

**GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE**  
**Annual Narrative Report**  
**October 1, 1998 through September 30, 1999**

**MANAGEMENT:**

Planning and negotiation with the Bodie family and Mississippi Congressional staff for possible inclusion of Cat Island in the Seashore was initiated and continues. Legislation to change the Park boundaries to include the island has been introduced and is currently under consideration.

Significant time and effort went in to development and improvement of the park's Annual Performance Plan (GPRA), PMIS projects, and OFS budget requests. All management staff received training on PMIS and improving project justifications to enhance funding capabilities of the Park.

Our NPS 1999 Visitor Survey ratings for fiscal year 1999 reflected an overall 97% GPRA reporting measure for goal IIa1 (up 1% from 1998 survey). Hours at the Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center have been expanded to better serve the visiting public.

Partnership activities included: funding made available through the Gulf of Mexico Program to complete the EcoVentures CD-ROM for high school students; the partnership with the Friends of Gulf Islands was fostered and a special 1699 event with the group was organized for the Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of D'Iberville; law enforcement memoranda of agreement were established for Harrison and Jackson counties, Mississippi; and funding for the design of the Santa Rosa multi-use path was obtained through cooperation and partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation. A total of \$100,000 was made available during FY '99 for the planning and design phase, which is currently underway, and scheduled to be complete by 12/99. An additional \$520,000 is available through the FL DOT during FY 2000 for the construction phase which will be initiated upon project approval by the Development Advisory Board.

The establishment of the Division of Resources Management during FY 1999 has improved the Park's capability to deal effectively with recreational, natural, and cultural resource issues. A new Chief of Resources Management was selected and reorganization of staff has been accomplished to provide a more efficient and effective handling of cultural, natural and recreation resource issues. This division is still evolving and additional staffing needs and further realignment of current staff are being identified and addressed.

An in-Park Incident Command Team, followed up by two all risk teams greatly enhanced the Park's ability to meet immediate critical needs in the Mississippi District after Hurricane Georges (9/28/98). The Pleasant Valley HotShot Fire Crew provided assistance

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at Davis Bayou from Tonto National Forest in Arizona. The Corps of Engineers provided valuable assistance in the execution of the Hurricane Georges recovery at Ship and Horn Islands. Cooperation between the COE and the Park resulted in fast-tracking repair of boardwalks, beach cleanup and rebuilding of the pier at Ship Island. Limited facilities were reopened within three weeks and by April 1, 1999, all facilities were reopened and the concessioner was able to begin seasonal trips to Ship Island.

Facilities at Opal Beach are approximately 90% completed (as of 9/13/99, 30 days is the expected completion date). After the original contractor defaulted in August, 1998, the Surety Company awarded a new contract with a start date of February 1, 1999. A cooperative agreement with the Federal Bureau of Prisons continues to facilitate Hurricane Georges and Hurricane Opal beach cleanup and resource damage mitigation (sand fencing and planting of sea oats). Over 30 miles of beach received debris cleanup through this effort.

A public meeting was held concerning the prescribed fire program and for the first time, fuel reduction and prescribed fire programs were introduced in the Park. Successful controlled burns were conducted in February, 1999, in the Naval Live Oaks Area of the Seashore.

Consultation began with FWS and a draft plan was developed to protect the endangered Perdido Key Beach Mouse by limiting beach access to improve the habitat and restore the healthy dune system. The Perdido Key beach mouse only occurs within the Perdido Key Area of the Seashore and the population is estimated at only 40 animals.

A total of \$1,103,479 (as of 8/31/99) was collected in fee revenue. Fee demonstration projects during this fiscal year included an electrical upgrade and complete overlay of roads and pads and extension of 14 pads to accommodate larger recreational vehicles within one loop in the Fort Pickens District; the planning for the electrical upgrade and complete overlay of the roads and pads in the Davis Bayou campground and additional loops at Fort Pickens; cleaning and painting of the Star Pavilion at Perdido Key and letting of contract to rehab the facility.

The Hanley Road entrance in the Davis Bayou Area (MS) was successfully closed to vehicular traffic. A project to replace a culvert at Stark Bayou in the Davis Bayou Area was funded through FLHP 3R funding and completed during this fiscal year (\$800,000 project).

### ***Safety***

The Superintendent and Program Manager attended a Leadership in Safety Excellence Course. On January 20, 1999, the Central Gulf Coast Federal Safety & Health Council conducted a courtesy safety and health inspection of selected facilities and provided findings, which were scheduled for correction. The Seashore's Safety Officer has been an

active member of the Southeast Region Safety Advisory Team as well as the Central Gulf Coast Federal Field Safety Council. The Park's Safety and Health Committee was reorganized to promote a positive, employee-oriented safety plan. A plan was implemented to discuss lost time accidents in monthly staff meetings to identify problems and possible solutions and to have the Safety Committee review all accidents to seek preventive action. The GPRA lost time injury rate for Gulf Islands NS for FY 1999 is 6.92, up from the 1992-1996 level of 6.29. The park had a total of seven (7) lost time injuries and twelve (12) non-lost time injuries (five of these were reports only – no medical attention/costs or lost time). Higher profile and employee involvement in safety issues and concerns is expected to improve this rate. The Safety Officer participated in the annual Housing Inspections in both districts in August. While on Ship Island he conducted a spot safety check of the Concession Operation and also did spot safety checks of the NPS Maintenance areas on Horn & Ship Islands. The Safety Officer recently purchased a number of videos on safety related topics. These videos will be available for use by Seashore supervisors to use in conducting safety sessions for their employees. The Safety Committee is preparing and distributing a quarterly Safety Newsletter to all employees. The Safety Officer has obtained a subscription to "Spotlights" a publication that highlights safety issues for supervisors to utilize for tailgate safety meetings.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

#### ***Florida District***

Fiscal Year 1999 began with cleanup operations due to Hurricane Georges. The Fort Pickens area was closed until November, forcing cancellation of October programs. Fort Barrancas was open, and Naval Live Oaks was open on a limited basis, with most trails closed due to downed trees. Staff members worked on chainsaw and beach debris crews, with one person detailed to draft the damage report for WASO. Operations returned to normal in November.

The Christmas Campfire program drew over 300 visitors to Fort Pickens in December. A special Candlelight Tour on December 26 drew over 100 visitors.

Fort Barrancas was closed Monday through Wednesday from November through February again this year. Tours of Fort Pickens were discontinued on Mondays and Wednesdays for the same period. These changes were designed to allow more staff time for special projects. Auditorium programs at Fort Pickens were given on Saturday mornings.

A full range of programs was resumed in the March through May period at Fort Pickens, and Barrancas resumed daily operations. Programs included daily tours, natural history auditorium programs on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, rifle firing demonstrations on Mondays and Saturdays, opening Battery Cooper on Sundays and Fridays, a VIP-led bird walk on Thursdays, candlelight tours on Saturdays, and Full Moon Walks in March

and April. Saturday nature walks were given at Naval Live Oaks, focusing on the effects of prescribed burning.

The summer season ran from May 30 to August 7, with 30 guided programs offered weekly at Fort Pickens. Snorkeling, rifle firings, Battery Cooper, and the tower at Battery 234 were available twice weekly. Auditorium programs were given six days a week, with evening programs given on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. In addition, the Escambia Amateur Astronomy Association gave evening programs on alternate Fridays at Battery Worth, and Full Moon Walks were given in June and July. Tours were offered daily at Fort Barrancas, and tours of the Advanced Redoubt were given on Saturday, Sunday, and Thursday mornings. All programs were well attended. New programs included The Magic of Herbs and Wildflowers, Animal Olympics, Wildlife Rescue, Turtle Hurdles, Wildlife Night Prowl, and Junior Ranger Alert! One seasonal interpreter was hired for the summer, bringing the field staff to six.

The fall program schedule ran from August 8 through October 30. Guided tours were offered daily at Fort Pickens, and weekends at Fort Barrancas. The popular Full Moon Walks were given in August, September, and October. Special programs for September and October included a new natural history walk starting at Battery Payne, new nature films in the FP auditorium Mondays through Fridays, rifle firings and candlelight tours on Saturdays, and Battery Cooper on the weekends.

Beach Cleanups were conducted in the spring and fall, with underwater dive cleanups conducted at the Fort Pickens jetties. Staff continues to manage the Adopt-a-Shore program for the district.

The Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center continues to be staffed by personnel from the Visitor Protection division. Staff provided training for Naval Live Oaks personnel to manage school group reservations for the district and provide information via CC:mail and computerized forms to interpreters and teachers.

The Fort Pickens auditorium was upgraded from 16mm film projection to video projection, allowing a greater variety of programs at significantly reduced costs.

Offsite programs were presented to numerous civic groups, including the Executive Club, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Seaside Environmental Series, Escambia/Santa Rosa Marine Task Force. Staff made several presentations for local television stations.

Staff participated in Earth Day celebrations in Pensacola, assisted in the Earth Day Festival in the Mississippi District, and participated in the Mardi Gras parade in Gulf Breeze. Staff also represented the park at the Gulf Breeze Chamber of Commerce Business Fair, and the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce Welcome Snowbirds Day.

A new site bulletin on the Mobile Bay Campaign during the Civil War was added to the

park publication program, and staff is working on a site bulletin to address the critical resource issue of the endangered Perdido Key Beach Mouse.

Dr. Bob Lilly, professor of geology at Oregon State University, was brought in to produce a manual on plate tectonics as it relates to the Seashore. He presented programs to the staff and the general public on the subject.

An interpreter attended the first NPS Web Authoring Workshop at the National Conservation Training Center, assisted the park Computer Specialist in launching an expanded Web page for the park, and is listed as one of the park's two "webmasters." Previously, the park's website was maintained by the regional webmaster.

Staff member drafted plans for a multi-use cultural heritage trail onboard the Pensacola Naval Air Station, linking Fort Barrancas and the Advanced Redoubt, the Pensacola Lighthouse, the National Museum of Naval Aviation, and the Santa Maria de Galve archeological site.

An interpreter was detailed to De Soto National Monument for five weeks as Acting Chief Ranger, assisting with personnel issues and updating the interpretive program.

A field interpreter was named Accessibility Coordinator for the park, attended a workshop on accessibility issues for presentation to the Director, Retrofitting for Accessibility training, and Universal Designs training, and was instrumental in retrofitting an exhibit at Naval Live Oaks for improved safety and accessibility.

Staff acquired large cache of historic documents relating to Fort Barrancas from a rare book dealer, and arranged for curatorial work through the University of West Florida's Public History program and the National Museum of Naval Aviation.

Sixty-four Volunteers in Parks (VIPs) were employed in the district operation this fiscal year, including 21 new recruits. VIPs were used to staff visitor centers at Fort Pickens and Fort Barrancas, and to assist at the Naval Live Oaks desk. VIPs accomplished numerous administrative, maintenance, and resource management tasks for the district, and conducted interpretive programs. Reliance on the VIP program is critical to district operations, a trend likely to increase.

### *Mississippi District*

The Mississippi District's interpretive staff made timely and effective usage of the 1999 commemoration of French Louisiana's establishment three centuries ago. **1699-1999: Ship Island and the Mississippi Gulf Coast** became the overall theme for twelve months of programs presented at the Colmer Visitor Center, Ship Island and offsite locations.

Using Ship Island as a focal point, each general program at the Colmer Visitor Center was devoted in some fashion to three centuries of events affecting history of today's United States of America. Intertwined with the historical and archeological aspects were the importance of barrier islands and salt marsh in providing security and sustenance for soldiers, sailors, colonists and immigrants. Fifty-six programs were presented primarily on Sunday afternoons with a total attendance of 1577 visitors. Attendance for the Colmer Visitor Center stands at 39,196 in 1999.

The District received assistance from community 1699 Society reenactors, University of Southern Mississippi professor Dr. Pat Smith who portrayed Jean LaFitte D'Iberville, interpreters and volunteers from Gulf Islands National Seashore Florida District staff, Jean LaFitte National Park and Preserve staff and 1812 reenactors from the Chalmette National Battlefield and Acadian Culture Center Preserve, and from Andersonville Prison National Historical Park. Writer and speaker Veronica Deplanne from Quebec, Canada presented a costumed program on the "Legacy of the French Empire".

Several vessels including two Biloxi Schooners, "The Glenn L. Swetman" and "The Mike Sekul" participated in the 300th anniversary of landing of Pierre LeMoyne D'Iberville on Ship Island. Local media groups filmed reenactors as they landed on the island and planted the French Flag on February 10, 1999.

The newly formed "Friends of Gulf Islands" was involved not only with the planning of the 300th anniversary of the French landing on Ship Island but was instrumental in having the reconstructed frame of the 1886 Ship Island Lighthouse built and moved to original location. Navy Seabees built the structure, which was barged out to the island.

The 1999 Earth Day festival at the Colmer Visitor Center even possessed a slant relating to 1699 and Ship Island. Preceding the celebration on Saturday, park rangers and Denny Olsen, a guest artist/naturalist from Montana, who portrays "Critterman" visited 1450 students in local schools encouraging respect for the natural world which has so greatly diminished since 1699. During the celebration itself, banners and non-personal interpretive exhibits reminded visitors of the wilderness once found on the coast three centuries ago. Thirty exhibitors worked with park staff to encourage visitors to respect the natural areas still existing on the coast. About four hundred adults and children attended special presentations of "The Lost Voyageur" and "Critterman." Total attendance for the day stood at 3000.

A total of eleven recorded offsite programs were given during 1999 at schools, welcome centers and with civic groups. Including the 1450 students visited by "Critterman" and a park ranger, a total of 6,088 contacts were made with the public outside of the park's boundaries. This figure includes 2300 people met by volunteers and park rangers at state welcome centers on nearby interstates.

Tours of Fort Massachusetts on Ship Island also incorporated some reference of events beginning in 1699 and afterwards. Though the fort is a third system fortification and just predates the Civil War, mention was made that the French first established the island's strategic location in reference to the Mississippi River and why fortifications were thought necessary. From March through October, 386 fort tours were given at Fort Massachusetts with 10,771 people in attendance. The Guard Room/Eastern National outlet had 17,370 visitors come through its doors.

An interesting side note is the opening of the Ship Island tourist season one month late. In 1998, hurricane George's inflicted major changes on the islands and park headquarters at Davis Bayou. With 2.5 million dollars devoted to repairs mainly on Ship Island, facilities and Fort Massachusetts opened during the first weekend in April. In a similar fashion to the 1699 commemoration, park interpretive staff took advantage of the public's interest in the recent passage of Georges and the thirtieth anniversary of the devastating hurricane Camille to organize three programs on gulf coast hurricanes. One was more historical in content, but two used the talents of local television weathermen, Mike Reader and Todd Adams to discuss the scientific side of hurricanes. Total attendance was 140 people.

Along with the above mentioned programs, the summer at Davis Bayou was active with Junior Ranger programs, ages six to eleven, and Seastar programs, ages three to five, for young people. With help from volunteers, 124 boys and girls signed up for becoming Seastars during the months of July and August while 118 children attended the necessary four programs to become Junior Rangers. Thirty Junior Rangers and their parents partook in the Junior Ranger Field Day with interpretive rangers on Ship Island.

Rangers and volunteers participated in a number of events promoting environmental awareness and respect for the park itself. These include providing a float in the Ocean Springs Mardi Gras parade, the Mississippi Sandhill Crane Festival (1500 attendance), Ocean Springs Environmental Day, Celebrate the Gulf and the Mississippi Coast Aqua Fair.

Another active program for children's participation was the Gulf Islands National Seashore Scout Patch at the Colmer Visitor Center. Forty-one boys and girls passed the tests on salt marsh and barrier island ecology.

Attendance at these children's programs helped encourage diversity in the usage of park resources. Local Headstart enrollees attended both Junior Rangers and Seastars. Other programs for adults and children were incorporated into the Sunday afternoon programs. These include programs on the Louisiana Native Guards by Dr. James Hollandsworth, recollections of the Skrmetta Family who have operated the ferry service to Ship Island since the 1930, and the performance of Vietnamese Dancers at the Colmer Visitor Center.

Volunteers played an important role in making the year's activities a success. Many subject matter experts volunteered to speak on various aspects of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

centuries on the northern gulf coast. Others helped operate the information station at Ship Island and the Visitor Center front desk at Davis Bayou on the mainland. Including programs, visitor centers resource projects and beach clean-ups, private citizens aided the Mississippi District with 9,529 volunteer hours.

The interpretive staff assisted with the wilderness planning meetings in Gautier and Biloxi, Mississippi. Over 30 news releases were written by the interpretive division and multiple contacts including several televisions and monthly radio interviews were given.

The Green Energy Parks program received special attention during 1999. There was a planning conference in Atlanta as well as production of the Horn Island Photovoltaic documentary. The dual purpose for this effort was to encourage NPS units to consider alternative energy sources (national goal) and (locally) reduce noise pollution (generator noise), danger of environmental damage (less usage of diesel fuel), etc. within the Horn Island wilderness area.

## **ADMINISTRATION:**

### ***Procurement and Contracting***

Processed over 43 SF-279 contract transactions in support of Fee Demo and hurricane related projects.

Four Interagency Agreements were initiated to support Ship & Horn Island, cleanup of the park Barrier Islands and Santa Rosa Multi-Use Trail in Florida.

Over 250 purchase order documents were issued in support of park operations.

Total of Interagency Agreements, purchase orders and contracts executed and pending amounted to \$3,553,708.00.

### ***Budget and Finance***

Division of administration established new accounts; provided budget planning and programming recommendations; assisted with logistical and personnel support in budget and finance matters.

Coordinated special funding needs and executed contractual services for natural and cultural projects.

Tracked storm damage account for Hurricane Opal recovery in the amount of \$242,992.

Submitted a detail report on the costs associated with Hurricane Georges and tracked storm

damage funds appropriated for recovery in the amount of \$7,279,485.

Tracked park's base ONPS funding and additional soft monies totaling \$5,065,000.

Tracked park's fee demonstration projects and funding in the amount of \$851,267.

Monitored new credit card program.

Tracked permanent change of stations funding for 5 moves which totaled \$38,000.

Tracked donation accounts in the amount of \$41,249.

Tracked 24 IBP's and 40 Special Use Permits, income accounts totaling \$10,600.

Tracked quarters account in the amount of \$22,369.

### ***Communication/Information Management***

Goals reached for the Information Technology include:

Upgraded all computers to 32 bit operating systems, i.e. Windows 95, 98 or Windows NT 4.0, to Pentium 100 or better, and to Office 97 and CC:mail 8.4.

Installed anti-virus protection on all computers and installed, setup, configured, and transferred files on 41 new computers, and 3 computers were upgraded to Pentiums.

Reconfigured, setup, and installed 7 computers that the new assets replaced. These went back into the field.

Moved servers to new location upstairs, installed new NT 4.0 server and upgraded Novel server to NT.

Installed new network cabling to new hardware: 5 computers, 3 printers, and rewired servers and hubs.

Maintain 95+ computers and 70+ printers, network and CC:mail for 70+ users.

Installed new server, setup NT server and migrated all existing Novell programs to NT.

Upgraded network from 10 MHz to 100Mhz.

Installed and maintained various network software such as Project Management, Travel Manager, Day Planner, Ccmail, network management, AFSII, GIS, and Internet connectivity.

Designed and bought equipment configured and stood up two additional networks at Fort Pickens Ranger Station and Davis Bayou Mississippi. This includes set up of routers, 64K frame relay circuits, NT 4.0 servers, network wiring, hubs, network cards on each PC, and network printers.

All computers in the park now have access to a Laser printer or quality ink jet printer.

Introduced the park to Color Laser printers, installed 3: one each at Naval Live Oaks, Davis Bayou and Fort Pickens Bldg.5.

Installed and configured CAD Station at Naval Live Oaks.

Installed and configured 36 inch TCP/IP plotters on networks at Naval Live Oaks and Fort Pickens.

Upgraded servers and hubs on the 3 networks to be capable of sharing 9Gigs + of data for GIS stations.

Installed and set up 3 56K modems for dial up Internet access at Naval Live Oaks for sharing of Internet with remote users not on a network.

Developed an extended Web Page for the Park.

Installed a functioning Intranet at Naval Live Oaks that can be accessed by all other Park computers.

Appropriated and installed Microsoft Office 97 on all computers in the park.

Develop and implement park Information Systems Standard Operating Procedure.

### ***Human Resources***

Organizational restructuring of three positions was completed eliminating fragmentation of duties. Clear accountability and responsibility of these positions are better defined which has contributed greatly to organizational effectiveness, productivity and customer service.

No formal complaints of discrimination were made during this fiscal year.

33 seasonal/temporary hires (9 females - 9 minorities).

2 term hires (1 disabled- both outplacement hires).

15 permanent hires (2 minorities - 6 females).

15 in-house promotions (7 minorities - 6 females).

All seasonal master position descriptions were reviewed. 30 positions were audited.

Essential competencies were identified for all Administrative Employees.

Facilitated and coordinated Supervisory Excellence and Introduction to Park Program Management training courses.

All administrative employees attended at least one training course during FY '99.

HR staff conducted Safety Management Information System (SMIS) training for all supervisors.

### ***Property/Housing***

A total of 29 excess computers were donated to local schools, Fixed Assets Subsystem was implemented, and property inventory was completed.

Annual Housing Inspection was completed, Housing Management Plan was updated and repairs were made to all quarters affected by Hurricane Georges.

### ***Government Performance & Results Act (GPRA)***

Coordinated with Superintendent, Division Chiefs and other key staff the development of the park's Annual Performance Plan (GPRA), PMIS Projects, OFS budget requests and other related planning strategies.

FY-99 and FY-00 Annual Performance Plans were submitted to Region.

Performance Management Database System (PMDS) goals for FY-99 were updated.

### **MAINTENANCE:**

Work continues on reconstruction of facilities which were destroyed by Hurricane Opal at the Opal Beach Day Use Area on Santa Rosa Island in the Florida District. Park maintenance staff (average of four) have completed the fabrication and installation of thirty roof structures and the Ranger/Maintenance building. The thirty roof structures are comprised of twenty-four picnic pavilions and six bathrooms. The take-over contractor has also abandoned the project so the remaining plumbing, etc., will be completed by Park staff. The west side of the complex consisting of the entrance station, Ranger/Maintenance building, twelve picnic pavilions, and three bathrooms will be open for public use by

March 1, 2000. The remainder of the complex consisting of twelve picnic pavilions and three bathrooms will be open by Memorial Day.

All facilities at Ship Island have been either rehabed or rebuilt after Hurricane Georges. This consisted of complete replacement of 2,500 linear feet of boardwalk, rehabing all buildings, and installation of new metal roofs, new septic system on south side, new generators, and replacement of all wooden components on the pier.

Horn Island buildings have been rehabed and contract let for pier replacement to Parnell Construction. Installation of new photovoltaic (PV) solar system has been completed through the Green Energy Parks Program. With the use of this system, we have only consumed 100 gallons of diesel fuel for the generators in the last four months. Generators consume approximately twenty gallons per days' use.

Loop A in the Florida Campground has been completely upgraded with fee demo funds. This consisted of new 50/30/20 amp service to all forty-three sites, new water lines, fourteen pad extensions, and asphalt overlay.

## **RESOURCES MANAGEMENT:**

### ***Cultural Resources***

Monitored the installation of the framework for the Ship Island lighthouse. This full-scale exhibit of the past lighthouse has been donated to the park by a local friends of the park group. Using donated timber from the U.S. Forest Service, donated saw mill services, and donated construction skills from the U. S. Navy Seabees, an eighty foot, cross braced, framework made of 24"x24" clear timbers, conforming to original design, was fabricated, constructed, transported, and erected on Ship Island.

Replaced safety railing, gun ports and doors at Fort Massachusetts at Ship Island. Hurricane Georges destroyed visitor safety rails, gun port covers, and sally port doors at the Fort. This opportunity was taken to install sustainable epoxy and fiberglass safety rails, devices designed to withstand the corrosive salt air and high ultra violet environment of Ship Island. The replica gun port covers, which were swept away in the storm were reproduced in fiberglass and epoxy and twenty-two new reproductions were reinstalled. The sally port doors of the fort, elements long missing from the fort, were redesigned using original drawings as guides and reproduced using currently available wood materials. The replacement of these necessary safety devices and reproduced functional elements of the Fort gives it both an historic appeal and a visitor friendly function.

After Hurricane Georges, archacological sites throughout the park were assessed for possible damage, and one located in Butcherpen Cove was stabilized by Native American volunteers using plantings provided by the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

## *NATURAL RESOURCES*

Resources management assisted in the recovery from Hurricane Georges. The shoreline changes were documented using GPS technology. Over 100,000 sea oat seedlings were planted to stabilize friable sand dunes using over 500 volunteer hours. Bureau of Prison work crews led by Park Service employees installed over 5,000 feet of sand control fence.

The first management fire in the history of the park was conducted at Naval Live Oaks. About 200 acres were burned in a pine stand. Assistance from Great Smokies NP, Eglin Air Force Base, and three local fire departments was given. This first effort established a fire program in this park.

Cleared twenty acres in Davis Bayou as part of a pine savanna preservation project. Specific to the hearings that provided an access road into the Davis Bayou unit was a commitment to re-establish a pine savanna habitat. Absence of fire from this area and rapid urban growth that has effected natural drainage routes has caused a decline in the aerial extent of the once wide spread pine savannas of the Mississippi Gulf coast. Because of the nearness of homes and an elementary school the area was hand cleared and the brush piled for future burning in 2000.

Monitored a shore bird population increase caused by the effects of Hurricane Georges. Too often only the destructive effects of hurricane events are recorded, but storm surge over wash provides broad open areas in the dune fields. These open areas are prime shore bird nesting habitat. A large increase in plover, tern, and skimmer resulted. As the dune vegetation recolonizes the nesting habitat will decrease. This change in habitat and associated change in shore bird populations will be recorded.

Participated with Santa Rosa Island Authority and Gulf Power in a "Lights Out for Turtles" program in the Pensacola Beach and Navarre Beach areas. The populated areas of Santa Rosa Island create pools of artificial light that disorients nesting sea turtles. A public awareness program conducted by a Student Conservation Association intern brought together the local municipal authority, the local power company, and the tourist bureau to work together to reduce unnecessary outdoor lighting, shield lights pointing at the beach from local lodgings and businesses, and to educate the beach visitor of the effects of lights on the beach on the nesting sea turtle.

Responded to a major sewer spill in Santa Rosa Sound. A double failure at a local waste water treatment facility led to the closure of park beaches and fishing pier on the Santa Rosa side of the Fort Pickens unit. Cooperating with state and local health agencies as well as the US Public Health staff of the Southeast Regional Office, the progress of the clean up of this million-gallon spill was carefully monitored by the park staff. Visitation was easily diverted to Gulf of Mexico beaches and no visitor incidents or residual effects of this spill were reported.

Worked with Biological Resources Division (BRD) to establish parks GIS database. Close and collegial contact has been established with the Lafayette branch of USGS-BRD. Using funds provided by the Southeast Regional Office, GIS technicians from BRD and the Environmental Protection Agency created eight layers of a comprehensive GIS depiction of the resources of the Gulf Islands National Seashore.

Conducted six wilderness plan scoping sessions. Mandated by the Wilderness Act to prepare a plan of the wilderness areas on Horn and Petit Bois Islands, the park conducted scoping meetings for this plan in: Pensacola, FL; Gautier, MS; Biloxi, MS; Jackson, MS; New Orleans, LA; and Atlanta, GA. The thought behind this effort was that as the largest federal wilderness on the Gulf of Mexico coast, the voice of the region must be heard.

## **RESOURCE AND VISITOR PROTECTION:**

### ***Preserve Park Resources***

During the first six months of FY-99, much of the division's attention was devoted to cleanup and restoration following Hurricane Georges, which passed directly over the park, flooding all the offshore facilities, destroying piers and docks and boardwalks, severely damaging many of the facilities, cutting Ship Island, and drastically changing the topography and botany of the islands. Rangers and other park staff worked together under the Incident Management System in the immediate response to the hurricane and the subsequent damage. After a month of rebuilding efforts from park, two Incident Management Teams were brought in to speed up the process. Some members of the park staff continued to work with the Teams, while others were able to return to "almost normal" operations.

The MS District Ranger continues to work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) contractor in cleaning up debris deposited along the barrier islands by the hurricane. The COE is managing the contract based on a needs assessment provided by the park.

The scouring actions of Hurricane Georges created attractive nesting areas for shorebirds. MS Rangers worked with the district natural resources personnel to identify, post and monitor active nesting areas. Several thousand least terns, royal terns, sandwich terns, black skimmers and oyster catchers nested on Spoil Island, Horn Island, and East and West Ship. Nesting areas were delineated with signs and employees regularly patrolled the closed areas.

Rangers and natural resources personnel worked together to continue our monitoring of sea turtles, stranded sea mammals (dolphins and whales) and sea turtle nesting activities.

MS Rangers, resource personnel, maintenance personnel and the municipal fire company fire responded to a wildfire along Park Road in the spring. Trash burning adjacent to the

park on one of the windiest days of the season led to the wildfire, which was contained without serious resource damage.

During the opening days of shrimp season, rangers patrolled the waters around the offshore islands and arrested seven shrimp boat captains for commercial fishing within the park. Many more were observed very close to the boundary and were warned. One boarding of a shrimp boat led to a confrontation between a ranger and two seamen, resulting in two arrests for interfering with the enforcement of resource laws.

In Florida, we had an unusually high number of fishermen illegally taking egg-bearing female Blue Crabs during the month of August. In response, we wrote a substantial number of violation notices in order to get the word out to the local community that we have zero tolerance for this type of harvesting in the park. We have also been conducting boat patrols of the Fort McRee area and surrounding waters to discourage personal watercraft from disturbing sea grass beds.

The park was also successful in completing the first **Prescribed Burn** in its history. Sixty-three acres of fuels were burned during 1999 in the 1300-acre Naval Live Oaks Reservation as part of a long-term goal to reduce fuel loading along the park boundary.

A sophisticated photovoltaic power system was installed on Horn Island to enable the ranger station to be operated totally on solar power for about half the year. This will greatly reduce the dependence on diesel power generators and the transportation of diesel fuel.

An extremely old and poorly designed culvert over Stark Bayou was replaced this year. The old culvert was much too small and formed a serious bottleneck in water flow with each changing of the tide. The new culvert is much bigger and will allow for a far more natural watercourse through these sensitive wetlands.

Six planning meetings were held to obtain public input prior to the park beginning to draft a Wilderness and Backcountry Plan. These meetings were held in Pensacola, Gautier, Biloxi, New Orleans, Jackson and Atlanta. The next phase is writing the initial draft, which is scheduled for the last week of September.

Mississippi has a new Visitor Use Assistant handling picnic pavilion reservations, special use permits, boat launch fees and camping. These programs have become very popular and provide a valued service to the public.

In accordance with the park's security plan, alarms have been installed in most of the buildings in the Davis Bayou Area. The alarms provide for both intrusion and fire detection. Fire and intrusion alarms were installed in the Fort Pickens Ranger Station, District Offices, museum, curatorial collections, Ft. Pickens maintenance buildings and the

Santa Rosa Ranger/Maintenance building. Environmental alarms were installed in buildings with hazardous materials.

The park finalized Law Enforcement Memoranda of Understanding, which the Sheriff of Harrison County and the Sheriff of Jackson County signed.

Rangers responded to an airplane crash in the waters off Ship Island, rescuing the pilot and arranging for his evacuation to a hospital in Gulfport.

Several kilos of cocaine were recovered from Petit Bois Island and Perdido Key where it was found washed up on the beach. The cocaine is believed to be part of a shipment that was brought to the coast through park waters.

The park made the decision to close the entry gate where Hanley Road enters the park, in order to increase safety to park users and to ensure a more park-like atmosphere. Traffic moving through the picnic area had increased over the years as residential development continued to increase adjacent to the park. Although this decision was made after a great deal of consideration, there were some individuals who were very much against it. Over all, support of the move was very high, however. During the first ten days of the closure, Rangers were at the gate to explain to visitors the reason for the closure. Support for the closure was 96%.

This year we had no lifeguards at Ship Island due to an inability to obtain applicants. With a booming service economy on the coast, fueled by casinos, no one wanted to work the long hours required of lifeguards at the salary we were offering.

The **Lead Lifeguard** position continues to provide us with improved organizational effectiveness and accountability. The net results were no significant problems with tardiness or poor conduct and performance issues.

**Opal Beach** in the Santa Rosa Area was opened again for the first time since the summer of 1995 when it was extensively damaged by Hurricane Opal. We placed a lifeguard tower there along with 3 lifeguards. Although visitation this summer was reduced over previous years due to construction activities and limited facilities, the lifeguard operation served as a positive safety presence for those visitors who chose to use this area and its beaches.

The **Junior Lifeguard Program** entered its second year of operation. The program increased in size by adding Perdido Key and extending the length of the course from one six-week session to two four-week sessions. Subsequently the number of enrollees increased to 31(15 boys and 16 girls). We received a lot of interest in the program and turned away an estimated 15-20 potential enrollees. Lead Lifeguard John Hunter managed the program.

A summary of assists and EMS incident is as follows:

|                  | <b>Water Assists</b> | <b>First Aid Cases</b> | <b>EMS Responses</b> |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Opal Beach<br>3) | 15                   | 16                     | 1 (parking lot       |
| Johnson Beach    | 11                   | 15                     | 2                    |
| Langdon Beach    | 9                    | 11                     | 5                    |

In addition, 500+ jellyfish stings were each treated at Langdon and Johnson Beaches and 200+ were treated at Opal Beach.

This year the Boaters' Rendezvous was held again at Ship Island. Over 900 boats anchored along a half mile stretch of beach, with an estimated 9,000 to 10,000 people in

attendance. A total of nine arrests were made during the incident, including several for public intoxication, boating under the influence, reckless boat operation, disorderly conduct and one arrest for spousal assault. Personnel responded to three fights, two emergency medical evacuations, lots of minor injuries, a fuel leak, one capsized boat, one swamped boat, one stolen boat and one search for two individuals who were so intoxicated they fell off their boat when returning to the mainland (and the other people in the boat were so intoxicated they didn't realize it until they reached land).

Memorial Day Weekend crowds continued to be manageable as they have been in recent years. We closely coordinated traffic control with the Escambia County Sheriff's Office. This resulted in less gridlock on Highway 399. We also received assistance from the University of West Florida Police Department with managing traffic and law enforcement activities in areas immediately adjacent to the park. We went through the entire holiday weekend without a significant incident occurring. Efforts by the local gay and lesbian community to implement a public transportation system were only marginally successful as our primary workload continued to center around traffic control and parking in the Santa Rosa Area.

The effects of crimes in the park on visitors are sometimes hard to determine. In several categories, crimes have been reduced, while in other categories, we are documenting a greater number of incidents. Violent crimes and drug offenses have remained static, although traffic offenses and boating offenses have both decreased. This may be attributed to the effects of Hurricane Georges on visitation patterns and the fact that much of the district was closed for several months following the hurricane. Commercial fishing cases have increased, but preservation of natural features incidents have decreased slightly. Theft cases have decreased significantly, although most of the thefts for FY-98 were due to initial resistance by some people to paying a new boat launch fee. That resistance has obviously diminished this past year.

| Offense                          | 1998 | 1999 |
|----------------------------------|------|------|
| Assault                          | 1    | 1    |
| Burglary                         | 18   | 19   |
| Vandalism                        | 12   | 20   |
| Drug Possession                  | 1    | 1    |
| Theft                            | 85   | 31   |
| Weapons                          | 3    | 0    |
| Disorderly Conduct               | 7    | 10   |
| Public Intoxication              | 7    | 3    |
| Boating Violations               | 46   | 13   |
| Commercial Fishing               | 3    | 5    |
| Preservation of Natural Features | 5    | 2    |
| Traffic Violations               | 157  | 605  |
| Motor Vehicle Accidents          | 28   | 25   |
| Vessel Accidents                 | 9    | 2    |
| Assist to Visitors               | 19   | 6    |

|                    |    |   |
|--------------------|----|---|
| Assist to Agencies | 11 | 6 |
|--------------------|----|---|

MVA's in the Santa Rosa Area rose dramatically in 1996 and 1997 after Highway 399 was realigned following the destruction caused by Hurricane Opal in October 1995. However, after the park installed reflective markers through the more dangerous curves, the accident rate dropped to zero.

New Rangers Paul Scott Martin and Greg Johnston and new Visitor Use Assistant Ruk Kleinberg joined the Mississippi Ranger staff this year.

The Florida District Ranger, Skip Prange, retired after 33 years of NPS service. The vacant telecommunications operator position was filled with Dena Bolin who has previous radio dispatching experience at Glen Canyon NRA and Zion National Park.

We are entering into our third year of operating a Communications Center under an MOU with the Gulf Breeze Police Department. It has provided many dividends to both agencies and is critical for Officer and Ranger safety.

I-300 Intermediate Incident Command training was held this year, with over twenty park employees attending the course. This should add to the park's ability to manage major incidents in the future. The course was especially well received since it took place only five months after Hurricane Georges.

Ranger Jill Kinney attended the instructor's course for the Department of the Interior Motorboat Operators Training and now can provide this training to park employees.

Ensured that all employees with required law enforcement and/or emergency firefighting requirements were involved in a physical fitness/wellness program. Semiannual physical fitness testing was conducted and employees participated in a fitness program.

Ranger Directives for most aspects of Ranger Operations were completed in order to meet competency goals and service-wide standards.

#### Awards:

**Tom Howell** was the recipient of a DOI Valor Award for saving two swimmers.

**John Hughes** received the Law Enforcement Ranger of the Year Award from the Pensacola Beach Optimist Club.