

STUDY OF A NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

SANTA ROSA ISLAND



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SYSTEM OF TRANSMITTAL

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

"SANTA ROSA ISLAND"

FLORIDA

GENERAL

The coast of northwest Florida from Pensacola to Apalachicola is one continuous strip of fine sand beach of a dazzling whiteness, probably second to none on the continent in its extent and its quality of sand. Most of the shore is lined with sand dunes of varying height which are often surmounted or backed up by very interesting plant life.

Railway facilities are somewhat meager but the completion of the Gulf Coast Highway will make the area accessible by automobile over good roads from all of the Southeastern States, some of which at the present time contribute substantial summer colonies in various small beach developments.

The particular area under consideration lies between Panama City and Pensacola and includes about one hundred miles of beach, more than half of which is on the mainland, the rest lying on Santa Rosa Island.

A comprehensive development would include Choctawhatchee Bay, a shallow body of water suitable for fishing and small boats. This Bay is fringed along most of its shore with various types of growth ranging from pine to oak hammock. The mouth of Choctawhatchee River is included with its delta and large jungle swamp, a very interesting tangle of growth affording excellent wild life value.

The remainder of the recommended area is either pine flatwoods or scrub growth including dwarf live oak and scrub palmetto interspersed with cypress ponds. These ponds are often fringed with Ti-ti, bays, holly, etc.

At some points along the mainland, beach inlets occur which widen out into inland lakes or bays along the shores on which are interesting possible locations for the development of cabin or camping units.

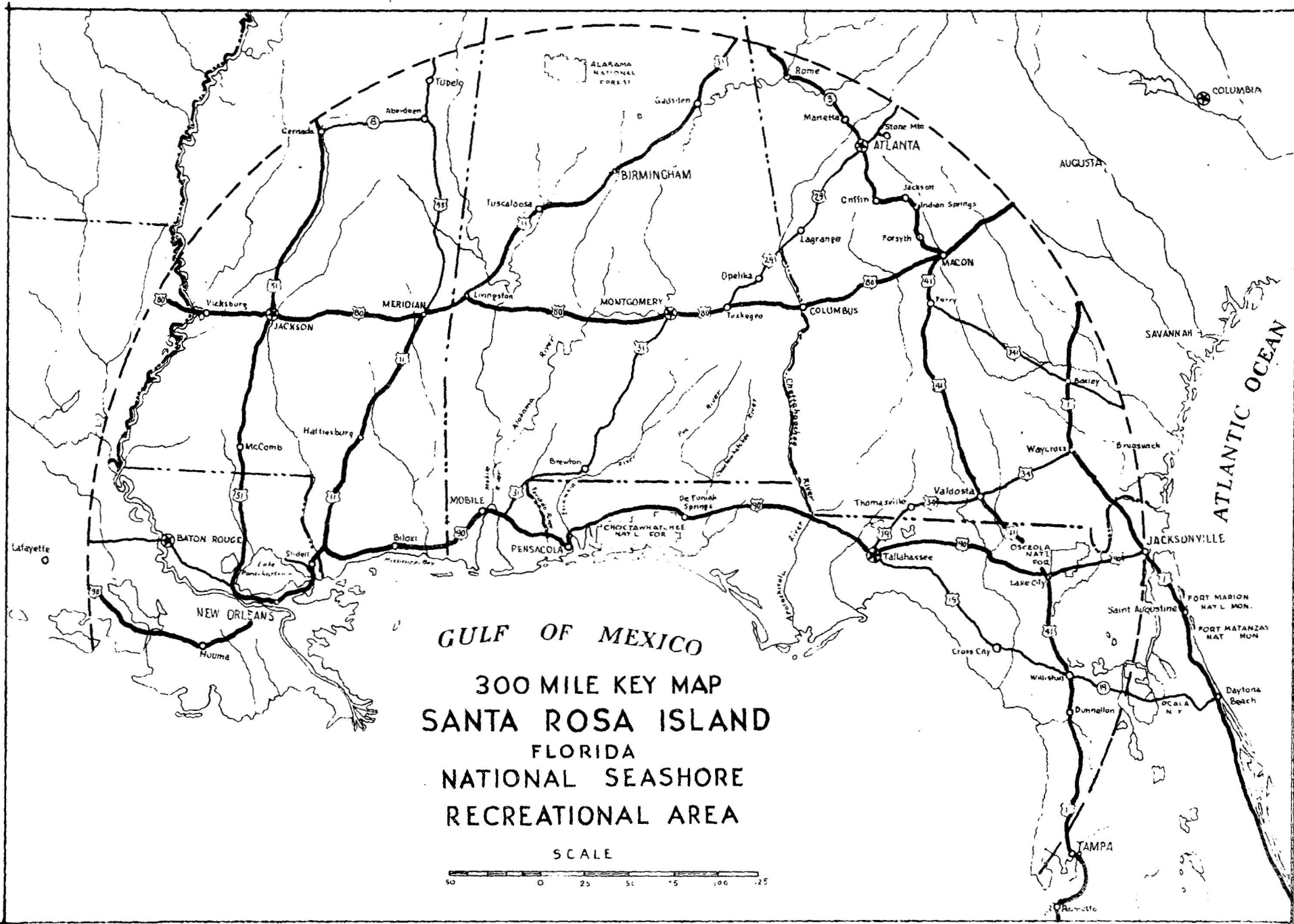
This area lies in an advantageous position since it is located near such large centers of population as New Orleans, Birmingham, Montgomery and Atlanta as well as the more scattered population over the States of Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia and West Florida.

It is a long season recreational area, being usable with comfort seven or eight months of the year and even during the winter periods of warm weather. Excellent fishing and boating may be indulged in all through the year. An interesting flora can be observed throughout the area and could doubtless be increased tremendously under proper protection. This growth could afford protection to an abundance of wild life of all sorts found in this region.

The chief disadvantage is the large amount of cut-over and burnt-over pine land which would have to be included in any large scale plan and which would provide a monotonous scenery over a large portion of the area.

Opportunity would be presented for recreational fac-

tures such as fishing, sail-boating, excellent swimming and bathing and, in restricted areas, a system of trails would be devised through the woods. A large bird and animal refuge could be provided in the wilder parts. As to scenery, the dunes, Gulf, scrub and hammocks each have their individual appeal.



NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

Location: The beach area dealt with herein lies between Pensacola Beach on Santa Rosa Island and Panama City, a distance, roughly, of one hundred miles. It was thought advisable to include Chestawhatchee Bay and a strip around its shore averaging about a mile and a half in width and the whole peninsula south of the Bay in order to take advantage of a diversity of values. Of its kind the writer has never seen a lovelier sight than the stretch of pure white sand bordered by the Gulf of Mexico. The numerous bays, bayous and inlets, generally fringed with vegetation, have a definite charm also.

Present Means of Access: The nearest rail communications of importance are at Pensacola and Panama City, the former being of greater importance. U. S. Highway # 90 parallels the western portion about twenty miles to the north, while Florida State Highway # 10 skirts the beach and the north side of Chestawhatchee Bay to connect Pensacola, Panama City and Tallahassee. These two highways are connected by numerous paved state roads. In addition, that portion of the Gulf Coast Highway which lies between Panama City and Destin is being completed. The Intercoastal Waterway is partially developed through the area and will soon be available to small craft. Excellent harbors for larger vessels are found at Pensacola and Panama City.

Extent of Area: The shore of Chestawhatchee Bay should be included because of its interest in regard to forest

value, camp sites and recreational values. It would naturally follow that all of the peninsula would be taken in rather than to leave a strip of privately owned land between ocean and bay.

Physical Characteristics: The scenic values lie in the long stretches of dunes, the white sand beaches, the growth along the shores of bays and inlets. Most of these are illustrated in the accompanying photographs.

The beaches average one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet wide and have fine white sand and a gentle slope. An undertow is noticeable only after storms and then only at certain points. In the Bay are found long stretches of shallow water with occasional firm sand beaches, very suitable for the use of children when the deeper, rougher water of the Gulf is objectionable.

Possibility of Boating: The Bay provides excellent opportunity for small fishing and sail boats, but a large shoal through most of the west half would exclude boats of more than three feet of draft except through the channel of the International Waterway.

Forest Values: At one time a very large part of this area has grown good timber, chiefly pine and cypress. Some of the parts are re-seeding rapidly with pine so that protection would doubtless produce a quick reforestation. Live oaks, which thrive in profusion near the shores of Choctawhatchee Bay, are sometimes interspersed with magnolia, hickory, gum, etc., to form

a dense hammock growth.

Wild Life Values: Much of this area has been hunting grounds for years. Turkey, rabbits, squirrels are among the small game found. In the section may be found bob-cats, raccoons, deer and probably some bear, to mention a few of the common animals in the area. Ordinary water fowl to be found in Florida may be seen in nearly all parts since there is much shallow water where these birds love to feed.

Special Matters of Interest: The local people claim that mosquitos, although troublesome at times, are not as bad as might be expected. Chiggers, or red bugs, are prevalent through the back country. Sand flies and dog flies are nuisances at certain periods. The general run of Florida snakes, including rattlesnakes, occur here but are no more numerous than elsewhere through the South.

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

EXPLANATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The character of the major part of this area is flat pine land which would indicate that development should be confined to the areas of intensive use and their access roads, keeping in mind the desirability of making adequate provision for reforestation and the preservation and encouragement of wild life. There is no doubt that under protection both the wooded areas and the wild life could be greatly increased.

At present a few scattered beach resorts exist along the Gulf, one of them being fairly well developed, near the east end of Santa Rosa Island, under lease from Escambia County. This is shown in one of the accompanying photographs illustrating the type of beach cabins in favor here. The south shore of Chetamhatchee Bay is hardly used except by a few fishermen but the north shore, in addition to several fishing villages, has a growing population of vacationists. The inland portions for the most part are devoted to forest industries with occasional small farms.

It is suggested that the present beach near Fort Walton be continued in use with a more suitable type of structure prevailing. It would also be desirable to acquire and enlarge the holdings from Grayton Beach to Sea Grove Beach, as this is the most desirable location for intensive development, including,

as it does, the only high bluff, the only heavy growth near the beach and the most interesting dune and inlet country.

In order to make the area readily accessible, a system of entrance roads would be required. Opportunity would be afforded here for cottages and cabins of various types for overnight and week-end use or for longer periods. In this section it would be desirable to provide bath house and pavilion accommodations as the heaviest traffic from a distance would probably concentrate in this locality if properly developed.

The area east of the Bay, especially around the mouth of the Chestawhatchee River, should be preserved intact as a wild life reservation, since it is a wild tangle of swamp growth and nearly impenetrable. This protection could be extended, of course, to other smaller areas as well.

Ultimately it would seem advisable to develop the wooded areas along the south shore of the Bay as camp and cabin grounds, picnic grounds and trail developments. The north shore could maintain an extension of the cottage idea and bases for fishing and boating activities could be provided.

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

LAND COSTS

General values were determined by questioning assessors and forestry personnel and comparing assessed values with true values. In riding through the pine lands of this section, one would be inclined to think that a dollar and a half to two dollars would be a fair price for most of this land, and is surprised to learn that much of it is assessed for that amount and hold for a price as high as five dollars an acre. It is found that throughout the area prices varied from fifty cents to one hundred and fifty dollars per acre, depending more on its location than on its fertility. Very little property has changed hands in this section in the last few years.

Most of R 16 and 16 W, T 3 S was recently offered to the government for two dollars an acre. This is largely cut-over pine land with many very low areas. In Section 21, R 20 W, T 1 S five acres of property bordering the water north of Chestawhatchee Bay were sold for \$1500.00 in late 1934. One lot 299' x 325' in the same section sold for \$500.00. A tract in Sections 32 and 33, R 21 W, T 2 S fronting on the ocean beach sold in late 1934 for \$10.00 an acre. It is claimed that the beach frontage from Grayton Beach on beyond Seagrave would be held at fifty to one hundred dollars an acre.

The beach, vacationing and farm land is held mostly in many small parcels varying from a building lot to ten or twenty acre tracts. The pine land, however, is in much larger holdings, the largest ownership probably being the Gulf Coast Properties of 35,000 acres in Walton County. This is one of the DuPont interests. There are other large holdings in the vicinity but none that would be affected by the proposed area.

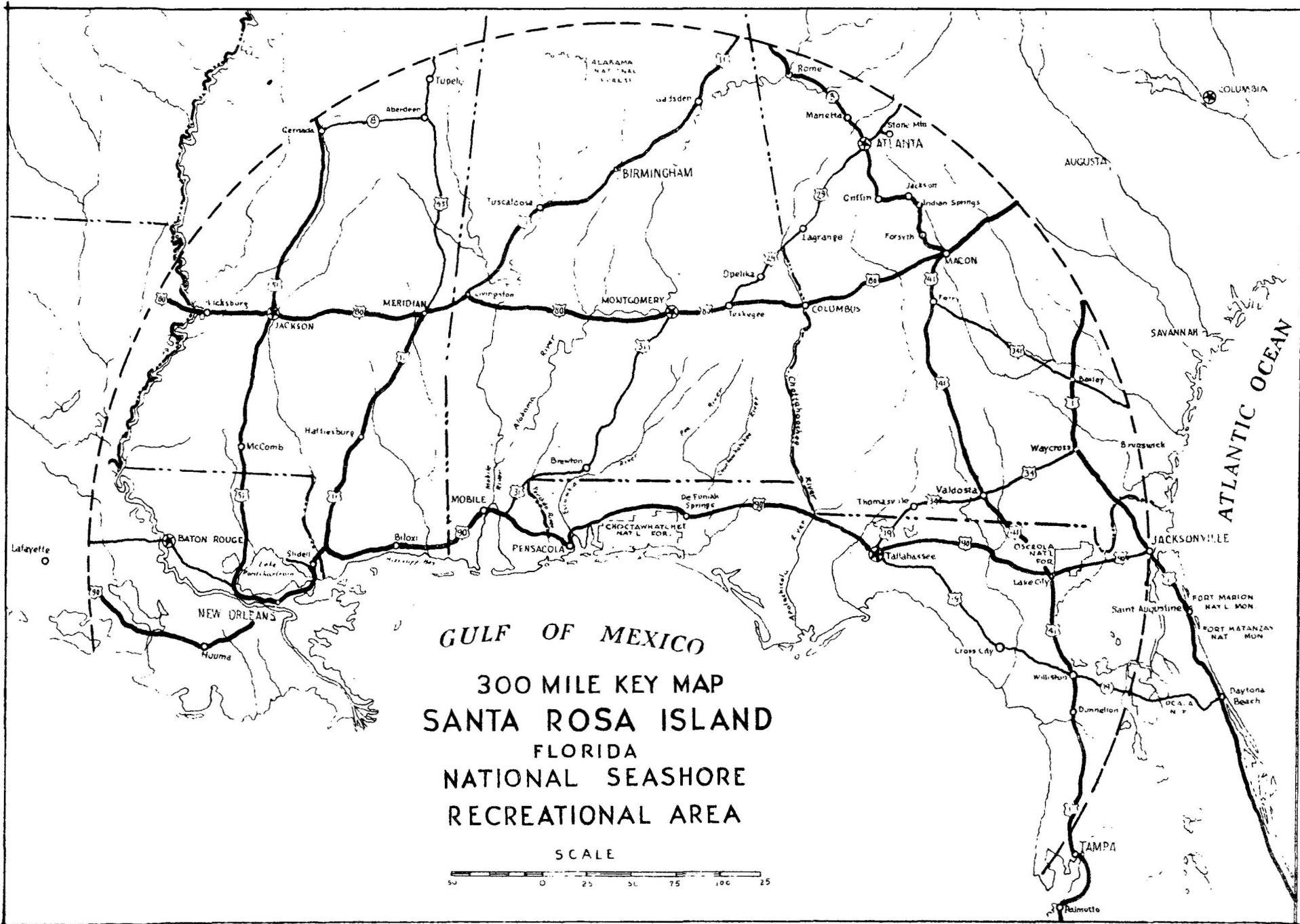
To estimate the cost of acquiring land in this section, it is necessary to divide the area in three sections, each of which is so situated and so composed as to have different values put on it.

First is a narrow strip along the beach, probably averaging not more than half a mile wide and about sixty miles long, with total acreage of 19,200 and running in price from \$10.00 to \$100.00 an acre on the beach front. A fair average price for the strip according to these figures is \$10.00 an acre since that much of the land a half mile back from the beach would run considerably less. The total estimated price for this tract is \$192,000.00.

The next large division would be the scrub and pine lands of the interior which vary in estimated price from fifty cents an acre to seven dollars. A fair average would be about four dollars with total acreage of approximately 81,000 and estimated purchase price of \$324,000.00.

The remaining portion lying north and west of Choctawhatchee Bay has a most varying valuation, due to the desirability for cottage sites of many places along the Bayard and the comparative undesirability of land further back. This portion also includes a large acreage in the Choctawhatchee National Forest which, of course, would not have to be purchased. The portion remaining in private lands could be roughly averaged at ten dollars an acre, with total estimated purchase price of \$220,000.00 for the acreage involved.

The result is a total estimated purchase price of \$786,000.00 for the area outlined on the accompanying map, exclusive of Santa Rosa Island and a proposed portion of the National Forest.



NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

POPULATION DATA

A population survey discloses the following distribution:

Within radius	100 miles	520,000
" "	200 "	5,200,000
" "	300 "	6,632,000.

The area served by these beaches, comprising a large part of the Southeastern States, would supply in general a type of visitor who would doubtless be more modest in his demands than those in more prosperous sections. This conclusion might be modified by the possibility of visits by tourists en their way to lower Florida and on their return to the North. It is obvious, however, that a rough but sturdy type of construction would meet requirements sufficiently.

Another factor which might be taken into consideration is the large negro population in the lower South. Over a hundred mile stretch of beach, it ought to be possible to locate an area that could be devoted to the use of this colored population.



NO. 1. BEACH AND DUNES ABOVE LONG BEACH



NO. 2. LOOKING ACROSS THE SCRUB FROM STATE HIGHWAY



NO. 3. BEACH AND SAND BLUFF AT SEAGROVE



NO. 4. PINE LAND AND CYPRESS POND TYPICAL OF THE SECTION



NO. 5. DUNES AND INLET AT GRAYTON BEACH



NO. 6. TYPICAL SCENE IN INTERIOR OF PENINSULA



NO. 7. TYPICAL GROWTH ON SOUTH SHORE OF CHOCTAWHATCHEE BAY



NO. 8. SOUTH SHORE OF CHOCTAWHATCHEE BAY FROM THE EAST END



NO. 9. TYPICAL SCENE ON SANTA ROSA ISLAND



NO. 10. LEASED BEACH AND PRESENT
DEVELOPMENT SANTA ROSA ISLAND

The foregoing report respectfully submitted
to the Fifth District Office, National Park Service,
State Park Division

By: _____

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District No. 5