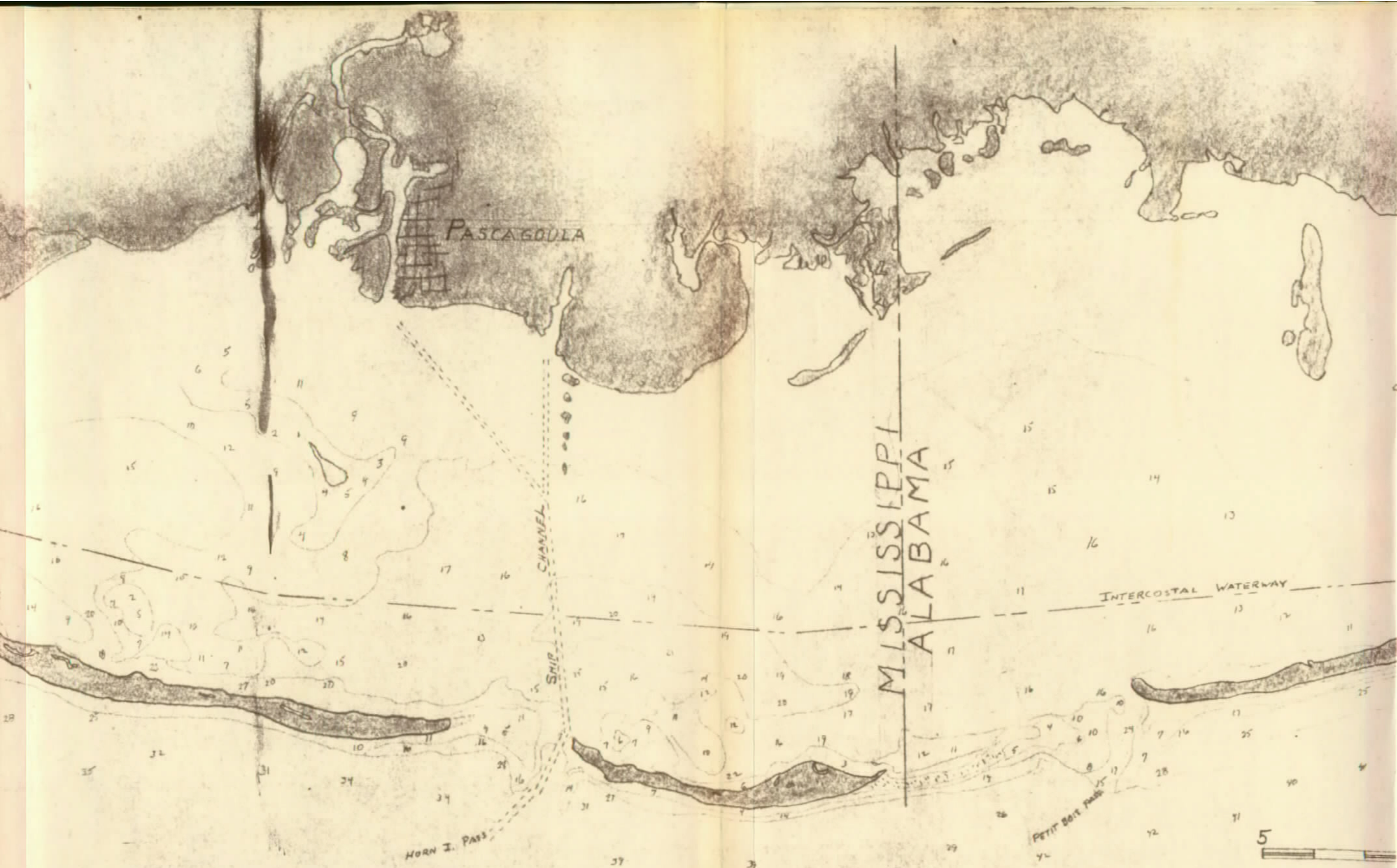
SHIP ISLAND PASS

CAT ISLAND

SHIP ISLAND

LOCATION MA





HORN ISLAND

PETIT BOIS ISLAND

DAUPH

GULF ISLANDS

for



JOHN ISLAND

Development Of Ship Isle Scanned

★★★ Legion To Scan New Proposal

By TOM COOK
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Plans for development of Ship Island and construction of a causeway gained new impetus at a Saturday afternoon conference attended by representatives of Joe Graham Post 119 of the American Legion, Ship Island Fort, Inc., and Gov. Ross Barnett's state causeway committee.

A sense of determination to get the project moving and a shift in plans emerged out of the meeting held in the Legion post building at Courthouse road and U. S. Highway 90.

TO SCAN PROPOSAL

Under this impetus, Commander Emil R. Craig said the Legion post executive committee will meet at 8:30 o'clock tonight to consider acceptance of a plan proposed by stockholders of Ship Island Fort, Inc. If accepted, the plan will be presented to the post membership for their endorsement at an 8 o'clock meeting tonight, Craig said.

Major points of the plan were outlined by Harlan Loflin, recently elected president of Ship Island Fort, Inc., who said the plans were approved at an annual stockholders' meeting on Oct. 28.

Over 800 acres of the approximately 1,200 acre Ship Island, located 12 miles off the Harrison County coastline, are owned by the American Legion post which, in turn, is a majority stockholder in Ship Island Fort, Inc., a development corporation.

PROPOSAL

Loflin said the plan endorsed by stockholders of Ship Island Fort, Inc. would:

Convey all island property owned by the Legion post to the state of Mississippi.

The state would then re-convey to the Legion post about 25 acres in a strip of land between parallel lines beginning at a point 400 feet west of the old lighthouse and at a point 200 feet west of historic Fort Massachusetts and extending across the island, including two beach fronts and the fort.

The state would be asked to take immediate steps to protect Fort Massachusetts from erosion and deterioration by the expenditure of an estimated \$75,000 in erect a breakwater and deposit hydraulic fill between the fort and breakwater. The dredging would help create a small craft harbor adjacent to the fort.

REVENUE BONDS

The state would issue revenue bonds to finance construction of a causeway, to provide roads, water supply and sanitation facilities—an overall cost estimated at \$12 million.

The approximate 800 acres of island property conveyed to the state would, in part, be developed and maintained as a public recreational park and beaches would be dedicated to public use.

The state could enter into a real estate development of a large area of the state-owned property or permit private interests to develop the property to produce revenue which, together with toll fares, would be dedicated to retiring the bond issue.

Passage in Congress of Senate Bill 1680 is still the vital hurdle to be cleared by proponents of island development. Failure of the bill to be reported out of committee during the last session of Congress administered scuttled an earlier plan of development.

SENATE BILL

Senate Bill 1680 is a proposed amendment to an Act of Congress of 1934 which conveyed island property to the American Legion post under certain restrictions as to its use. The amendment would permit the Legion to sell, convey or lease its property for development purposes.

The amendment was first proposed after a contract was entered into on Oct. 21, 1960, between the Legion post, Ship Island Fort, Inc., and the Associated Development Co. with the intent of allowing private capital to develop a

Later, Governor Barnett revived a long dormant proposal to construct a causeway to Ship Island during a December 1960 luncheon in Gulfport attended by county and municipal officials of Harrison County. A majority of the local officials turned a cold shoulder to any local bond issue to finance causeway construction and the emphasis was turned to a state-financed causeway.

Continued From Page One

Officers of Associated Development Co. include D. J. Venus III, Gulfport, president, and Louis J. Ours, a Franklinton, La., attorney, secretary. Mayor R. B. Meadows Jr. of Gulfport and former Biloxi Mayor Lou Quave are among stockholders. According to statements made at Saturday's conference:

A letter from Venus to the Legion post commander and Ship Island Fort, Inc. President was read at the meeting.

In the letter, Venus called attention to the failure to secure passage of Senate Bill 1680 and noted that the company's escrow agreement with the Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc., could be declared null and void if the bill not authorized within two years of the contract date.

WOULD WITHDRAW

The letter stated Associated Development Co. would be willing to withdraw from its contract and agree to its cancellation on return of a \$15,000 escrow deposit plus accrued interest.

Venus wrote that Associated Development Co., however, would like, if possible, to have an agreement that in the event the state of Mississippi or an agency of the state should decide to let private enterprise develop property conveyed to the state that the Associated Development Co. be given the first opportunity to carry out the development under a contract and lease similar to the present one with the Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc.

Venus noted that cancellation of the present contract appeared to be in the "best interest" of parties concerned since "certain pressures have been brought to bear on both parties." He wrote the company did "not want to

Henry Collins of Biloxi, who is a Ship Island Fort, Inc., stockholder, attacked the letter as "high-handed" and expressed the view that Associated Development Co. should be eliminated from any participation in island development. Odom urged caution in entering into any future contracts.

Robert L. Rice of Gulfport, chairman of the state causeway committee, defended the current contract with the company and said if island property is conveyed to the state he could see no reason why the company should not have the first opportunity at any private enterprise development authorized.

State Rep. Jerry O'Keefe of Biloxi, a causeway committee member, warned that action on an island causeway plan should be pressed during the administration of Governor Barnett because "you can't tell what the attitude of a future governor will be." O'Keefe stated he could not see "any possibility" of a development plan being approved under the present contract with Associated Development Co.

In other discussion, Loflin expressed the view that all beaches on the island should be dedicated to public use while O'Keefe and several others maintained certain sections would have to be dedicated to private use as an inducement to investors in choice lots of island property.

In conclusion, co-chairman Rice and John Collins, Biloxi, of the causeway committee urged both the Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc., to agree on a written proposal for consideration by the state committee and Governor Barnett.

Loflin said it appeared certain a written proposal could be agreed upon by the end of this week.

Attending the conference were the following persons:

Ship Island Fort, Inc., Harlan V. Loflin, president, Emil R. Craig Sr., first vice president, Peter Casano, treasurer, Henry Odom, J. W. Sumrall, L. V. Keel and L. R. Morgan.

Joe Graham Post 119 of the American Legion, Tom George, Carl D. Alfonso, Dr. R. E. L. Stuart Sr. with Emil R. Craig Sr., J. W. Sumrall, L. V. Keel, L. R. Morgan, Peter Casano and Harlan Loflin also members of the post executive committee.

State Causeway Committee, Robert L. Rice, John Collins, Rep. Jerry O'Keefe, Dr. W. H. Starr, Hugh Jones, M. A. Harrison, Houston Gellert, and Joe Harrison.

Legion Post Adopts Ship Island Plan

*** Would Be Developed By State

The executive committee and the general membership of Joe Graham Post 119 of the American Legion Monday night unanimously adopted a plan seeking a state contract for development of Ship Island and construction of a causeway.

Harlan Loflin, a member of the executive committee and also president of Ship Island Fort, Inc., said the written proposal will be submitted later this week to Gov. Ross Barnett's causeway study committee.

APPROVE PLAN

Stockholders of Ship Island Fort, Inc. had approved the development plans at an annual stockholders' meeting on Oct. 28.

The American Legion post owns over 800 acres of Ship Island property under terms of a 1933 Act of Congress and the post is also a majority stockholder in Ship Island Fort, Inc., a development corporation.

The island development plan was approved by the Legion post executive committee in a 6:30 p.m. meeting Monday and was ratified by the general membership in an 8 p.m. meeting.

PROPOSAL

The plan which was offered to Governor Barnett through his causeway committee provides:

The American Legion post will deed its island property to the state and the state would deed back to the Legion post about 25 acres in a strip of land surrounding historic Fort Massachusetts and extending north and south across the island.

The state would be required to immediately make available sufficient funds, estimated at \$75,000, to construct a breakwater around the fort extending out a distance of 50 feet at a height of four feet about mean high tide.

SMALL CRAFT HARBOR

In conjunction with dredging to deposit hydraulic fill behind the breakwater, the state would be required to construct a small craft harbor on the north side of the fort with at least 50 feet of the harbor fronting on Legion-owned property. Also the state would be required to construct a concrete jetty extending out from the mouth of the harbor as a protective device and would be required to build a paved road leading from the main causeway road to within 50 feet of Fort Massachusetts.

The state, if it should enter in to the proposed contract, would have a period of one year to complete work around the fort. State engineers would be asked to submit plans and specifications to the Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc. for their approval.

PUBLIC BEACHES

The Legion post concurred with Ship Island Fort stockholders that all beaches on the island should be dedicated to public use.

Continued On Page Two

Legion Post

Continued From Page One

Under the proposed contract, the state would have three years from the effective date of the contract to begin causeway construction based on an issue of revenue bonds.

Should the state fail to construct a causeway during the time allowed, ownership of the island property would revert to the American Legion even if the state had carried out the improvements in the vicinity of Fort Massachusetts.

The state, under terms of the proposal, would be asked to develop and maintain a public park on Ship Island. The Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc., would retain all mineral rights to island property.

SENATE BILL

Congressional approval of Senate Bill 1680, an amendment to the Act of 1933 which would authorize the Legion post to sell or lease island property for development, is still a necessary step before a valid contract can be entered into.

Officials of the American Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc., see this as no problem, however, if the state agrees to enter into a contract and lends its influence to passage of the amendment.

The Legion post and Ship Island Fort, Inc., at present have a contract with Associated Development Co. for private enterprise development of the island but Associated Development has offered to cancel the contract if given an assurance it would have first crack at any real estate ventures the state might approve.

Governor Barnett has publicly stated his support for a causeway to Ship Island but has never publicly committed the state to enter into the financing of a causeway, estimated to cost in the millions of dollars.

Ship Island Proposal Text

Text of the written proposal for development of Ship Island and construction of a causeway as submitted to Gov. Ross Barnett's causeway committee by Joe Graham Post 119 of the American Legion and by Ship Island Fort, Inc., follows:

PROPOSED OPTION TO SELL AND PURCHASE

Whereas, Joe Graham Post 119, American Legion, at its regular meeting on Monday, November 13th, 1961, and Ship Island Fort, Incorporated, at its meeting under date of October 28th, 1961, by resolutions introduced, considered as passed at the respective meetings proposals to sell and convey, subject to an Act of Congress of the United States, removing the restraints contained in a deed of conveyance from the United States to Joe Graham Post 119, American Legion, as shown of record in Deed Book 199, at pages 197-200 of the Records of deeds of Harrison County, Mississippi, all their rights, title and interest in and to the lands described in the aforementioned deed, and known as Ship Island, to the State of Mississippi, upon the following terms and conditions, to-wit:—

1. That the State of Mississippi, will re-convey to Joe Graham Post 119, in fee simple, that certain portion of such land on Ship Island lying between parallel lines running North and South, from the north shore to the south shore of the Island, with the eastern margin of said parcel of land being located approximately from west boundary line of the Coast Guard property, and extending westwardly 200 feet past the fort.

2. That all gas, mineral and oil rights, and rights to develop, explore, secure and acquire such minerals, gas and oil as well as the rights of ingress and egress to and from said lands for such purposes.

3. It being an immediate urgency and necessity, that efforts be made in order to save from collapse Fort Massachusetts from the ravages of Sea, the State will make available the sum of \$150,000.00 or such sums that are necessary in order to construct a protective wall around the Fort sufficiently strong, durable and feasible, according to the opinion of a qualified engineer or engineers on such matters, to serve the purpose of protecting the Fort. It being suggested that said protective wall or bulk-head extend a distance of fifty feet outwardly from the Fort, and all around the perimeter, and extending in heights of four feet above mean high tide. The area between the Fort and retaining wall to be filled in by sand or dirt. That during the construction of the bulk-head or protective wall the State will build a small craft harbor north of the Fort, with not less than fifty feet fronting and adjacent to the lands to be re-conveyed to the Legion. The State to prepare and submit the plans and specifications of such proposed developments, improvements and additions unto Joe Graham Post and Ship Island Fort, Inc., and secure their approval to such plans and specifications.

The protective wall for the Fort, is most urgent and work on this project shall be started and completed without delay and as soon as possible.

4. The State will construct and maintain a suitable concrete lateral road leading from and connected with the main causeway road to within fifty feet of the fort.

5. The Post shall have title to Fort Massachusetts, and the area of land enclosed within fifty feet of the perimeter thereof.

6. The State will set aside an area from their portion of the lands suitable for park for public

usage, and will develop and maintain such park at its expenses.

7. The State will dedicate to the use of the public certain areas of the sand beaches, to be agreed upon by the parties hereto.

8. The State will construct or cause to be constructed a causeway leading from the mainland to Ship Island, and shall from a period of not more than three years from the date of the conveyance of title to them or it, to begin the actual and physical construction of said causeway. That should the State, or its designee, fail, refuse, neglect to perform same, the title to the entire area conveyed to the State shall revert back to Joe Graham Post 119, American Legion.

9. Joe Graham Post 119, shall be vested with all rights to issue franchises of water craft or otherwise, and receive the proceeds therefrom, shall have the right to police the Island, to institute and maintain any facility; accompaniment of men and materials, and to prescribe reasonable rules of conduct and enforce same, for the purpose or purposes of preserving a peaceful and lawful use or uses of all the area, and to do and perform any and all other acts deemed to be necessary for such purposes, within the law, as though the Island was incorporated area, and the Post was its governing body.

THE DAILY HERALD

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Thursday Afternoon, November 30, 1961

REGION ONE

DEC 18 1961

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The Ship Island Plan

The American Legion of Gulfport and the Causeway Committee are proposing a new plan for the development of Ship Island and a causeway to the island. The proposed plan does not appear to be much different from the old plan under which a real estate development company would secure control of the island.

The present plan also has provision for passage of Senate Bill 1680, which would permit the Legion to lease the island to private developers.

The Daily Herald believes if restrictions were necessary in the sale of the island more than 25 years ago there certainly is more need for such restrictions in any bill now introduced in Congress to spell out how the island can be used and by whom. The original sale provided the island should be maintained for park and recreational purposes. There is now more need for reserving the island for this purpose than there was when the sale was originally made to the American Legion.

Passage of Senate Bill 1680 would make the lease between the Legion and Associated Development Company binding. If the contract between the contracting parties were cancelled, there would be nothing to prevent the Legion selling or leasing the island to the state and the state in turn leasing it to any organization.

With the state treasury in the condition it is now, there does not seem to be much possibility the Legislature would go along with any plan for an appropriation for a causeway to Ship Island, and there is doubt a causeway could be financed solely by toll. The causeway to Dauphin Island, which is much shorter than the proposed causeway to Ship Island, is not paying its way with a toll.

The Daily Herald believes the surest way to assure Ship Island will have the widest public use is for it to become a National Park. If the National Park Service were acquainted with the historical significance of the island and its possibility as a recreational area we believe the service would show an interest in acquiring the island.

Submitted by:

BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
GULF ISLAND NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES
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