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STUDY OF A NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

SAPELO ISLAND
Georgia

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Louis P. Croft

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NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

"SAPELO ISLAND"

GEORGIA

GENERAL

The major problems to consider in the development of this area are - first: accessibility, and second: acquisition. Sapelo Island and the islands in the vicinity of Darien are separated from the mainland by marshes which are covered by a few feet of water at high tide. Definite channels of sufficient depth traverse these marshes, affording navigation for small yachts.

The distance from Meridian Landing to Marsh Landing at Sapelo Island is approximately five miles and at present is accessible only by boat. Such access seems inadequate for a project under consideration. Accessibility to the area by automobile would be possible by the construction of a series of causeways and bridges leading from the mainland north of Crescent to Creighton Island and thence to the western shore of Sapelo Island. Such construction would, no doubt, offer the required accessibility for a project of this character, but the cost of such work over the seven mile stretch of marsh and open water seems prohibitive in relation to the use for which this area may be assigned.

The second problem, namely, acquisition of Sapelo Island, can be solved only through the present owner. The legal title to the property is vested in Sapelo Plantations,

Inc., and it is generally conceded that Mr. R. J. Reynolds, Jr., of Winston Salem, North Carolina, is sole owner of the corporation. Title to the Island was acquired in 1934 from Alfred W. Jones, representative of Howard E. Coffin, of the Hudson Motor Company, Detroit, Michigan. Mr. Coffin previously had made extensive improvements in the nature of residences, tennis court, indoor swimming pool, greenhouses, drives, clearings, plantings, fencing, etc. With the exception of the federally-owned area of Blackbeard, the title to the Island is vested in Sapelo Plantations, Inc. The small privately-owned tracts remaining are either being purchased or under option to purchase. There are one hundred and eighty men now employed doing maintenance work under the supervision of Mr. Girard Bullen, who represents Mr. R. J. Reynolds, Jr.

Sufficient area of back land should be acquired to protect the lines of access to the Island, and to provide additional area for game preserve, cabin groups, fishing camps, and boat landings. This area should be bounded by U. S. Highway # 17 on the west, Sapelo River on the north, and the road leading from U. S. Highway # 17 to Meridian on the south, including that marsh land between Doboy Sound - Hudson Creek on the south and Sapelo River on the north. It is proposed to include in the area 44,000 acres of island and mainland. The estimated purchase price would be $1,327,000 or an average of approximately $30.00 per acre.

All the area east of Federal Highway #17, including the group of islands in the vicinity of Sapelo and St. Catherines, and the adjoining marsh areas, is most suitable for development of a National Seashore Recreational Area.

The area covered by this report lies in the vicinity of Sapelo Island and covers the mainland and marsh areas from Sapelo River south to Meridian, and lying east of Federal Highway #17. As time would not permit a study of the St. Catherines area, it is recommended that this section be given further study with the point in view of including St. Catherines and Sapelo Island groups, combined with the mainland to the west and the vast intervening marsh land areas in one major national area. It is believed that the St. Catherines area offers superior possibilities for beach development than those found on Sapelo Island. Time would not permit the investigation of areas outside the one assigned, but information at hand indicates the desirability of enlarging the area covered by this report to include St. Catherines Island and the marsh and mainland to the west. The acquisition of St. Catherines Island would be a simpler problem than the acquisition of Sapelo Island.

The mainland and Island are of exceptional scenic value from the standpoint of undisturbed native growth, huge live oaks and fine forests.

It has real historic value dating back to the establishment of Spanish Missions in 1566, ruins of which still

remain at several points.

It has not been seriously exploited by real estate promoters or outside interests.

The area is rich in atmosphere of the old southern plantation period.

Artesian wells are frequently seen.

Wildlife is plentiful and is carefully guarded on the island. The mainland wildlife is moderately plentiful. The entire area is well adapted for use as a game preserve and wildlife sanctuary.

The many rivers through the marsh land are used for fishing, and deep sea fishing is a popular sport as well as a means of livelihood for many of the natives.

Sapelo Island is separated from the mainland by marshes five miles in width through which deep tidal channels occur, providing well-protected lanes for boating and fishing at all seasons of the year.

There is a population, within a radius of 300 miles, of 7,826,000, according to the census of 1930.

Sapelo Island is wholly owned or controlled by Sapelo Plantations, Inc., of which R. J. Reynolds, Jr. of Winston Salem, N. C., is reputedly the sole owner.

Island acreage is thirteen thousand; marsh, six thousand; and mainland, six thousand.

The purchase price estimated by Mr. H. G. Earp

for acquiring the 44,000 acres of mainland, marsh, and island, inclusive of improvements, is $1,327,000.00.

It is recommended that St. Catherines Island be studied for bathing beach developments as more ideal beaches exist there, and such allied activities as camping, boating, fishing, conservation of wildlife, and the like be delegated to the area covered in this report.

Sapelo Island has a white population of fifty and a negro population of three hundred. It is the seasonal residence of R. J. Reynolds, Jr. A highly developed estate exists there, consisting of a large residence, guest house, tennis courts, indoor swimming pool, greenhouse, gardens, pools, drives, airport, etc., all at the southern end of the Island.

The middle section of the Island is devoted to game preserve, and the northern end to pasture land, duck ponds, and farms.

The area possesses a wide variety of interests and could be developed so as to appeal to varied outdoor tastes, from camping to luxurious accommodations.

300 MILE KEY MAP
SAPELO ISLAND
GEORGIA
NATIONAL SEASHORE
RECREATIONAL AREA
SCALE
GULF OF MEXICO
ATLANTIC OCEAN
KNOXVILLE
ASHEVILLE
CHARLOTTE
CHATTANOOGA
GREENVILLE
COLUMBIA
ATLANTA
AUGUSTA
CHARLESTON
MACON
COLUMBUS
MONTGOMERY
SAVANNAH
JACKSONVILLE
TALLAHASSEE
TAMPA
WILMINGTON

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

Location: Sapelo Island is located in McIntosh County, Georgia.

Present Means of Access: Well-maintained sand roads lead from U. S. Highway #17 at Darien and two points further north to a good sand road following the east shore of the mainland. Small fishing colonies and scattered summer houses occur along this shore road, which passes through finely wooded country, spotted with old plantation houses, Spanish ruins, and massive live oaks.

Physical Characteristics: The topography of the mainland is slightly rolling starting at the shore line along the marsh land, with a steep bank from four to fifteen feet in height above normal high water. From the shore westward the land is flat or slightly rolling, reaching an elevation of approximately thirty feet above normal high water at the western boundary along Federal Highway #17.

The topography of Sapelo Island is flat or slightly rolling and varies in elevation from low marsh area below normal high water to thirty feet in elevation at the central and western part of the Island. The average elevation of the Island is approximately fifteen feet.

The soil on both the mainland and Island is fertile light sand and is underlaid with a light red clay.

Artesian wells are plentiful and good water is secured at an average depth of three hundred feet.

Blackbeard Island to the northeast is now owned by the United States Government, Department of Agriculture.

Beach Area: The dry beach along the east side of the Island consists of a narrow strip of low sand dunes about 200 yards in width and almost devoid of vegetation. It is separated from the main body of the Island by a grassy marsh and some open water. The width of this marsh varies from a quarter of a mile to almost a mile in width and may be crossed, near the south end of the Island at low tide, on horseback, but not by car. It is otherwise inaccessible at the present time except by boats of shallow draft which may enter the small inlets from the ocean side when tide and weather conditions permit.

The beach below normal high tide is flat and wide, and is well adapted for bathing purposes. The beach above normal high tide is low and narrow and not adapted to intensive use. Such structures as would be required for public bathing could not be safely constructed, as the elevation and extent of the area above high water would not offer sufficient protection against ocean storms. Under normal conditions, five miles of beach area is available for bathing on Sapelo Island.

Actual close inspection of the beach area was not possible due to weather conditions, inaccessibility, and the

refusal of the owner's representative to allow a trip to the beach by boat. Several opportunities were afforded, however, to study conditions from elevated points on the main island, and the general character of the beach area checked with detailed maps and charts at hand.

It should be noted, in considering beach development, that in 1901 a tidal wave covered parts to the Island that are about fifteen feet above normal high tide.

Backland Wildlife: Conditions are excellent on the main Island for the conservation of wildlife. Estimates of the approximate numbers and general quantity of various forms of game and other wildlife on the Island are as follows:

Deer	100 head
Quail	40 covies
Ducks	Plentiful in season
Coots	Very abundant
Doves	Scattered
Squirrels	Plentiful
Possums and Coons	Plentiful
Rabbits	Abundant
Guinea fowl	160

The Island is divided in its present use into three belts. Of the 13,000 acres of high land, the south one-third is considered as set aside for residential uses, the middle one-third for game preserve, and the north one-third for cattle range and duck ponds.

The game preserve area is completely fenced and protected by gates and cattle-gaps at all road crossings. Occasional poachers reach the Island by boat, but aside from these infrequent depredations, the wildlife of the Island is quite free from encroachment. The wildlife of the mainland in the area bounded by the Meridian Road on the south, U. S. Highway #17 on the west, and the Sapelo River on the north is present in like kind as on the Island, with the exception of guinea fowl, but in much more limited quantities.

Fishing is a popular sport in the "rivers" and tidal waters, as well as off-shore sea fishing. This is followed both winter and summer. Common kinds of fish are sea trout, red drum, bonita, and mackerel. Commercial fishing is also carried on from bases at Crescent and Meridian where small oyster and shrimp canning plants are operating.

Native Growth: The native growth of the Island and mainland may be considered as luxuriant in a majority of the areas. Huge moss-laden live oaks in quantity offer a picture of the old South, well worth preserving, especially since this section is rich in historic interest dating back to the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The accompanying views are a record of some of the outstanding ruins of Colonial Spanish structures of the late 16th century (1596 A.D.) built by Franciscan Missionaries of shell materials known as "tabby".

The forests of the mainland and the Island have not been cut over to a great extent in recent years and are well suited to a development of this nature. Slash and long-leaf pines, and the southern red cedars are the predominant conifers. Oaks in variety, sweet and black gum, red maple, southern magnolia, sweet bay and red bay, and southern holly are the predominant broad-leafed trees. Lower shrubs and ground cover are in abundance, the most common being southern holly, wax myrtle, small-leaf holly, fetterbush, gallberry, huckleberry, palmetto, and in some areas scrub oak. The most common vines are smilax, grape, and carolina jasmine.

In brief, the native growth of the mainland and the Island has been preserved to the extent that numerous areas are well adapted to the development of scenic drives, trails, picnic and camping areas, game preserves, cabin groups, etc.

Water Supply and Sanitation: The accepted source of water supply in this vicinity is from drilled artesian wells which are numerous along the roadside and at times are seen spouting eight to ten feet above the surface of the ground. The water from these wells has a slight sulphur taste but is not objectionable. Aeration in an open vessel for a short time renders it tasteless.

On Sapelo Island there are forty-seven of these wells drilled about three hundred feet deep with three inch steel casings.

Sanitation on the high land of the Island and the mainland could easily be provided in the form of septic tanks

with disposal fields. The soil in all the high land areas is light fine sand which would give proper aeration for such disposal facilities.

Summary: Accessibility and acquisition are very doubtful factors. The beach area does not have sufficient elevation or width for permanent or intensive use. Backland wildlife is plentiful and is well protected. The native growth of the Island and mainland is exceptionally good and is of real scenic value. Water supply and sanitation problems can be easily solved. The population of the area is scattered and varied. If the problems of providing access to the Island and beach, and the costs of acquisition all come within the realm of reason, this area should be considered of unusual merit for its scenic beauty and historic interest rather than for its value as a bathing beach for intensive public use.

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

EXPLANATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLAN

New Road or Boat Approaches Desirable: The existing roads leading from Federal Highway #17 to the settlements at Crescent and Meridian are well located for access to the landings at these points. Boats for the Island may leave from either Crescent or Meridian Landings, following the existing channels, through the wide marshes, to Sapelo Sound or Doboy Sound to the ocean.

Possible approaches to the Island, by means of causeways and bridges, should be considered, but detailed plans and costs for such work must necessarily be based on further investigation and engineering study to determine the practical solution possible.

Types of Accommodations Desirable: The following types of accommodations may be considered appropriate features in the development of this area:

1. Mainland features
   a. Combined structures, providing facilities for boat landings and anchorage, boat housing facilities, concession and refectory space. (At Meridian and Crescent)
   b. Cabin groups at the Crescent and Meridian areas, for fishing and vacation parties.
   c. Picnic areas at Valona.

d. Parking areas at Meridian, Valona and Crescent.

Rough Costs for Development of Utilities:

1.	Water supply	
	a. Five artesian deep wells	$5,000.00
	b. Pipe lines and storage	10,000.00
2.	Sewerage	
	a. Five shower baths & toilet buildings	7,500.00
	b. Septic tanks and disposal fields	1,500.00
3.	Electricity	
	a. Three local generating plants	4,500.00

General Outline of Circulation Needed: Roads - The location of approach roads on the mainland should follow the general alignment of the existing sand roads leading from Federal Highway #17 to the settlements at Crescent and Meridian. Changes in the detail alignment to provide closer association with points of interest, or to provide easier curves should be made. The present roads, however, should not be modified to the extent that the native growth along the roadside will be damaged. This alignment is suggested because many of the fine trees and heavy native growth masses are located along these existing roads.

One road, or possibly two roads, may be constructed through the area embraced by the main approach roads, but the area should not be broken up by any complicated network which would tend to destroy its value as a game refuge.

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

LAND COSTS

Area - approximate

High Land	13,000 acres
Marsh	5,000 acres
Total	18,000 acres

Assessment data: As of the 1933 assessment, there were 86 owners. The Sapelo Plantations, Inc. is assessed on 16,287 acres. The other 85 owners, holding one half acre to 156 acres each, are assessed on 575 acres. The Assessor being absent on a tax collecting tour, the Clerk of the Court advises that the assessment ratio is on basis of fifty per cent of fair market values.

The Sapelo Plantations, Inc. is assessed on 16,287 acres, including high land and marsh, no separation of the two classes of land. The assessment also includes improvements, which are not assessed separately. The assessed value is $104,825. The other 85 owners are assessed on 575 acres, all high land. Assessed value including improvements for these 85 owners is $6,165.00.

Total Assessed Value:

Sapelo Plantations, Inc.	$114,825.00
Other Owners	6,165.00
Total	$120,990.00
Market Value on Basis of Assessment Ratio	$241,980.00

It is evident this is not a reliable way to determine fair market value, as the deed records indicate that 16,841 acres were acquired by the Sapelo Plantations, Inc. in 1934 for $250,000 and, by another deed in 1934, acquired many small tracts of undetermined acreage, probably between 1,500 and 2,000 acres for $35,000, making total purchase price, under conditions very favorable to the purchaser, $285,000.

The place is improved with a very fine residence of reinforced concrete construction, 95 per cent condition. Reproduction cost estimates would be $150,000; for large guest house and office building and modern greenhouse, $50,000. Also, farm buildings, tenant houses, wharf, and 47 flowing wells and other improvements are existing on Sapelo Island. At the fixed price the Plantation Company is paying for the privately-owned small tracts, the value of bare land would be $170,000. The improvements are estimated at $250,000, making a total assessed value of $420,000.

The lands in other holdings on Sapelo Island, approximately 575 acres, would be assessed at $6,165.00. The fixed price at which the Sapelo Plantation is taking over these small properties from time to time is $12.50 per acre or $7,185.50 for the 575 acres.

We are reliably informed that Mr. R. J. Reynolds, Jr. is the owner of the Sapelo Plantations, Inc., that he acquired it for a winter home and game preserve. He now has one

hundred eighty laborers working on maintenance and improvements. This Island could probably not be purchased for less than one million dollars.

Creighton Island: This Island lies to the west of the north end of Sapelo Island. These Islands are separated by Mud River, a part of the inland waterways. This Island is assessed as 1,100 acres of highland and 3,000 acres of marsh and sub-marginal lands.

1,100 acres highland	$6,500
3,000 acres marsh and sub-marginal	1,000
Assessed Value	$7,500
Market Value on basis of Assessments	$15,000

As there are no improvements of value and the Island has not been developed, $15,000 is apparently a fair market value.

Mainland: An area of approximately 22,000 acres is east of U. S. Highway #17, between Sapelo River, on the north, and road leading from Highway #17 to Meridian, (Sapelo Island Landing). The easterly part of this highland area is divided into many small holdings, some of which are fairly well developed and improved. At Crescent, Valona and Meridian, there are small shrimp and oyster packing houses. This area is divided into three classes:

Fairly well developed and improved highland	6,000 acres
Wild highland	6,000 acres
Marsh and sub-marginal land	10,000 acres
Total	22,000 acres

Assessments indicate:

Small tracts developed and improved	500 acres @	$100.00	$50,000.00
Large tracts partly developed	5500 acres @	15.00	82,500.00
Undeveloped highland	6000 acres @	3.50	21,000.00
Marsh and sub-marginal	10,000 acres @	.25	2,500.00
			$156,000.00
Estimated market value			$312,000.00

Some of the small tracts are assessed as high as $300.00 per acre. These are quite well improved. The larger tracts partly developed, used as fishing camps, and partly cultivated, are assessed at various figures. No sound opinions could be secured. The values for the small developed tracts and the larger partly-developed tracts are estimated.

The values of undeveloped highland and marsh and sub-marginal areas are based on assessment data; and, it seems that they indicate a fair value.

Summary: The fair market estimated value on basis of assessment and opinions is as follows:

Sapelo Island	18,000 acres	$427,200.00
Creighton Island	4,100 "	15,000.00
Mainland	22,000 "	312,000.00
Total	44,100 "	$754,200.00.

Average per acre is $17.10.

Estimate of probable purchase price:

Sapelo Island	18,000 acres	$1,000,000.00
Creighton Island	4,100 "	15,000.00
Mainland	22,000 "	312,000.00
Total	44,100 "	$1,327,000.00

Average per acre is $30.09.

NATIONAL SEASHORE RECREATIONAL AREA

POPULATION DATA

A population survey discloses the following distribution:

Within radius		100 miles	611,000
"	"	200 "	3,283,000
"	"	300 "	7,826,000.

The native population of the Island and the mainland are mostly descendents of the old original stock, while the transient population is composed of wealthy families who have established seasonal estates for vacation use, hunting, fishing and boating. The latter class come from scattered points in the eastern United States and occupy their properties for a short season.

The native negroes, especially on Sapelo Island, are of the old unadulterated type. Many of them retain the old slave characteristics and originality which are now seen only in the remote sections of the South.

The population of Sapelo Island is about three hundred negroes and fifty whites.

Within the three-hundred mile circle are major cities as follows: Savannah, Georgia; Atlanta, Georgia; Columbus, Georgia; Macon, Georgia; Jacksonville, Florida; Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Montgomery, Alabama.

The smaller towns are primarily agricultural, and, in many instances, have small industries such as textile plants, canning plants, lumber mills, etc. The larger cities are primarily industrial, commercial, and mining and fishing centers.

SOUTH END OF SAPELO ISLAND

PALMS AND BEACH AT ST. CATHERINES ISLAND

NO. 1. OLD SPANISH RUINS EAST OF DARIEN

NO. 2. MARSH LANDING, SAPELO ISLAND

NO. 3. OLD SPANISH RUINS, SAPELO ISLAND

NO. 4. ARTESIAN WELL, SAPELO ISLAND

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

By: C. R. Vinten

C. R. Vinten
District Inspector
District No. 5

Lewis E. Ow...