

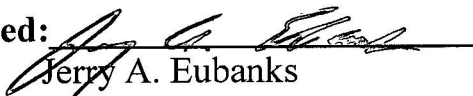
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The National Park Service

GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE
WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PLAN
2004

Approved: _____


Jerry A. Eubanks
Superintendent

Date: _____

3/15/04

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Goals and Objectives of this Plan

This plan serves as a guide to the management of the Gulf Islands Wilderness.

Its objective is to provide answers or access to answers for questions and issues that may commonly occur in the process of managing the Gulf Islands Wilderness.

B. Wilderness Boundaries

The wilderness boundary is defined by the mean high tide line on Horn and Petit Bois Islands. If on the land of either Horn Island or Petit Bois Island you are in wilderness. The waters surrounding these islands are outside the wilderness boundary and are not wilderness.

All land on Horn Island (3650 acres) is wilderness or potential wilderness. On Horn Island the potential wilderness is property that is partially owned by private individuals, and a wilderness enclave at the Ranger Station. Petit Bois Island, (1466 acres), is all wilderness and has no enclaves or in holdings. As of this writing negotiations to acquire non-federal interests in land on Horn Island are underway.

There is no written legal description of the Gulf Islands Wilderness. In establishing the Gulf Islands National Seashore the Congress made general reference to "islands" and did not use a legal description of aliquot parts or metes and bounds. Instead Congress referred to: Ship Island, Horn Island, Petit Bois Island; "the Mississippi islands;" "the islands;" or "the three islands." It may be that Congress recognized that these islands move. If fixed in space by a survey, in the fullness of time, these islands could move beyond the limits of the legal description and future generations would have only open sea for their enjoyment.

C. Legislation and Pre-existing Conditions Affecting Wilderness Management

The Gulf Islands Wilderness was established by Public Law 95-625, Title IV – Wilderness, Section 401 (5). There is one legislative constraint on the management of

the Gulf Islands National Seashore Wilderness. Section 405 of P. L. 95-625 allows the U. S. Coast Guard and the Federal Aviation Administration to use this wilderness area for navigational and maritime safety purposes.

D. Relationship of Wilderness Plan with Other Management Plans, Directives, and Initiatives.

Wilderness and wilderness management is reflected in the park's General Management Plan, Resources Management Plan, Fire Management Plan, Statement for Management, and the Superintendent's Compendium.

Wilderness Establishment is presented in the General Management Plan. The Resources Management Plan calls for wilderness planning, research, and management. The Fire Management Plan presents the park's position and process for fire management in the wilderness. The park's Statement for Management provides a brief history of wilderness establishment and a statement of requirements of wilderness management. The Superintendent's Compendium sets controls on wilderness use. The Strategic Plan recognizes wilderness and sets a course of action for further wilderness protection.

II. WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT PROPOSED GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES GOAL

Wilderness is primary and paramount to Horn and Petit Bois Islands. The goal of this plan is to ensure the protection, preservation, restoration, appreciation, and enjoyment of this wilderness for future generations in an unimpaired condition.

OBJECTIVES

To manage with a minimum of intrusion.

To provide for solitude and primitive, unconfined recreation.

To preserve the character of this wilderness.

To control nonconforming use and to prevent unnecessary or undue reduction of wilderness values.

A. Inventory of Administrative Facilities

1. Trails

There are two trails that cross Horn Island, the Station Trail that follows the tractor path from the pier on the Sound side past the Ranger Station and on to the Gulf side beach and the West Cross Island Trail that goes from the "chimney" on the Sound side and then across the island to the Gulf side beach. While there may be informal social trails, particularly near the heads of these two trails, they are not recognized official trails. Because of the frequency of severe storms these social trails are ephemeral and often last only one season.

There are no trails on Petit Bois Island.

2. Camp Areas

There are no established camp areas on either island. Camping is confined to flat, level beaches without vegetation or dune structures.

3. Administrative Facilities

Horn Island has a Wilderness enclave of about seven acres that holds: a boat dock; a generator building; a fenced compound holding a park staff residence and a maintenance building with primitive sleeping quarters; and a fenced area holding a Mississippi Air National Guard telecommunications tower and two photovoltaic panels.

Given the severe maritime conditions that exist on this island these structures are maintained in as good a condition as possible. The current condition of all facilities is judged as good. The quarters on Horn Island are occupied year round. The purpose for this presence is to provide protection to the wilderness and assistance to the public. These facilities are operated only as official residence and do not serve as any support or amenity to the wilderness user or other public.

There are two specialized pieces of equipment necessary to operate the wilderness on Horn Island, All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) and wheeled tractor. The ATV is necessary for beach patrol for protection and resource management requirements when patrol and access cannot be done by boat. The tractor is needed for marine debris removal and large marine mammal stranding.

There are no administrative facilities on Petit Bois Island and no specialized equipment is needed for wilderness management.

B. Visitor Use Activities and Levels

In calendar year 2000 Horn Island received a total visitation of 32,833 individuals for a gross average of about 70 individuals per day. Petit Bois Island received 17,459 individuals for a gross average of about 47 individuals per day. Most of the visitation occurs on summer weekends and is focused on the beaches of the east and west ends of each island. Total overnight use for calendar year 2000 was 6,329 individuals for a gross average of about 17 individuals per day divided between both islands. This level of use does not appear to have reached levels that affect the wilderness characteristics of: natural wonder, solitude, silence, and pristine conditions.

Threshold conditions that will trigger more assertive management to achieve the desired wilderness goals will be based on wilderness user complaints of value loss, observation during annual monitoring resource conditions, and persistence of items of human presence.

The extreme conditions of storm and wind across a sand terrain have a healing and grooming effect on the natural resources. The impacts of a heavily used campsite may quickly disappear as the result of a passing weather front. There are about 28 miles of available camping beach on Horn Island and 16 miles of available camping beach on Petit Bois Island. At this time, given current wilderness visitation, there appears to be adequate space for the wilderness user to find a clean and apparently unaffected site away from humankind to experience the primitive, pristine conditions of wilderness.

1. Trails and Cross country Use Capacities

The two trails on Horn Island, at this time, appear capable of accommodating the levels of visitation this island receives. While there is cross-country movement on both islands it does not appear at this time to be excessive or damaging to the wilderness characteristic of pristine conditions. A baseline of trail and camp site conditions has been established and recorded. At the end of each storm season, November-December, the trails and camp sites are evaluated for resource conditions. (See Section II-G of this plan for site evaluation form and protocols)

2. Establish Social\Experience Levels

At this time and based on observations the wilderness values and resources of Horn and Petit Bois Islands are judged to be in good condition. For this plan, the park does not propose to institute any visitor use levels. Given the current use levels there is adequate area available for the wilderness user to access and find solitude, silence and pristine conditions. Should the conditions and values of wilderness degrade during the life of this plan, compendium entries and changes will be made to address the degrading impacts, and planning will begin to establish a method of visitor use management.

3. Camp Area Use

Camping areas are defined as being relatively flat, level beaches without vegetation or dune structure.

4. Permits and Reservation System

A permit is required for organized groups of more than ten individuals. At this time there is no reservation system for wilderness use.

5. Access for Persons With Disabilities

Gulf Islands Wilderness is open to all visitors; however no modifications or adjustments to wilderness conditions are anticipated to accommodate disabled individuals. Special requests for accommodations will be considered in a case by case basis using the decision model found in Section II-D.

6. Sanitation

Human body waste must be immediately contained within a leak-proof container and removed from the wilderness; this is a requirement for any organized group of over ten individuals. For the individual wilderness user Human body waste and associated paper must be buried under six inches (6") of sand.

All trash refuse or material considered disposable by either the wilderness user or the park will be removed from the wilderness and disposed of in a proper container or in a proper manner.

C. Staff Organization and Accountability.

Key members of the park staff who are responsible and accountable for wilderness management are:

Superintendent - Accountable
Chief of Resources Management – Accountable
Mississippi District Biologist - Responsible
Mississippi District Ranger - Responsible
Horn Island Ranger - Responsible

This is the first plan for the management of wilderness in Gulf Islands National Seashore. It will be reviewed and updated in two years from the date of approval.

D. Application of "Minimum Requirement" Concept

Any and all activities conducted in the Gulf Islands Wilderness will follow a decision process and each decision will be recorded and that document will be archived in the Seashores administrative record. This is in order to meet a desired future condition of a wilderness unaffected by the works and acts of humankind; and to provide a permanent record of decisions. Projects will be assessed first for their suitability within the Gulf Islands Wilderness and, for projects determined to be suitable, the selection of the minimum tool or technique to use in the completion of the project will be made based on this process. When necessary, the minimum decision process will be accompanied by appropriate environmental documentation.

Gulf Islands National Seashore will use the decision process displayed on the flow chart found in Appendix A to determine the minimum requirements for a specific management activity in the Gulf Islands Wilderness. All proposed management actions will be evaluated using this process. The Superintendent will approve final management decisions.

The minimum requirement process will be applied in two steps. First, the flow chart will be used to evaluate whether a proposed management action is appropriate and necessary. If the action is determined to be inappropriate it will be denied.

E. Fire Management

Minimum impact suppression tactics will be used in managing all fires that may occur in the wilderness.

The islands will be zoned into fire management blocks. Wildland fires will be managed by indirect attack in those blocks. Natural fire breaks will be utilized first. Superintendent's approval, through the fire management plan, will be needed for use of motorized equipment and ground disturbance. The park's Fire Management Plan is clear on the prohibition of motorized equipment in fire suppression activities in the wilderness (See Fire Management Plan Part III, Description of Park; and Part VIII, Section H, and I Minimum Impact Suppression and Rehabilitation).

F. Cultural Resources

There has been little human occupation of these islands and there has been substantial movement and reconfiguration of the islands land surfaces. At this writing the only known cultural resource in this wilderness is the ruins of a chimney from the World War II period. This chimney is both a cultural relict and a local landmark. It is regularly inspected and stabilized as needed. It will be managed and maintained in its ruined state.

G. Resource Monitoring

Resource monitoring, particularly, the effects of day use, trail use and camping will be done annually using an established procedure.

Areas to be monitored will be trails, campsites and likely campsites, bird colonies, and the east and west tips of both islands. These areas will be located using a GPS. They will be photographed, and a standard record of site observations will be filled out.

Indicators to be evaluated will be size of area, intensity of trampling, vegetation condition, litter and refuse amount, and shorebird colony condition.

Threshold conditions for action will be established through comparison of current site conditions with previous year's record. For example expansion of twenty-five percent of disturbed areas of campsites, erosion of trail tread by three inches or more, presence of litter or refuse, decline of twenty-five percent in shore bird populations in day use areas will be thresholds for remedial action.

H. Interpretation and Education

A combination of interpretation and education is key to the success of this plan. Small changes in the customary practices of wilderness users are made in this plan. Group size limits, sanitation procedures, noise production, and crowding are being changed. Education is the first approach to instituting these changes in the conduct of the wilderness visitor.

A specific interpretive plan for wilderness education and interpretation has been written.

Currently wilderness interpretation is done through a, "Wilderness Month" program conducted in November; and biannual cleanups of the wilderness islands are done in the spring and fall. A guide, "Camping on a Barrier Island" is in place.

As part of this plan wilderness interpretation and education will be expanded. Wilderness Month will be continued with emphasis on local and national media. Efforts will continue to present an annual off shore tour for media from the three states which produce most of the wilderness island visitors (LA, MS, FL). During tours media will be exposed to potential story lines illustrating how wilderness users can better, respect and preserve wilderness values. Efforts will continue to reach national and regional media beyond the three state areas by use of articles, editorial review and phone contacts.

The park will coordinate with community groups currently interpreting the Gulf Islands Wilderness in their own fashion to the general public. These groups include: the Walter Anderson Museum, the George Ohr Museum, the Memphis School of Art, Biloxi Seafood Museum and the Ocean Springs Art Association.

A curriculum based program on wilderness islands is in place and available to elementary school teachers in the coastal Mississippi area. A traveling trunk, "Wilderness Box," is available for presentations to school groups, scout groups, 4-H clubs, and other off site programs.

Park staff will be trained through the programs offered by the Carhart Center and in house trainers. The entire park staff including VIPs and SCAs will be made aware of wilderness ethics and "Leave No Trace" principles to provide veracity when informal contacts are made.

A wilderness focus group will be established to learn about the publics perceptions of wilderness and wilderness values. Island clean-ups will continue and a wilderness awareness component will be added to these events. A range of interpretive programs focused on wilderness will be established for use in schools, off site presentations, Junior Ranger programs, and for presentation to the general public.

IBP charter boat captains transporting visitors to the wilderness will provide to their clients basic wilderness and wilderness use information. This may include orienting captains at time of permitting through videos, written materials, and personal contacts. Wilderness brochures and other appropriate materials will be given to captains to distribute to their customers.

Public outreach materials will be produced. Print media will include:

1. An up date to the "Camping on a Barrier Island" guide to include a section on wilderness values and "leave no trace principles".
2. A plastic information card specific to camping in the Gulf Islands Wilderness will be available for inserting in information mailings, distribution by charter boat captains, and for pick up by campers coming to the visitor center for orientation.
3. A rewrite of existing desert wilderness camping brochure to apply to barrier island camping.
4. An active program of articles and information on Gulf Islands Wilderness to be distributed to local editors and publications of potential interest.
5. A video encouraging positive wilderness camping techniques to be seen by groups and individuals planning to camp in Gulf Islands Wilderness.
6. Wilderness interpretive signage to be displayed at Davis Bayou fishing pier, public boat launches, and within the Horn Island administrative area.

Video and internet information:

1. Produce a "How to Camp on a Wilderness Island" video for use by boat captains transporting individuals or groups to the Gulf Islands Wilderness.
2. Produce video segments for wilderness education to be used on area educational television stations
3. Include and update information on wilderness values, use, and activities on the Seashores Homepage.

I. Management of Valid Existing Rights

There are several privately owned interests on Horn Island. These interests are difficult to identify on the ground because the island has been over washed in several hurricanes and because the island has moved and changed shape.

If contact is made with an individual claiming ownership of a lot or lots on Horn Island refer the person to the Superintendent.

We will recognize all rights and privileges of valid land owners on Horn Island. The owner has every expectation of the quiet use and enjoyment of the property they may own.

Private land ownership on Horn Island is complicated by poor definition of property lines and by partial ownership, some lots are partially owned by the holder of title and the United States. With this complexity it is necessary to establish clarity of title, and location of corners and property lines.

Before allowing any activity that may affect wilderness values by individuals claiming ownership, contact the Superintendent so title and location may be verified.

J. Scientific Activities

All requests for scientific research on Horn and Petit Bois Islands will be reviewed using the "Minimum Requirement" concept described in Section D of this part.

K. Issues

1. Camping – At this time designated camping sites will not be considered. The current policy is one of open camping except in excluded areas. Currently any vegetated area is excluded from campsite location for reasons of resource protection. This policy will be implemented through education and enforcement. See Compendium, Section 2.10-3.

2. Crowding is a current condition of concern, while crowding has not reached a point needing active management it may in the future. At that time campsite separation may be considered and implemented through a compendium addition on visitor use conditions.

3. Groups – Groups greater than ten individuals must have a valid permit to visit the wilderness. The "Pack it in Pack it out" policy will apply to permitted groups. An acceptable device to receive human waste must accompany any group and be utilized by the group. It will be the responsibility of the group and its permit holder to see that all human waste generated by the group while in the wilderness is removed and disposed of in a correct manner. See Compendium, Section 2.10-3.

4 Day Use – By coincidence, large groups gather at either end of Horn Island. This has the potential to affect State and Federal T&E species. A policy to relocate and exclude nonconforming day use will be implemented. The habitat of these protected species will be closed to human presence and individuals and groups seeking other than wilderness experiences will be diverted to East Ship or Sand Islands. See Compendium, Section 1.5-2

5. Vegetation – A baseline of current vegetation cover in the open human use areas of the wilderness will be established. An active program of restoration of areas affected by human use will be initiated. The human use areas of this wilderness area will be regularly monitored to determine vegetation changes.

6. Wildlife – A program to control the exotic aquatic rodent, Nutria, will be established. Also, a current monitoring program, using indicator species, to establish a health index of the wildlife residing in the wilderness will continue.

7. Nesting Activities – The current program to protect nesting birds and sea reptiles through area closure, education, and enforcement will continue. See Compendium, Section 1.5-2.

8. Pets – Pets are prohibited in the wilderness. See Compendium, Section 2.15-(f).

9. Campfire – Campfires will be allowed in the wilderness under the conditions of current regulations. Fires will be allowed below the high tide line and drift wood will be the fuel source. The Leave No Trace ethic will be emphasized through user education. See Compendium, Section 2.13.

10. Night Sky – To protect the night sky for the wilderness visitor and to protect sea turtles the park will work through the Fish and Wildlife Service to educate major local point sources of night light (Chevron Corporation local oil rigs and Pascagoula ship yards) on lights effect on wilderness values and Endangered Sea Turtles. Best practices for night time campsite lighting to protect sea turtles and wilderness values will be promoted.

11. Lighting devices will be kept close to the ground and will be shielded on the shoreline side.

12. Natural Quiet – Intrusions to opportunities for solitude will be reduced as much as is possible.

13. Commercial Operations – Commercial operations offer an excellent opportunity to educate and sensitize the wilderness visitor. To this end Incidental Business Permits issued to entities providing access to wilderness areas will contain clauses and responsibilities to protect wilderness. Examples of topics covered will be: education, refuse and sanitation, natural quiet, group size, and Leave No Trace practices. The IBP holder will have the responsibility to issue Group Permits.

14. Fishing – There will be no changes to current operations and policies on fishing as a result of this plan. See Compendium, Section 2.3 and 1.5 17 through 21.

15. Special Events – All special events will be by permit. Permits will be determined issue by issue. An event will not degrade wilderness values or intrude on opportunities for solitude.

16. Viewshed – Our goal is to seek a pristine, unencumbered viewshed and to prevent further degradation. We will work with adjacent agencies, communities, and industry to meet this goal. Because these affects occur outside the wilderness there is little direct action that we can take to control local development.

17. Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species – We will manage to meet the requirements of the Endangered Species Act and or any recovery plan affecting these species. Any operations or visitation to this wilderness will support and observe the requirements of the ESA.

18. Closures – Closures of specific areas of this wilderness will occur to protect: habitat, species, and wilderness values. These closures will be stated in the park's compendium. Closed areas may be signed. See Compendium, Section 1.5.

19. Insect Control – All control will be limited to application of repellent to the body or portable screens or nets. Insecticides or traps are prohibited.

20. Exotic Species – Exotic species will be actively contained and suppressed and where possible extirpated. Control techniques will be limited to non-motorized mechanical methods. Herbicides may be used but must follow approved NPS procedures. Every effort will be taken to avoid the introduction of exotic species into the wilderness. Cleaning of equipment and inspection of materials prior to entry onto these islands will be conducted and encouraged.

21. Inholdings – Inholdings exist within the wilderness on Horn Island. The Park honors the rights of the owners and respects the owners' expectations of quiet use and enjoyment of their property within the limits of applicable laws and regulations.

22. Motor vehicle Use – All Terrain Vehicles and tractors are necessary for the management of this wilderness; but use will be evaluated on a case by case basis and where not necessary vehicles will not be used. The park SOP calls for operations below the mean high tide line and only when boat operations cannot be conducted. See Park's SOP Section IV, page 58.

23. Emergency Medical Services – Emergency situations may occur with in this wilderness. Motorized equipment use will be allowed in cases of human life and safety. The use of any motorized equipment within the wilderness will be followed by an evaluation of any resource effects and by the implementation of any needed restoration measures.

24. Piers and Anchorages – At this time the provision of piers or docks for public convenience will not be considered because of their potential to effect: sea grass beds and dunes; visual experiences of the visitor; and disruption to the wilderness experience. Mooring points may be established to protect sea grass beds and protect adjacent wilderness values. See Compendium, Section 1.5-9.

25. Potential Wilderness Additions – Those non-Federal lands on Horn Island are potential wilderness additions. Should the United States ever receive clear title to any potential wilderness addition lands they will be considered eligible for addition through proper procedures to the Gulf Islands National Seashore wilderness.

26. Special Use – Permission for special uses of the wilderness occur. These requests are considered on a case by case basis consistent with park and National Park Service wilderness policies.

27. Marine Debris – It is the responsibility of the park to clear marine debris from the wilderness. Annual inventory and clean up of accumulated debris will be made a part of park operations. Every effort will be made to identify the responsible owner of marine debris. When identified the responsible party will be required to remove their debris.

28. Hazardous Materials – When containers of potentially hazardous materials are found or reported the park will take any necessary safety actions and inform the USCG. Removal operations will conform to this wilderness plan and the values of the Wilderness Act.

29. Aircraft – Aircraft flying over the wilderness are uncommon. Civilian overflights, when illegal, will be pursued and prosecuted when possible. Military operations occur adjacent to the wilderness. Existing liaison with the both the FAA and military will be used to control and reduce flights over or near the wilderness. A notice to airman will be requested and maintained with the FAA to protect wilderness values.

30. Native American Rights – There are no known Native American rights asserted in this wilderness at this time. Should such rights be asserted the park will recognize all rights and consider any request.

31. Impacts to Adjacent Islands – Closures and management actions in the wilderness may shift uses inconsistent with wilderness characteristics to adjacent islands. This may require additional management strategies for the adjacent islands.

32. Sand Depletion – The Park will work with the COE on channel maintenance and dredging. Methods and alternatives that will minimize dredging effects on the wilderness will be actively sought and pursued. See Statement for Management, pages 14-16.

33. Air Quality – The park will investigate the process to establish this wilderness as a class one airshed. Funding will be sought to establish an air monitoring station on Horn Island.

34. Water Quality – Funding will be sought to establish a water quality baseline for the surface waters of the wilderness.

35. Air National Guard Tower – It is our goal to see to the complete removal of this tower and all associated materials: guy wires, anchors, fence, and photovoltaic system. No adaptive use of this structure will be made by the park or by any other agency or commercial entity. At the end of its permitted life the tower will be completely removed.

36. Fees – No fees will be considered for collection at this time; but future needs and requirements may open this topic in the future.

37. Existing Rights – There are private lands on Horn Island and some previous owners of land on the wilderness islands retained fractions of mineral rights. We will honor all rights held by fee and fractional owners.

38. Quiet Hours will be established for all wilderness and adjacent waters one mile out from the wilderness. The Quiet Hours will be 10 PM to 6 AM. No boat generators will be allowed during these times in these waters. A rule of thumb shall be if the noises generated by boats in these waters can be heard on shore, they must be controlled. Education and enforcement are key to the success of maintaining natural quiet.

APPENDIX A

GUIS Minimum Requirement Method

