

Coastal Management at Gateway NRA

"Coastal Management Policy Emphasis in an Urban National Recreation Area" is the title of a paper included in the proceedings of the Coastal '80 Conference held last November in Florida. Authored by Gateway NRA Supt. Herbert S. Cables, Jr., and Natural Resources Management Specialist John T. Tanacredi, the paper explores the myriad of management activities that will be necessary in the development of this NRA — such specific management scenarios as barrier beach and bathing beach stabilization, marsh stabilization, water quality and public health aspects of bathing beaches, wildlife refuge resources, and the coupling of research priorities in the National Parks with management decisions in our coastal zone.

The paper deals with "the paradox of Gateway" — its potential as a recreation resource, and the ways its advantages of location are offset by the severe stresses to the park's lands and waters because of the densely populated, highly urbanized area in which they lie. In short, one of its main advantages is at the same time one of its most severe drawbacks.

However, even given these stresses, Gateway's barrier beaches, marshes, upland forests and bay provide unparalleled opportunities for experiencing a natural coastal system.

"In order to properly harmonize the varied areas encompassing Gateway, the park has been allocated into six management zones," the paper states, "each of which has specific management strategies and types of allowable use and development. Offshore waters, including those of Jamaica Bay, have not been zoned. The six zones are Protection, Use-by-Reservation, Beach, Unstructured Recreation, Structured Recreation, and Development. The Development zone includes two subzones: Support and Gateway Village."

The paper describes the Protection Zone as including "natural areas so sensitive to human activity that they will be available for use only under special conditions." Included are high and low salt marshes, primary dunes, freshwater marshes, and identified critical areas such as waterbird nesting sites. Uses of lands in the Protection Zones will be strictly regulated and confined to research and maintenance.

Areas sensitive to overuse will be zoned for use-by-reservation, enabling management to control access. Included in this zone are most forests, some upland marsh areas and secondary dunes, and grasslands with significant values. Special use areas such as

nurseries and horticultural experiment sites will be placed in this zone, and low impact uses such as nature study, environmental education, and historical interpretation will be allowed.

The Beach Zone encompasses ocean and bay shores able to take moderate to substantial recreation use. Management strategies will reflect shoreline dynamics (interrupting them only as necessary to reduce erosion and maintain beach use in major public use areas). Techniques may include maintenance or establishment of dune systems, plantings, windbreaks, and sand nourishment to provide for planned levels of recreation use . . . swimming, surfing, sunbathing, beachcombing and, in a few locations, surf fishing.

Unstructured Recreation Zones are predominantly natural areas other than beach that can accommodate recreational use. They include open grassland/thicket areas with no particularly sensitive resources, managed to preserve the vegetation and scenery while establishing sites that support casual outdoor uses. Species that can coexist in such areas will be protected by appropriate management techniques (e.g. Ringed neck pheasants, rabbits, owls, grasshopper sparrows, etc.) Picnicking, walking, birding, kite flying, biking and informal athletics — activities requiring little supervision and few support facilities — belong here.

Structured Recreation zones encompass outdoor areas that can be developed and landscaped to support active organized sports and recreation . . . all activities that require hard surfaces, structured grounds and playing fields.

The Gateway Village concept (within the Development Zone) will establish at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn and at Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island activities like those already happening at Fort Hancock in Sandy Hook — educational programs, theatrical productions, research by other federal, state and local agencies, community events, day camping, formal and informal athletics, staff housing, historical interpretation and organized group outings.

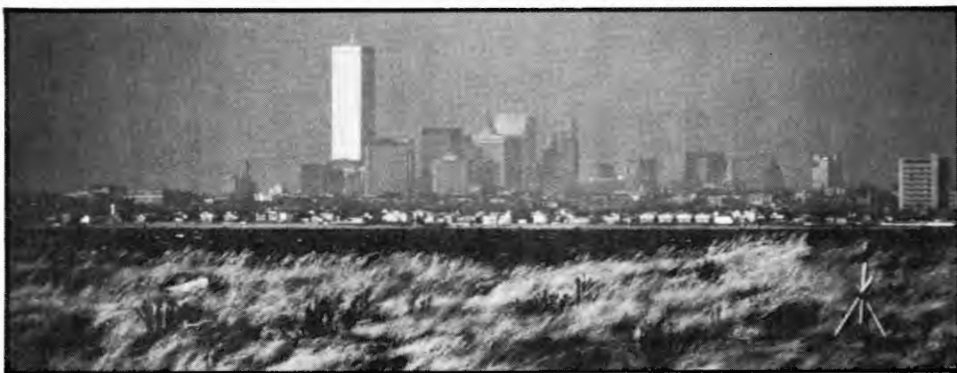
The Gateway concept derives from ecological principles which demonstrate the inter-dependence that binds natural and urban systems together and a recognition that it is no longer constructive for those who consider themselves environmentalists to separate their concern for the manmade environment from the rest of the natural world.

Coastal Resources Policy Implementation — the final section of the paper — deals with "management scenarios." The key word is "flexible," and Cables and Tanacredi argue that "letting nature take its course is in concert with the conservation/preservation ethic of the National Park Service" in addition to which, they note, it often "is the most economical way to handle a particular ecological situation."

A rich variety of management problems, proposed solutions, and actual projects follow. One example deals with Floyd Bennett Field, where "planners failed to recognize that restoration (return of the site to natural processes) would have resulted in erosion and destructive modification of the entire site by swift tidal currents through the Jamaica Bay inlet system. Flexible coastal management approaches coupled with sound scientific data averted a potentially significant alteration to the Floyd Bennett Field area for the future."

Sludge disposal, landfill operations, refuge management all figure in the scenario section of this paper. Conclusions emphasize the bridging of the gap between scientific research in parks and traditional interpretive skills. "This type of interpretive connection," the author writes, "the taking of complex scientific data and making it palatable to the general public, will reduce the scientific credibility gap . . . At Gateway, management is integrating this coastal ecosystem consciousness into its daily and longterm development."

(The complete paper is available from Tanacredi at Gateway NRA, Hdqts. Bldg. 69, Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11234.)



URBAN REFUGE: Jamaica Bay Refuge, presents stirring contrasts and complex management problems.