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Olmsted Center
for Landscape Preservation

Cultural Landscape History for Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York



Cultural Landscape History
Fire Island National Seashore

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Fire Island, New York

Prepared by Marstel-Day, LLC
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Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
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Cover photo: Aerial of Fire Island looking east from the Fire Island Lighthouse (Elizabeth DeMaria, 2022).

Title Page: Fire Island Lighthouse and Keeper's Quarters, photo taken by Kristie Baynard, Marstel-Day, LLC.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) Site History is to document and summarize the physical landscape associated with Fire Island National Seashore through its early history to present. Fire Island National Seashore was established in 1964 to preserve the only developed barrier island in the United States without roads. Fire Island is the longest barrier island along the south shore of Long Island, New York, and a 26-mile portion of the island is protected as the Fire Island National Seashore. The study area is composed of 19,580.29 acres including submerged marine lands, several islands, sand flats, and wetlands landward of the of the barrier island. The national seashore supports the federally-designated High Dune Otis Pike Wilderness— a nearly 7-mile stretch of 1,380 acres— 17 communities, and the Smith County Park.

The Cultural Landscape History documents the chronological landscape history for the Fire Island National Seashore cultural landscape and includes the following periods of development: history prior to 1915, 1916–1940, 1941–1978, and 1979–Present. The report develops baseline documentation for the study area and will be used in park planning, resource management, community outreach, interpretive media, and park operations.

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

Fire Island National Seashore was established in 1964 for "the purpose of conserving and preserving for the use of future generations certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes, and other natural features within Suffolk County, New York, which possess high values to the Nation as examples of unspoiled areas of great natural beauty in close proximity to large concentrations of urban population…" The National Seashore is managed by the National Park Service through a commitment of cooperative stewardship with Fire Island communities and other relevant entities to protect the environmental quality and distinctive character of Fire Island. The preparation of this cultural landscape history was recommended in the 2016 General Management Plan for the Fire Island National Seashore and builds upon numerous other studies completed for Fire Island. These include the 1965 *Master Plan*; the 1977 *General Management Plan*; the 1979 *Historic Resource Study*; the 1983 *Fire Island Lighthouse and Keeper's Dwelling, Fire Island National Seashore, Patchogue, New York, Historic Structure Report*; the 1998 *Cultural Landscape Inventory: Fire Island Light Station*; and the 2016 *General Management Plan*.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area for the Fire Island National Seashore Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape History, is coterminous with the park's legislative boundary. The park includes roughly 6,242 acres of federal land, with 1,380 acres federally-designated as the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness Area. The remaining 13,338 acres are privately owned. The study area excludes the William Floyd Estate in Mastic Beach, New York and lands in Patchogue, New York that accommodate the park headquarters as well as the Patchogue-Watch Hill Ferry Terminal. The Fire Island National Seashore includes 26 miles of a dynamic barrier island with high dunes, maritime forests, and unpopulated beaches adjacent to urban centers. The seashore is bounded by Robert Moses State Park on the west and Moriches Inlet on the east. Interspersed among the federal lands within the seashore on Fire Island are 17 residential communities predating the seashore's authorization.

The legislative boundary extends into the waters surrounding Fire Island and includes portions of the Atlantic Ocean to the south; Great South Bay and Moriches Bay to the north; and the numerous islands and marshlands within this area including but not limited to Sexton, West Fire, East Fire, Ridge, Pelican, Hospital, and John Boyle Islands. In 2012, Hurricane Sandy created a breach on the barrier island in the area known as Old Inlet within the wilderness area, effectively splitting the barrier island into two islands.

SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

A Cultural Landscape Report is the primary document used by the National Park Service to inform long-term management and treatment decisions for its historically-significant landscapes. This project follows a cultural landscape approach adhering to A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Processes; Techniques and The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes; and Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes.

PROJECT GOALS

The goal of the Cultural Landscape History is to document and summarize through a combination of narrative and graphics the general appearance of the project area and the changes to the landscape as it evolved from its early development through the present day.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The early cultural history of Fire Island is centered on the harvesting of maritime resources first by Native Americans such as fish, whales, and shellfish. In the 17th and 18th centuries, European farmers used the island for grazing cattle and harvesting hay. The first lighthouse on Fire Island was built in 1825 and reconstructed in 1858. Lifesaving stations were also added to the landscape around the mid-19th century and became important focal points along the length of the entire island. Around this same time, resort development began with the construction of hotels along the beach. The shift on the island from a maritime economy to that of recreation, coupled with a resort industry, is reflected in the island's rapid population growth after the Civil War. Numerous communities were then established during the late 1800s and early 1900s and experienced significant growth in the 1920s.

At this time, Robert Moses, a leader in the New York State government, planned for an ocean parkway across the entire the length of Fire Island. He was a major proponent of the parkway system and sought to have parkways across much of New York. He argued that it would help stabilize the dunes from erosion and prevent destruction from future storm events. Instead, the local municipal governments opted for less expensive and more immediate solutions to repair the island's dunes at the time.

The Fire Island communities grew steadily throughout the 1920s and 1930s and then suffered a severe setback in 1938 from the Great New England Hurricane. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed on Fire Island and there was widespread damage to the dune system. Significant rebuilding of the communities damaged in the 1938 hurricane did not occur until after World War II and occurred amidst concerns by Fire Island residents for the island's protection from erosion. Moses again argued for Moses' parkway plan, however, it failed in widespread support of creation of a Fire Island National Seashore, which was established in 1964. Following the Seashore's establishment, the National Park Service prepared numerous development plans during this period to create visitor experiences and increase accessibility throughout the island. Eventually, the National Park Service embraced its core mission to protect and preserve the environment through model zoning regulations, the acquisition of thousands of acres within its boundaries, vehicle regulations, and condemnation of properties along the dunes and within the wilderness area.

Since 1980, the National Park Service has spent considerable time and funds to better understand the cultural and natural environment, the stakeholders, and the National Park Service's own role on the barrier island. For example, during that year, to support the preservation of the wilderness area covering just over 1,360 acres it was designated the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness.

Identifying causes and solutions to the severe erosion problem along the island have been of paramount concern. The protection of the natural environment as it was back in 1964 has significantly more work to be done but methods are being implemented that may take years to see tangible results. Protection of cultural resources has also been a continuing priority such as the restoration of the Carrington House, the listing of the Fire Island Lighthouse complex on the National Register of Historic Places, and now this Cultural Landscape History of the entire Fire Island National Seashore.

FINDINGS

The Fire Island landscape that one sees and visits today is fundamentally a post-WWII landscape (primarily dating to the 1945—1978 period). The landscape does not exhibit early human impacts from any periods prior to the mid-19th century, and even those from the 19th century are limited to the Fire Island Lighthouse. The early history of Fire Island was focused on the cultivation of maritime resources by Native Americans and then later it included the protection and safety of ships and their passengers around the island. Resorts developed during the mid-to-late 19th century with the introduction of passenger trains nearby to Long Island. Although the island sustains an identity from this period as a place for leisure and recreation, the 19th-century resort landscape has changed. Construction boomed during the early 1900s until the Great New England Hurricane of 1938. Dunes were leveled, hundreds of buildings were ruined, and large swaths of vegetation were destroyed during the storm and were not rebuilt until after World War II. In addition to this rebuilding and growth, some communities during the post-war period created distinct cultural identities, such as Cherry Grove and Fire Island Pines who accepted and embraced the LGBTQ+ community. Other communities developed as family vacation areas; some catered to group rentals; a few identified as wealthy and highly exclusive neighborhoods, and others became middle-class communities both for year-round residents and seasonal visitors. The cultural identities associated with these communities can be seen on the landscape in addition to other cultural modifications since the immediate post-World War II period. The most obvious of these modifications is the density of construction in many of the communities. Additionally, there has been a focus on the dunes, beaches, and wilderness area as exhibited by dune and beach renourishment, the removal of homes on the dune crest, and the return of the Otis Pike High Dune Wilderness to an all-natural zone. The cultural landscape history of Fire Island ranges from the use by Native Americans, the development of resorts, the community growth, the establishment of the Fire Island National Seashore, and continued protection of cultural and natural resources by the National Park Service through to the 21st century. This cultural landscape history will help provide readers with an understanding of Fire Island's past and present. This landscape history will also help the National Park Service coordinate with the communities, tribes, agencies, and other stakeholders, for planning for its future and the essential preservation of the seashore.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Guiding the Marstel-Day team was H. Eliot Foulds (Cultural Landscape Program Manager, Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, Northeast Region). He provided expert knowledge on cultural landscape studies, how to organize this study, and the information that should be presented on such a vast topic. Susan Sarna (Cultural Resource Program Manager, Fire Island National Seashore) served as our Point of Contact and was quick to help, provide coordination and needed information on a variety of concerns throughout the project. Elizabeth DeMaria (Museum Technician, Fire Island National Seashore) was critical in the initial stage of the project in providing us access to everything the National Park Service had in storage regarding Fire Island at the William Floyd Estate in Mastic, New York. She assisted us in our research by conducting searches for information alongside us and prompting us to delve into dozens of boxes, files, books and reports, binders, maps, and photos. The information we identified during our research visit with her assistance provided the core of the historic context in this study.

Thanks must also be given to Michael Bilecki (Chief of Resources Management for Fire Island National Seashore) and Jordan Raphael (Biologist for Fire Island National Seashore) for having provided us with a tour of the Fire Island National Seashore. Michael and Jordan provided important insight of the study area, whether it be ecological issues along the bulkheads or the deer browsing within the Sunken Forest or the piping plover and effects of off-road vehicles on the beaches. Michael Bilecki's nearly 30 years of institutional knowledge of Fire Island National Seashore and witnessing its change both administratively, physically, and culturally were invaluable to this project. Alexcy Romero, Superintendent, Fire Island National Seashore, provided us with his perspective of where the seashore is regarding its accomplishments and what the priorities are to maintain its mission of preserving its cultural and natural resources for future generations.

We reached out to the local tribes including Chief Harry Wallace with the Unkechaug Nation and Shane Weeks of the Shinnecock Nation. Marstel-Day would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Peter Weppler, Chief of the Environmental Analysis Branch, of the United States Army Corps of Engineers – New York District, in providing data on sand nourishment projects on Fire Island. Various repositories were also researched and contacted for additional information such as the New York State Library, the University of Alabama, and the National Archives. Finally, we would like to thank the community members and residents of Fire Island, who participated in the project kickoff, review of this report, and provided information and resources regarding their respective communities.

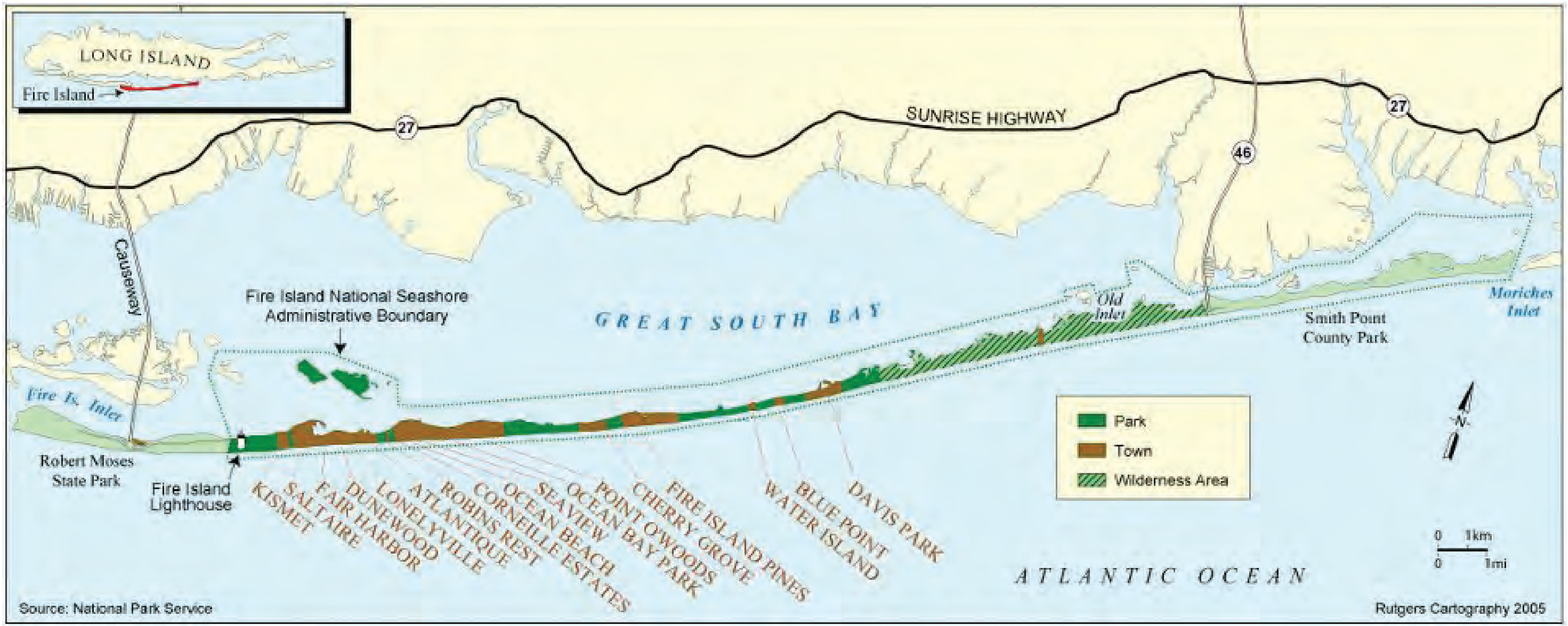


Figure. This 2005 map illustrates the communities, parks and the National Seashore Administrative Boundary. Almost all the communities are located on the western side of the island, and the Otis Pike High Dune Wilderness Area is visible on the eastern side.

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INTRODUCTION

Fire Island National Seashore was established in 1964, following the passage and implementation of the Wilderness Act days earlier. Congress established the Fire Island National Seashore as a national seashore to be protected and managed by the National Park Service. The original legislation established a zone between Davis Park and Smith Point County Park, with the intent of preventing development that would impact the natural existing flora, fauna, and physiographic conditions existing at that time. Separately, the Wilderness Act was passed to regulate and preserve lands with wilderness-like character, to which a portion of Fire Island could be defined. However, efforts to protect this unique landscape began well before then. This Cultural Landscape Report, which is Part I, Landscape History, presents the landscape history, both natural and cultural, from the earliest human habitation up through the present day. The history is provided in chronological order, with a narrative for each period, including legislative background and changes, natural and cultural landscape settings and changes through time. This landscape report includes histories of the whole of the Fire Island National Seashore, 26 miles of ocean shoreline, and the 17 residential communities that predate the Seashore's authorization. In part, the purpose of this report is to involve the local Fire Island communities and build consensus for island-wide landscape preservation.

The report is arranged chronologically. Chapter 1 presents the landscape history from geologic eras to 1915. Chapter 2 describes the island's landscape history from 1916 to 1940, including a discussion of pre-war resort development and beach tourism. Chapter 3 presents the landscape history from 1941 to 1978, focusing on post-World War II development and conservation responses. Chapter 4 presents the landscape history from 1979 to the present, including the history of legislation affecting the national seashore, and National Park Service administration and stewardship. Each chapter concludes with a landscape narrative summary and in the case of chapter 4, an existing conditions plan. Graphics within each chapter illustrate general changes to the landscape, including historic maps, geographic setting, and locations of the 17 communities.

The report follows National Park Service policy included in *The Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes; Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes;* and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques*.

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Chapter 1: History Prior to 1915

This chapter offers a deep time history of Fire Island, including geological and other natural processes that shaped and were shaped by human occupation since time immemorial. Flora, fauna, and human occupation in different areas of the island are briefly discussed in distinct chronological sections. These sections begin with the natural and precontact history before discussing colonial through early twentieth century histories of the island.

NATURAL HISTORY AND NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

This section describes Fire Island natural and Native American histories before European Contact. The natural history of the Fire Island landscape spans over 65 million years. Archaeological evidence shows that Native Americans lived on the island and nearby Long Island for at least 9,000 years, if not longer, and likely seasonally. Native American maritime industries—including whaling, fishing, and gathering shellfish—influenced European and Euro-American industries that still maintain a critical economic role for people on the island today.

GEOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Fire Island, New York is one of Long Island's barrier islands. Barrier islands are so named because they absorb the energy from the ocean, protecting the coast. The Long Island barrier islands began forming over 65 million years ago when a Cretaceous sedimentary stratum became covered with a thin blanket of glacial and modern sediment located on the inner shelf along the coast.[1] As the glaciers retreated during the Wisconsin Phase of the Pleistocene Epoch, they stalled over what would become the south shore of Long Island. This created the Ronkonkoma Moraine, which forms the center of Long Island. North of this moraine are remains of glacial till and the landscape carved by the glaciers. The southern half consists of a broad outwash plain caused by the meltwaters of the melted glaciers and subsequent geological processes that carried sediments such as silt and clay that were deposited on the ocean floor, then approximately 490 feet (150 m) below modern-day levels.[2] About 8,000 years ago, when the rate of sea level rise began to decrease, these sediments began migrating landward and accreting mass. The dunes located between current-day Point O'Woods (the oldest community on Fire Island) and Watch Hill (a current-day Fire Island National Seashore visitor center), near the central portion of the island, likely

formed during this time and represent the oldest portion of Fire Island. As tidal processes began to erode the Cretaceous strata near current day Watch Hill, sand was exposed and carried westward, creating a more stable shoreline.[3]

The geography of Fire Island varies from east to west and is constantly being shaped by geological forces. The central portion of the island is relatively stable; this central core of Fire Island has remained in place for the last 750 to 1,200 years, although erosion does occur on the ocean and bay fronts. The eastern portion of the island, extending from Moriches Point to Watch Hill, is susceptible to processes such as overwash and rollover, which contribute to a less stable landmass.[4] Overwash occurs when the tide overcomes the primary dunes during intense coastal storms, while rollover is the process of the barrier islands to migrate toward the land.[5] These factors favor the creation of inlets, which shaped the historical landscape of Fire Island. The western side of the island, situated between current day Point O'Woods and the island's western terminus, features geography indicative of the westward movement of sediments, as evidenced by the buildup of tidal sediments. These sediments have formed curved dune ridges in a sub-parallel alignment. These dunes provided sediment via the process of erosion that contributes to the westward distal movement of the island.[6]

FLORA AND FAUNA

The active geological processes that have shaped Fire Island allowed for a variety of flora and fauna on the landscape. 12,000 to 9,000 years ago, areas of receding glaciers around Long Island gave way to spruce and fir parklands and forests, which led to the growth of coniferous forests and smaller amounts of oak and other deciduous forests. The megafauna of the Ice Age had become extinct, making way for smaller fauna to thrive. Around 7,000 years ago, when the climate became drier and warmer, the environment encouraged the growth of mixed oak and hemlock forests. A more diverse class of fauna began to emerge as well, including deer, otter, beaver, rabbit, and turkey.[7]

Unique conditions have also led to the growth of rare vegetation on Fire Island. The Sunken Forest, first formed between 200 and 300 years ago, is one of the increasingly rare maritime forests on the eastern seaboard. According to the National Park Service:

> . . .the site of the Sunken Forest was an area of bare, windblown sand. But, it was soon invaded by the seeds of pioneering dune plants, like beach grass.
>
> Woolly beach heather and seaside goldenrod were probably the next plants to grow in this area. These plants not only pioneered, but helped stabilize the habitat by trapping blowing sand.
>
> There are virtually no nutrients to be derived from windblown sand, so pioneer species got their nourishment from the air, wind-borne minerals from the sea and from land.
>
> As plant communities became established, they added organic material to the sand, and gradually conditions were created that enabled increasingly diverse plant associations to grow. Early pioneer species then disappeared or declined as species such as post oak, black cherry, and highbush blueberry took hold.[8]

These environmental conditions led to the development of Fire Island's natural landscape in the early 20th century, which was classified as the Oak–Chestnut forest region, found within the Central Hardwoods-Hemlock forest vegetation zone and "the maritime vegetation is an aquatic-edaphic variant of this vegetation zone."[9]

EARLY HUMAN HABITATION

Human habitation of Fire Island began thousands of years before European colonization. The first evidence of human presence on Long Island occurred 12,000 to 9,000 years ago, before the formation of Fire Island and the other barrier islands.[10] This time period coincided with a dramatic increase in temperature, making the environment more habitable and more similar to conditions seen today, although archeological evidence suggests that Long Island was abandoned for inland terrain in the winter months.[11] The first archeological evidence of human activity on Fire Island dates roughly to this time period, which is known by archeologists as the Archaic period. During the Late Archaic period the population increased substantially along the Mid-Atlantic coast.[12] People living at that time were nomadic, likely kin-based, moving across the landscape during different seasons to follow game animals, and to harvest plants for food and fiber. The cultural landscape was likely sparse based on what we know about the population during the Archaic period, consisting mainly of temporary camps.

About 4,000 years ago, Long Island became more suitable for human activity and habitation, as reflected in the archeological record. Although the barrier islands, including Fire Island, would not have been inhabited year-round, local Native American tribes long visited Fire Island in the summer months to access the abundant natural resources. Between 3,700 and 2,700 years ago, the earlier, nomadic people became more sedentary and developed agricultural societies. Although there were important developments in Indigenous culture during this time period, and more permanent settlements have been found on Long Island, humans still likely only lived on Fire Island during the summer months. There is little archeological record of precontact sites (pre-1520) on Fire Island.[13]

As of 2005, there were eight recorded archeological sites related to Native American occupation within Fire Island National Seashore. These sites include four village sites and four sites containing isolated artifacts such as stone tools. Given the lack of sites, few lines of evidence exist from which the Native American landscape of Fire Island can be interpreted. The villages recorded archeologically likely would have consisted of small, impermanent structures, used seasonally. These would have housed small fishing and hunting groups, rather than large agricultural communities that would have been present on the mainland.

CONTACT PERIOD

Europeans first recorded witnessing human activity on Fire Island in 1524, when Giovanni da Verrazzano observed large fires burning from aboard his ship. The region would not be colonized for another century, when the Dutch first settled Long Island.[14]

European settlers came into contact with numerous tribes on coastal Long Island, including the Canarsie, Matinecock, Merrick, and Rockaway peoples in the early 1600s. These early colonists recorded that these groups lived mainly along the coast and coastal headlands of southern Long Island. Europeans in the 18th century noted that the Native Americans preferred the south shore of Long Island to the northern portion, stating:

> The northern part of it [Long Island] is much more fertile than the southern . . . the soil of the southern part of the island is very poor; but this deficiency is made up by a vast quantity of oysters, lobsters, crabs, fish, and water fowl, all of which are far more abundant than on the northern shores. There the Indians . . . chose the southern part to live in, because they subsisted on oysters and other products of the sea. When the tide is out, it is very easy to fill a whole cart with oysters . . . the island is strewed with oyster shells . . .[15]

The name Fire Island likely dates to this early time of European contact. Most theories behind the name seem to be related to Dutch occupation and involvement in the area. The Dutch believed that Native Americans called the island "Sictem Hackey" translating to "Land of the Secatogues." Another theory maintains that the name Fire Island is a derivative of "vier" meaning "four" in Dutch, which was transliterated as "fier" and perhaps from there to "fire." Another theory is that the island is named for the large fires that Verrazzano documented during his 1524 voyage, or the fires that were used by pirates and wreckers to lure unsuspecting victims to the island.[16] A less circulated theory is that the island is named for the poison ivy that turns bright red in the fall; with the plant comprising 30 percent of vegetation on Fire Island, giving the appearance that the island is ablaze.[17]

Before the onset of development and tourism on Fire Island, the natural resources were being exploited for the benefit of economy. A number of industries existed and evolved the cultural landscape of Fire Island over the years. The first known example of industry is the construction of infrastructure at Whalehouse Point, established by Isaac Stratford in 1653 for the purposes of whaling.[18] Stratford would be among the first to recognize the Native American's skill at whaling, and with their assistance and direction his business grew. Stratford described the whaling activities of the early 18th century, writing in his journal that:

> . . .a whaling crew, half Indians, had their hut east of Quanch. They used to land and come off at the point there, where the water is deep, called Whale House Point till this day. From the days of the earliest settlement, whaling crews used to go on the Beach. They would live there during the season and watch the sea day by day, ready to launch their boats and push off whenever they saw a whale blow. Their supplies were brought from the north side of the Island, and fires were built on Long Point as a signal for the crew to come off. The Long Point of these days is now Ireland's Point, which pushes out into the bay a mile, about, west of the mouth of the Cannan River.[19]



Figure 1-1. Based on secondhand information from a variety of sixteenth-century sources, this 1601 or 1602 engraving by Theodore de Bry depicts Native American whaling methods, observed by European settlers shown at left. Europeans sought the expertise of Native Americans for hunting and butchering whales. The location is likely Newfoundland, Canada (Strong, Long Island History Journal).

These activities would cement the island's importance in the whaling industry throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Figure 1-1).[20]

EARLY SETTLEMENT, THE COASTAL SURVEY, AND THE ECONOMY

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

European land records first mention Fire Island in 1644, when the English King Charles I (1625–1649) deeded Long Island to his brother James, Duke of York. The English pushed the Dutch out of the area later that same year. Colonists in the area at this time were already aware of the abundant natural resources available along Fire Island's seashore, and lookout groups were assigned as early as 1644 to watch for beached whales that may provide them with useful oil and bone. In 1653, the English constructed a permanent whaling station on the island (Figure 1-2).

In 1658, a smallpox outbreak decimated nearly two-thirds of the Long Island Indigenous population. By 1670, most of the remaining Indigenous groups had fled the area after being subjected to decades of mistreatment by European colonists (Figure 1-3). Although they had believed they could share their lands with their European counterparts in peace, they were often subjected to violence and many were forced into indentured servitude.

Figure 1-2. 1657 Map of 'New France,' including the eastern seaboard. This map was prepared by the French royal cartographer Nicolas Sanson. The map shows Long Island, identified as 'Lange' (Sanson).





Figure 1-3. Map of the province of New England, illustrating New York and Long Island, dated to approximately 1670. This map shows Fire Island south of what is now Long Island. The map was prepared by the British cartographer Captain John Scott, an early settler of Long Island. Referring to Fire Island and the boundary islands, Scott included this caption: "On these islands might be managed a good fishery for ??" (Scott).

Although their numbers had been drastically reduced by European expansion, Native Americans still played an integral part in the economy. As the Native Americans of Long Island participated in the European economic system, they slowly became reliant on European agriculture, having lost access to much of their lands. They did not have traditional trade goods of that era, such as alcohol, tobacco, weapons, and imported textiles, but they did have maritime hunting and boating skills that the Europeans could not replicate. At first, the sales of harpoons and lancing tools to Native Americans was forbidden because the Europeans feared they were arming an enemy. However, this quickly changed with the ever-increasing profits of oil and blubber sales; the Europeans had witnessed the Native Americans adeptness at navigating the coastline in canoes in the winter months of the whaling season. By the late 1650s, the whaling companies were competing over the Native American workforce, sometimes recruiting men months in advance of the start of the whaling season in November, with the promise of pay in trade goods that had previously been used to acquire land from the Native Americans throughout Long Island.

This practice continued well into the 19th century, even as the Native American population dwindled.[21] As such, the Native Americans continued to have an impact on the cultural landscape of Long Island and Fire Island, although their way of life and cultural traditions were eclipsed and oppressed.

In 1685, land patents for Fire Island were granted to the town of Brookhaven, by tribal leaders of the Unkechaug tribe, described in deed records as "Winescrocum and others." These land claims were later disputed by the town of Southampton.[22] An agreement was reached between the two towns that allowed residents of Brookhaven to harvest lumber and other resources such as whales and fish. This is the first evidence of activities on Fire Island that helped to shape the cultural landscape. As previously noted, the name "Fire Island" may have been influenced by these activities, such as using fire for the rendering of whale fat during its processing. These deeds did not prevent Colonel William Smith from claiming the land as his own in 1686, or William Nicoll, the nephew of a previous governor, from doing the same two years later in 1688. Ultimately, all parties would have some portion of their land claim upheld, which would result in further land disputes over a century later (Figure 1-4).[23]

No significant permanent cultural activity occurred on Fire Island until 1774 with the purchase of Fire Island by the town of Brookhaven. Around this time, the residents began searching for valuable resources to exploit economically. They quickly turned to the harvesting of salt hay. They found that once dried it could not only be used as a practical insulation, but also to feed cattle. Fifty-five Brookhaven residents were selected by lottery and assigned small lots of land following the towns acquisition in 1774, although these agreements included easements to allow for communal right to the salt hay pastures.[24]

In 1789, the Smith family of Long Island sold the land that is today Fire Island to a group of 20 farmers. They would use the land for cattle grazing, fishing, hunting, and the collection of hay (*Spartina patens*), known colloquially as salt hay.[25] These activities would continue into the 19th century with little change to the outward appearance of the landscape. The landscape remained isolated and sparse and was dotted with a few hunting lodges and temporary structures used by the herdsman, shellfish gatherers, and salt hay collectors.

Figure 1-4. 1720 Map of New England ("Nova Anglia"), showing Long Island and the boundary islands. The map was prepared by the German cartographer Johann Baptist Homann (Homann).



NAVIGATING AROUND FIRE ISLAND: WRECKS, LIGHTHOUSES, AND LIFESAVING STATIONS

With a population increase following European settlement in the New World, the waters around Fire Island became increasingly crowded in the 18th and early 19th centuries along with other developments in maritime industries. During this time, Fire Island was one of the most dangerous places for ships in the vicinity of New York City.[26] One of the worst was the wreck of the steamship *Savannah,* which went aground on Fire Island in 1821, killing 11 people on board (Figure 1-5). This led to the construction of the Fire Island Lighthouse in 1825 to improve safety in the often-turbulent waters.[27] The construction of the lighthouse not only shifted the cultural landscape but also introduced a new industry and class of worker to the island, the lighthouse keeper, as well as associated laborers such as cooks and cleaning staff.

In 1825, Tredwell Scudder and Carl Smith of Suffolk County, and Samuel Gardiner of New York City, were commissioned to appraise and acquire land on the western end of Fire Island for the purpose of building a light station.[28] The chosen site was part of the town of Islip, and the deed holder was unknown; thus a notice was placed in the local paper calling for any interested parties to come forward. The land, appraised at $50, was paid into escrow, to be held in trust by the Suffolk County Clerk. No one ever brought any objections forward, so the deed was issued to the federal government to begin constructing the lighthouse.[29]



Figure 1-5. 1819 painting of the steamship S.S. Savannah, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic. The ship ran aground on Fire Island in November 1821 (Wood).

Haviland Wicks won the contract for building the lighthouse and the adjoining keeper's dwelling and outbuildings.[30] The 74-foot-tall lighthouse was operational by late 1826; however, there were numerous problems with it early on.[31] United States Navy lieutenant William D. Porter noted during his inspection in 1838 that "the cement is bad and crumbles. Lanterns appear to be too small, sills of windows rotten . . . [it] has undergone several repairs, and is yet leaky."[32]

Shortly after the construction of the Fire Island lighthouse, Long Island and Fire Island were the subject of scientific surveys by the United States Coast Survey Office. The Coast Survey Office, created in 1807 by President Thomas Jefferson, is the oldest scientific organization in the United States (Figure 1-6). Its original purpose was to survey the coast. In 1834, one of the members of the Coast Survey Office, Charles Renard, surveyed Fire Island, which in his map appears to run from the westernmost end of Fire Island to approximately where Watch Hill is currently located (Figures 1-7 and 1-8). A residence owned by Simmons on the bayside near Clam Pond is depicted with the lighthouse on the western end of the island. To the east, in the area now considered Ocean Beach, is Jones Signal, which became the location of the Lone Hill Life-Saving Station. Farther east, near the Otis Pike High Dune Wilderness area, a house labeled Jones. The 1834 map depicts the landscape of the western end of Fire Island as sand with some grasses, whereas it draws the remainder of the island with large dunes, some vegetation, and a forest.[33] A better illustration of Fire Island's western end was depicted by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1838 (Figure 1-9). This depiction illustrates the presence of the lighthouse and keeper's quarters, along with what appears to be a water drill. Water drills worked by using high pressurized water to drill into rock. Also pictured are several tents, and what appears to be an oven structure within the encampment.[34]

The lighthouse and new coastal maps of Fire Island and Long Island were important and useful measures to help prevent shipwrecks; however, these accidents still occurred and measures were taken to provide assistance to those that went aground. In 1847, Congress passed legislation that eventually established seven lifesaving stations on Fire Island. The first station built on Fire Island, in 1849, was established near the first lighthouse, referred to as the Fire Island station. Over the next five years six more stations would be built: Bellport (1851), Point O'Woods (1854), Lone Hill (1854), Blue Point (1854), and Smith's Point (1854). The seventh and last station built on Fire Island was constructed in 1871 at Forge River (Figure 1-10).[35] Over 400 men would serve at these stations over the next 44 years, saving over 7,000 people from 721 shipwrecks.

The new law required each of the stations to have a lookout tower and a storage room for a boat and life-saving equipment. The grounds for a station typically included a station house, a storage building, a barn and stable, a flagstaff, and a drill pole to practice rescue attempts.[36]

Figure 1-6. The United States Coast Survey was founded in 1807 by President Thomas Jefferson with the goal of surveying the Atlantic coast and improving maritime safety (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).



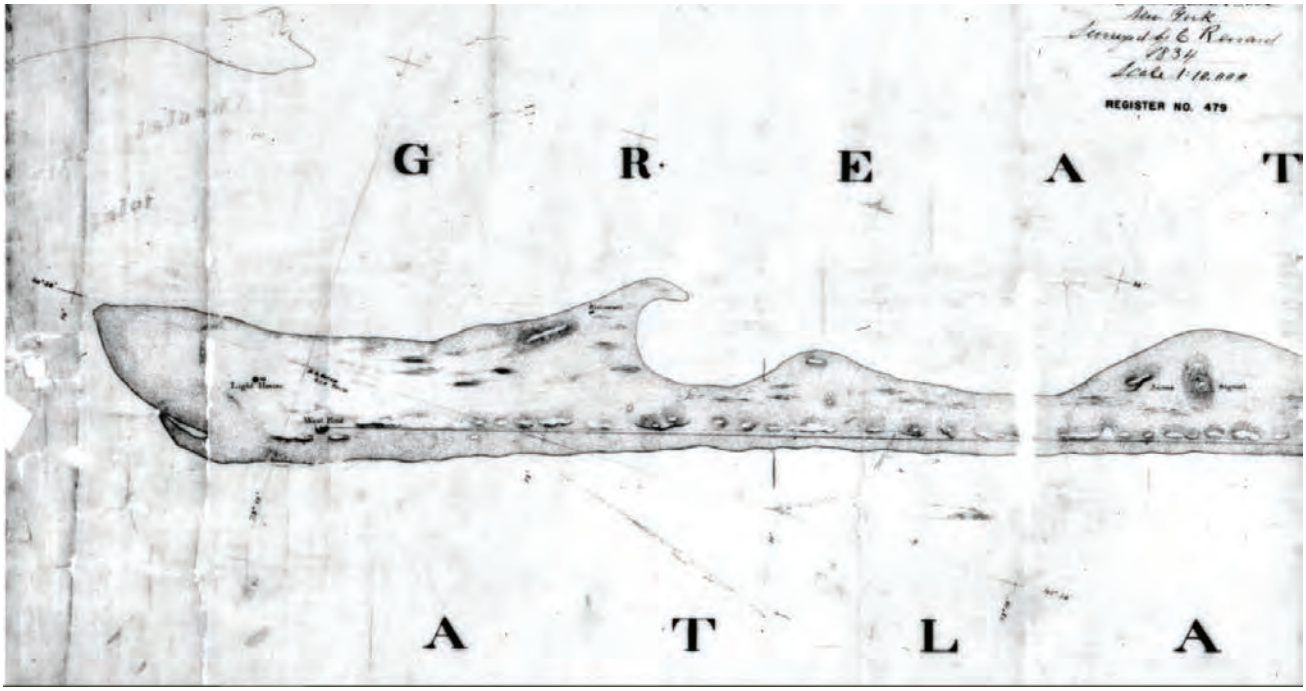


Figure 1-7. Western end of Fire Island mapped by Charles Renard in 1834. The end of the island is detailed with the lighthouse and further to the west is the Simmons house and then Jones Signal shown furthest to the east in this image (Renard).

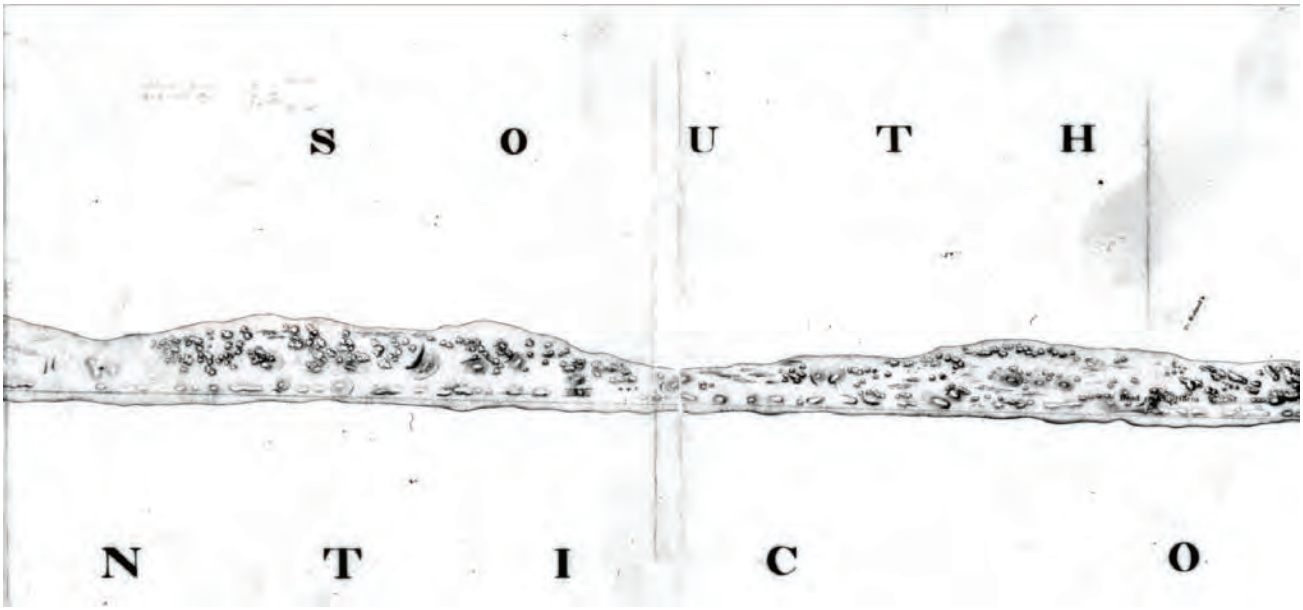
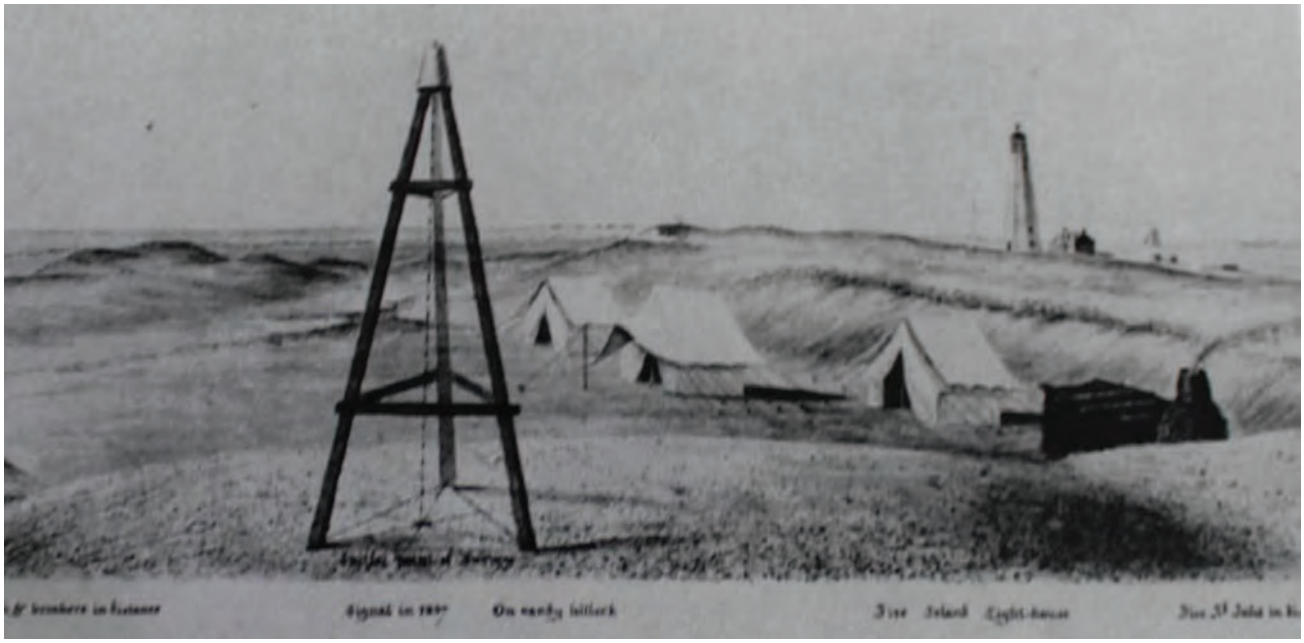


Figure 1-8. Map of the western end of Fire Island immediately east of the area shown in Figure 1-7. This area shows clusters of woods and very few human and cultural impacts (Renard).



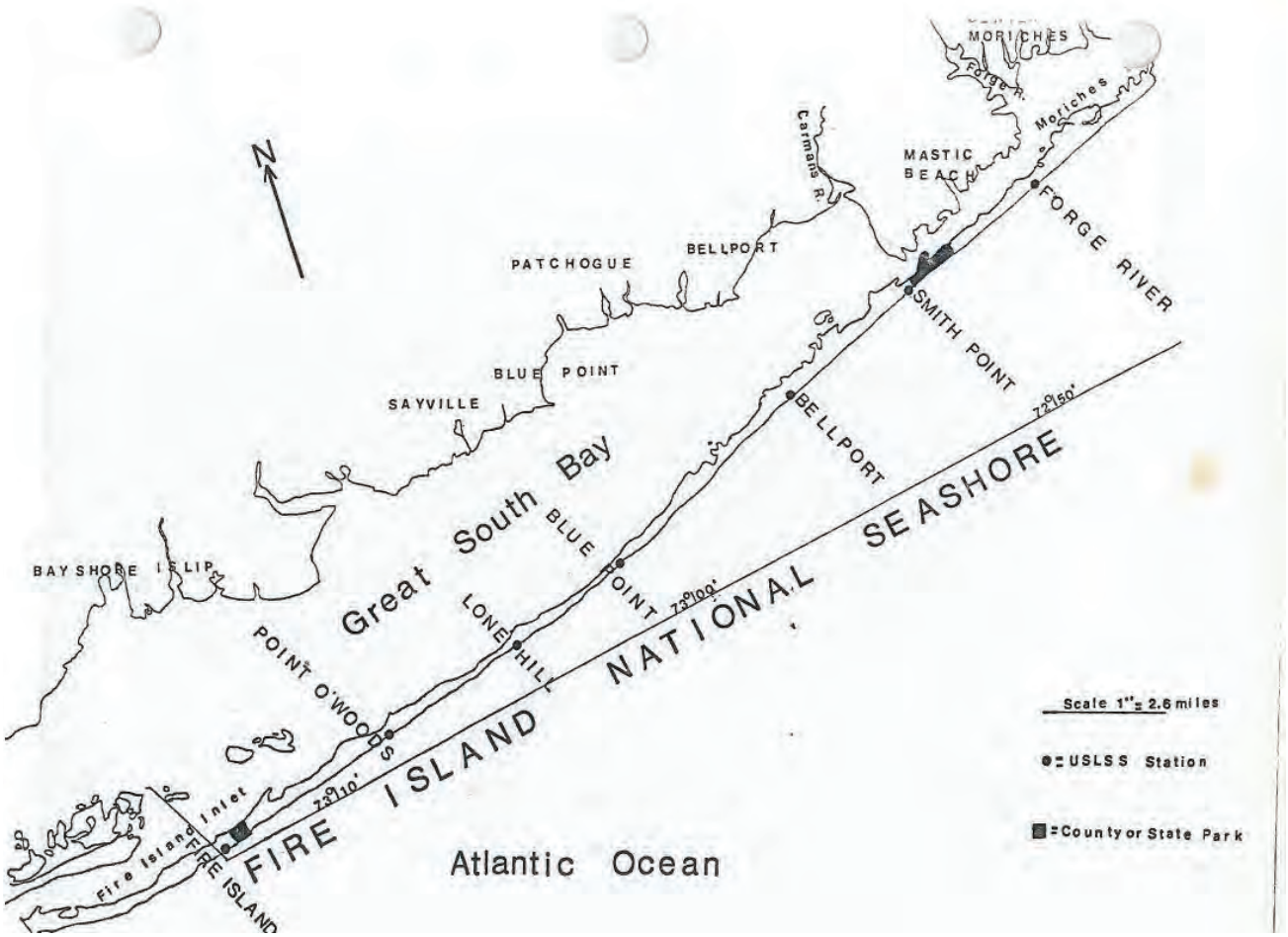


Figure 1-9. 1838 Hassler Survey Map (top).

Figure 1-10. Lifesaving stations on Fire Island were first established in 1849 with the Fire Island Station constructed near the lighthouse on the western end of the island. Six additional stations were constructed between 1851 and 1871 at Point O'Woods, Lone Hill, Blue Point, Bellport, Smith Point, and Forge River (Gonzalez) (above).

Shortly after the first lifesaving station was built, poet Henry David Thoreau visited Fire Island in 1850 to recover the body and possessions of his close friend Margaret Fuller, who had perished on Fire Island when the ship she was traveling on, *The Elizabeth,* ran aground. He gave a vivid description of the landscape at the time, stating:

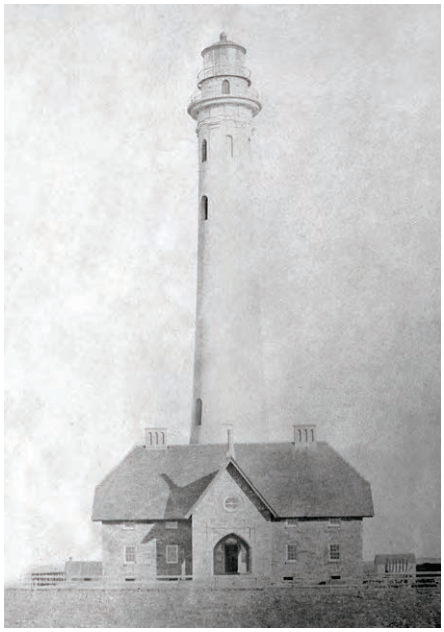
> The Great [South] beach is the principal beach on the [south] shore of long Island. It is 4 or 5 miles from the main land. [S] eparated from it by a very long & shallow bay which in two instances it took me 5 hours to cross on account of head winds. The bay abounds in oysters [and] clams. This beach alone is 40 miles long without an inlet & half a mile wide rarely rising more than 25 feet above the ocean at any point. It is pure sand without rocks–thinly covered with beach & other grasses & shrubs. The western end near Fire Island Inlet is called Fire Island beach from some low sunken islands of that name in the Bay opposite. There are but 4 houses worth naming on the whole beach–Selah Strong's at the Light H. one mile from the Western extremity–Felix Dominy's Public house 1 mile further east–Smith Oakes' another public house 3 [miles] further & Homans 10 miles further still. There are 2 or 3 temporary fishermen's bunks beside. Dominy's is deserted in the winter. A mile further west across the inlet commences the West Beach. Almost every family on the neighboring main land owns a large oyster boat and such as did not chance to be on the ground at the time of the wreck–instantly repaired thither even some women & children taking their [provision]–for the purpose of plunder. This they do not pretend to deny. There are some proper pirates among them but most do not deserve this name–they are rather low thieves & pilferers without the spirit of pirates . . .[37]

In 1852, the federal government created the Lighthouse Board, whose job it was to oversee, maintain, and reform the 12 new lighthouse districts along the East Coast. In part due to this new board, a new light apparatus was installed 1854, and more repairs were made (Figure 1-11).[38] Despite the repairs and new apparatus, the lighthouse was not fulfilling the needs of the shipping community, so in March 1857 funds were allocated for a new light station. Beginning in 1858, the old lighthouse and dwelling were demolished, with some materials being reused for the new keeper's dwelling and adjoining terrace, which was completed in 1859 (Figure 1-12). The new light tower was 80 feet taller than the previous one and was noted as being one of three new "first class light-houses fitted with first-order lens apparatus."[39] The new lighthouse and keeper's dwelling were completed in November 1858.[40] The original finish of the second lighthouse tower was a creamy yellow color.

The United States Coast Survey returned to the area and resurveyed Fire Island in 1873, both in July and then after a devastating storm on August 13. At this time, the westernmost end of the island shows multiple changes since the 1834 survey. The map depicts a lifesaving station and the Fire Island lighthouse to the east. Immediately east of the lighthouse is a large complex, the Surf Hotel (Figures 1-13 and 1-14). This complex contained a large L-shaped hotel connected to the bay side with several boardwalks and a dock. The map illustrates seven structures in1addition to the hotel. A trail leads from the hotel south to the ocean, where there is a cluster of five or six cottages. East of the Surf Hotel are several large buildings, two docks, and one trail to an oceanfront cottage. The rest of the island in this 1873 map shows a few buildings, piers, and trails. Notations include "fallen brick chimney," in what is now Ocean Bay Park and "Human No. 2 [*sic*]," in what2is now Point O'Woods. The latter refers to a "House of Refuge" maintained by a Humane Society, used as a place of shelter to shipwreck survivors maintained by the US Life Saving Service. Other notations on the map include

Figures 1-11. Original appearance of Fire Island lighthouse. The original was a cream color but was changed in later years (Lighthouse Friends) (below left).

Figure 1-12. Image of the 1858 lighthouse and stone keeper's quarters. Note the high dunes and one boardwalk leading to the east (FIIS Archives) (below right).





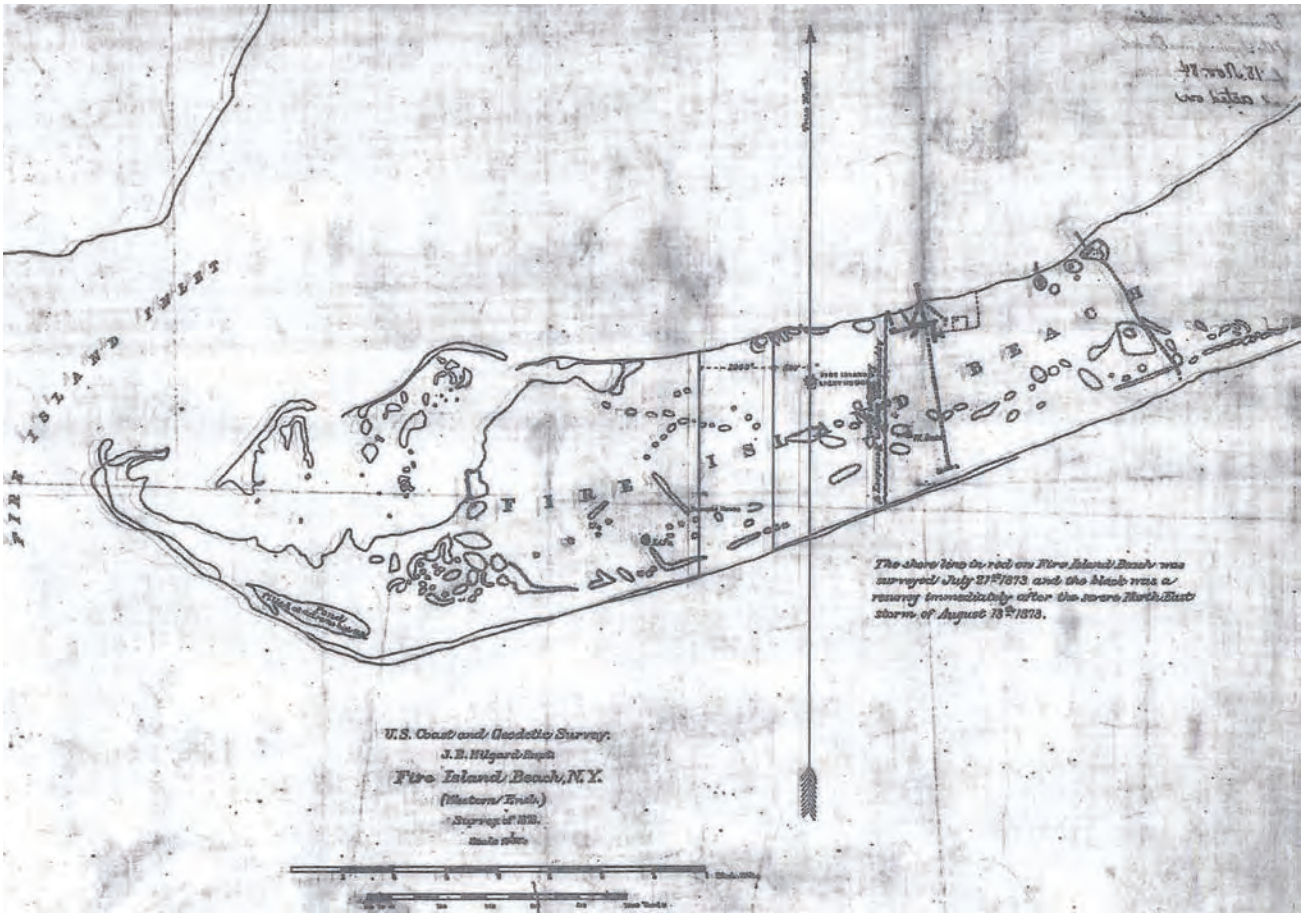


Figure 1-13. 1873 Map of West part of Fire Island, the only area developed at the time. The map was prepared as part of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. It shows the island as first surveyed on July 27, 1873, and then re-surveyed on August 13, 1873, after a severe Nor'easter storm. The cartographer was J.E. Hilgard (FIIS Archives).

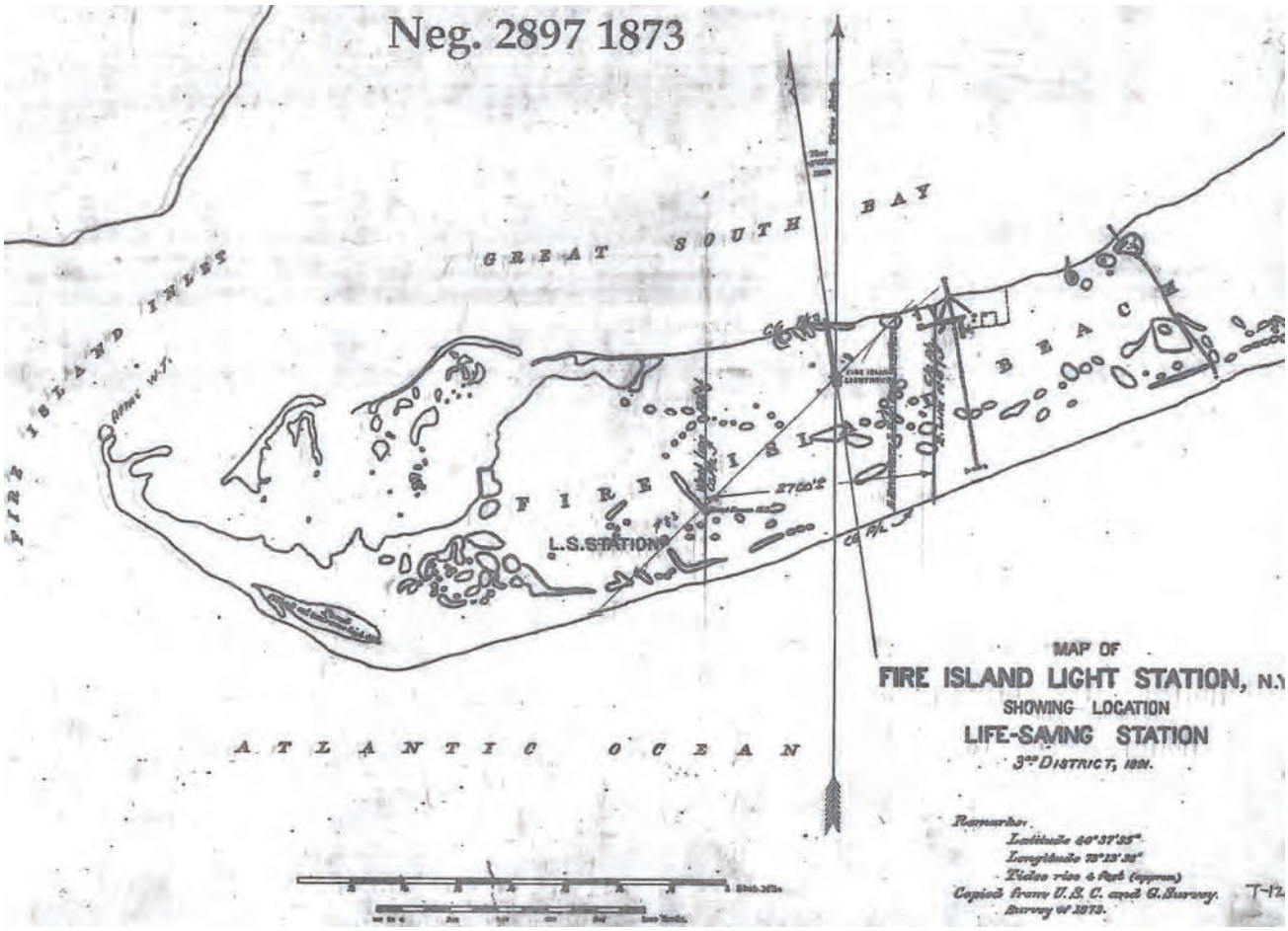


Figure 1-14. Revised version of the 1873 map of western Fire Island, shown at right. This version shows the Fire Island Life-Saving Station (FIIS Archives).

the Sunken Forest, the Smith's house, and pier west of the wilderness; a house at "Long Cove;" and "chimney of humane no. 5 [*sic*]," (indicating another House of Refuge) and Bellville Beach (which was the Bellport Life-Saving Station).[41]

The coastal survey maps from the 1830s and 1870s show that the island had few inhabitants, and that there was little growth leading up to the 1870s. A few buildings were constructed during those years, particularly the Surf Hotel and surrounding buildings. In addition, a few buildings stood between the western end of the island and the present-day Watch Hill, including one lifesaving station (Figure 1-15). However, maps showed much of the eastern end as primarily undeveloped and consisting of dunes, marshland, and forests.

After the reconstruction of the lighthouse, other structures were built in the surrounding area at the western end of Fire Island that provided for additional safety and communications. These included a lifesaving station, radio station, and a telegraph station. The United States Lifesaving Service built the first formal station building in 1878, and then, in 1881, the Service moved it onto lighthouse property. In 1886, the Service also moved the station's boathouse onto the property, and the station itself was again moved elsewhere on the property in 1893.[42]

In addition to the lighthouse and the lifesaving station, other structures were being built in the surrounding areas of the western end of Fire Island. Some of the more significant of these included the Western Union Telegraph Station and the Navy Radio Compass Station, which was an early electronic directional wayfinding apparatus and a precursor to the development of radar. The Western Union Company began its history on Fire Island by building a telegraph tower on the top of the Surf Hotel in 1868. By 1878, Western Union had obtained permission to



Figure 1-15. Photograph of the Fire Island Life-Saving Station shown at right on the 1873 map. The photograph dates to the 1880s and shows the architecture of the wooden Station. The people in the photograph are likely unknown but may be the family of either Seth Hubbard or Ezra Mott, who was the keeper beginning in 1888. The lighthouse can be seen in the left-hand side of the photograph, and the seagrasses and native flora are visible the foreground and surrounding the station (Art and Architecture Quarterly, East End).

run a cable to the lighthouse tower, which offered a longer range of visibility. The company's goal was to provide advance notice of incoming ships to interested parties in New York City, such as ship owners and relatives of incoming passengers. By 1885, Western Union had built its own dedicated telegraph watch tower (Figure 1-16). The Navy Radio Compass Station began in 1906 when the United States Navy established its wireless telegraph station on Fire Island. The Navy used it to test and develop different radio technologies for surveillance, as well as communication with Navy ships at sea. The most significant of these was the installation of the German Telefunken Radio Compass, which was installed in 1914.[43] Lighthouses and telegraph stations both allowed for, and were established due to, developments within the maritime industries of Fire Island.

MARITIME INDUSTRY

One of the leading industries on Fire Island beginning in the mid-19th century, which became evident on the landscape, was fishing and processing of menhaden. Between 1860 and 1890, three factories were located here. In 1861, Samuel Green opened the first fish processing plant on the island, where menhaden were processed into oil, which was used as a fish attractant as well as a fertilizer.[44] In 1885, the three fish processing plants in operation along the south shore were the South Bay Oil Works, the Smith and Yarrington Company, and the Comstock Works.[45] In the late 1880s, Selah Clock constructed a fish factory in what is now Lonelyville. This factory was used as a means to transfer fish for consumption to the mainland, and a railroad and pier were constructed. This construction allowed the shipments to avoid navigating the Fire Island inlet, which had become well known for its treacherous waters.[46] This practice was known as trap fishing, and used nets attached to 70-foot poles to secure them to the ocean floor. The fish were kept alive with daily feedings until they could be transferred to the mainland for consumption.[47] Later, in 1893, another fish factory opened in Seaview.[48] These factories brought seasonal workers to live on



Figure 1-16. This 1898 image shows the late-nineteenth—present-day appearance of the Fire Island lighthouse and the Western Union Telegraph Company watch tower. The color scheme of the lighthouse, with the alternating white and black painted stripes, was installed in 1891 (Lighthouse Friends).

the island, some of them bringing families. They made little to no profit for the owners of the operations, but ensured a working pay for local fishermen.[49]

Shellfishing was another maritime activity that began with Native Americans of the island only to be industrialized later by European settlers. After the sale of Fire Island and nearby environs to the town of Brookhaven, residents began the practice of leasing the bay bottom to shellfish farmers. Brookhaven had several regulations on shellfishing that aimed to prevent overexploitation in the South Bay. These regulations identified who could take shellfish (non-residents were not permitted), required permits to collect shellfish and set a threshold for these amounts, prevented dredging or dragging for oysters after February 1851, and regulated transporting shellfish outside of the town limits. In addition, lots were leased for the planting of oysters.[50] With the development of oyster lots, fishermen would lay claim to their resources and in turn replant them for next year's harvest.[51]

GENESIS OF LOCAL RESORT COMMUNITIES

In addition to local maritime industries, a tourism industry developed during the 19th century. Development on Fire Island began on the western side of the island close to the lighthouse and Fire Island Life-Saving Station. The western end of Fire Island was chosen for the lighthouse because the location near the inlet saw high volumes of maritime traffic. The first hotels and resorts were built in what is now the community of Kismet around the mid-19th century. Development likely occurred first on the western end of the island due to proximity of the lighthouse and the associated improvements that would have been made to the surrounding land as a result.

The resort and hospitality industry became an important economic source on Fire Island introduced in the mid-19th century. Census records for the mid-to-late 19th century show that seasonal workers were most often recent immigrants to the country. As both the year-round and seasonal populations increased, so did other jobs, bringing an influx of laborers to the island. The Oakley family were one of the first permanent residents on Fire Island, and established Oakleyville, a small hamlet on the western end of the island. The Oakleys worked on the construction of the opulent homes of Point O'Woods as well as working as domestic laborers for the growing tourism industry. These later tourism activities were possible largely due to the marine resources present on Fire Island. The exploitation of these resources along the south shore's western end influenced the development of the earliest communities by drawing activity on the island to area. Many of the small communities that were once inhabited only by workers have today been adapted into recreational areas, drawing the first development to the island's western end.

The first hotel in the area, the Dominy House Hotel, was a simple rustic lodge, most popular with fishermen and hunters. Felix Dominy established the hotel in 1844—he had served as the second keeper of the Fire Island lighthouse.[52] David Sammis, the builder of the expansive Surf Hotel in 1856, is credited for bringing throngs of tourists to the island for recreation and relaxation (Figure 1-17). The resort community began to flourish when the Surf Hotel was built just to the east of the Dominy House on 120 acres of land (Figures 1-18 and 1-20).

THE GREAT PARTITION OF 1878 AND EXPANDED GROWTH

Throughout the 19th century, Fire Island remained sparsely populated. Although the island was already used for maritime commercial activities, developers began to see the potential of Fire Island as a vacation destination.[53] David Sammis' Surf Hotel accommodated over 400 guests and it dwarfed not only the smaller boarding operations but also the local landscape. Some of the local residents were upset by the large structure and wanted to ensure that the surrounding landscape was reserved for local industry rather than tourism.

On the other hand, Sammis, as well as the factory owners, were perturbed by the constant presence of cattle on their lands, which they believed inhibited the operation of their businesses. This dispute played out in Green versus Sammis, filed in 1871. Because the legal documents of the 20 landowners of Fire Island were never legally consistent with deed transfers of the land between their heirs, when Sammis bought his property, it later became apparent that the purchase may not have been a fully legal action; nearly 100 people were informed of the action and asked to provide clear claims of land ownership. In 1877, a court appointee recorded that all but 17/24 of the original 20 shares were accounted for in the claims. The land was then divided into 78 lots along much of the length of Fire

Figure 1-17. "For Health, Bathing and Recreation." 1873 advertisement for the Southside Railroad of Long Island for summer travel to the beaches of Long Island. This flyer features several prominent hotels including the Surf Hotel in the center. The same image was also used on the Surf Hotel's stationary in 1873. Traveling by rail from areas across New York to the south shore was one of the primary travel methods for vacationers, with the last leg of the trip by a steamboat ferry (www.worthpoint.com) (below left).



Figure 1-18. This circa 1856 drawing of the Surf Hotel. The Surf Hotel, built by David Sammis was constructed in 1856. The image shows the hotel surrounded by high dunes, a steamboat ferry, and one boardwalk leading to the hotel from the dock (FIIS Archives) (below right).





SURF HOTEL,

FIRE ISLAND BEACH, N. Y.

The only natural sea-shore resort in America, long famous for its invigorating breezes, healthfulness and quiet enjoyment.

WILL BE OPENED JUNE 15th.

Some of the advantages of this place as a summer resort are:

First.—Its pure sea breezes, always cool and refreshing.

Second.—Excellent beach, which affords superb surf bathing; also still water bathing, if preferred to surf.

Third.—At the very doors of the hotel you may revel in the sand or sea.

Fourth.—Sailing and fishing can be enjoyed to perfection in the waters of the Great South Bay and Ocean.

Fifth.—It is the only place near New York where those suffering from "hay fever" or "rose cold" can obtain relief.

Sixth.—A certain relief for catarrh.

Seventh.—For children it is a paradise.

Eighth.—Here may be enjoyed all the beneficial effects of the Ocean, without the discomforts of a sea voyage.

Ninth.—The air is always cool at Fire Island.

Tenth.—The hotel is supplied with pure water, has excellent drainage, is lighted with gas, and has accommodations for 400 guests. Also ten cottages in connection with the hotel.

Eleventh.—It is the "place of places" in which to get rid of chills and malarial fever.

Rooms may be secured by telegraph. Through tickets and baggage checked to hotel.

TRAINS WILL LEAVE L. I. CITY, 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m.

D. S. S. SAMMIS & SON.

Figure 1-19. Promotional flyer from the Surf Hotel, printed before 1903. The flyer lists D.S.S. Sammis as owner. The Surf Hotel was one of the early recreational developments on Fire Island. Mr. Sammis was the catalyst for the 'Great Partition,' which allowed the further residential and commercial development of the island (Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society).

Island.[54] The end result was the Great Partition of 1878. The Great Partition of 1878 gave Davis Sammis full rights to the 120 acres to continue his business, clear the beaches of cattle, and cater to the visitors from New York City and beyond.

The 1878 Sammis Map depicts these lots, and includes labels identifying their respective owners (Figure 1-20). Some of the surnames of those who were given partitioned land include Rose, Smith, Mills, Jennings, Yarrington, Green, Gillette, Van Zandt, Benson, and, of course, Sammis.[55] Research did not identify any concerns for the rights of Native American tribes during the Green versus Sammis case. This division ultimately allowed development of the communities we see today. example, Lot 21 is the location of present-day Ocean Bay Park, Point O'Woods, and Oakleyville.

After the partition, a few neighboring landowners saw the opportunity presented by the Surf Hotel and soon began their own enterprises that aimed to meet the needs of tourists. The Perkinson Hotel, built in what is now Cherry Grove in 1880, is another early hostelry on Fire Island that hosted visitors and saw the formation of a resort community around it. Oral accounts suggest that Oscar Wilde spent several days in the Perkinson Hotel in 1882 during his tour of America.[56] The owner of the Perkinson Hotel sold small lots around the hotel, and the community of Cherry Grove grew with the addition of these small bungalows. Water Island

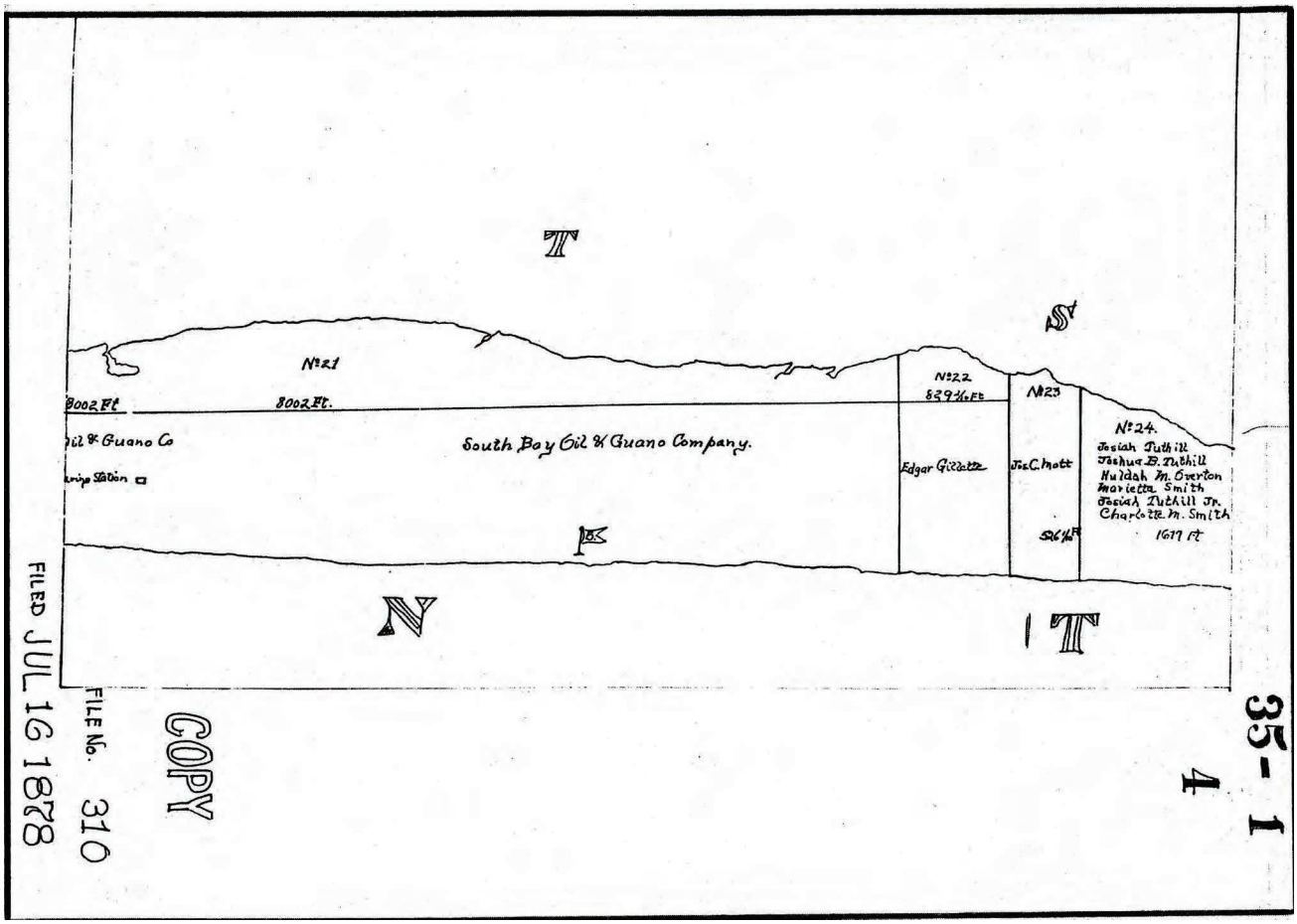


Figure 1-20. Excerpt of the 1878 Sammis Map depicting lots 21 through 24. Lot 21 was owned by the South Bay Oil and Guano Company (covering the current areas of Ocean Bay Park, Point O'Woods, Oakleyville, and a portion of the Sunken Forest; FIIS Archives - Rosenthal Collection).

was the site of three resort hotels: the White House was the first resort hotel, established in 1890, followed by the Atlantic House and Water Island Hotel in the early 1900s.

During a cholera outbreak in 1892, the island was briefly taken over by the state government and the Surf Hotel itself was purchased for purposes of quarantining a ship full of passengers. New York's Health Officer, W. T. Jenkins, wrote Governor Roswell Flower, "Can you give me the power to take possession of this Island. The conditions are very serious."[57] Sammis sold all 125 acres of his property, along with its improvements, including the hotel, nine cottages, and a steamer worth $35,000. The property was bought for $210,000, with $50,000 in cash given to Sammis immediately, and the remaining balance paid over the course of six months. In an article that year in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the Sammis hotel is described:

> The Fire Island hotel has been the resort of many wealthy and famous people in its time and old man Sammis, as he is called, has been an attractive personality to all with whom he came in contact. The hotel, until the past season, has been a rambling old structure, without any pretense of architecture or exterior air of comfort. Inside it is painfully neat and plain, but very comfortable. It used to be said that there was nothing fancy about Sammis but his prices. As showing the character of the man it is said that a grumbling guest went to pay a bill that had been made out for him. He pointed to each item and complained that he could get them cheaper somewhere else. At last came an item that he could not read but for which the charge was $20. 'What is that?' he asked, as he pointed to it. 'That,' said Sammis with an expletive. 'That is ozone, and you, you can't get that anywhere else than on Fire Island, and I'll make you pay for it.'[58]

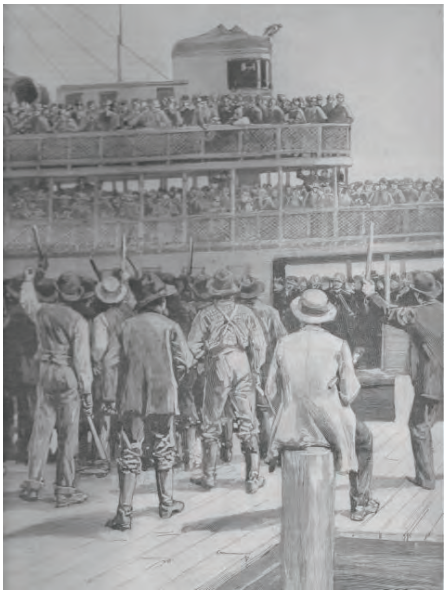


Figure 1-21. In 1892, a ship full of passengers suffered a cholera outbreak and anchored off the shore of Fire Island. The State of New York bought the entire 125-acre Surf Hotel property to quarantine the passengers (Wilkinson).

The people of the towns of Brookhaven and Islip fought the arrival of the quarantine ship passengers, and the town of Islip even applied for a court injunction. About 400 militia men blocked their arrival; however, the State Supreme court vacated the injunction, and, on September 13, 1892, the passengers were allowed to land and reside at the hotel (Figure 1-21).[59] After 1892, the New York Heath Department decided to lease the buildings in order that the property be used as a hotel again.[60]

A visitor to the Surf Hotel in 1907 provides an excellent description of the local landscape shortly after the cholera outbreak, stating:

> The first glance of the beach shows that man has come over and captured it. Here is the brick tower of the lighthouse 185 feet high, the quaint cottage of Life-Saving Station No. 25, and the square signal tower of the Western Union Company. There is also a great hotel, unique in its own way, and a model for all seaside hotels, with rows of cottages attached to it, and a mile or more of covered boardwalks leading to the ocean strand on the south, and to the bayside and steamboat wharf on the north.[61]

Shortly after this description, the Surf Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1908. Its neighbor, the Dominy House Hotel, also burned (in 1903) under what have been described as questionable circumstances.[62]

Additional resorts and tourist accommodations were built in neighboring areas. Beginning in 1911, a ferry dock, casino, and six cottages were constructed east of the Surf Hotel in what has since become known as the community of Saltaire. The community quickly developed, with over 100 residences built by 1912. The New Surf Hotel, in Ocean Beach, was built as the next grand hotel on Fire Island. Along the bay side was the casino, the New Surf Hotel with an annex, a store, a post office, and the Ocean Beach development office. By 1915, there were 154 residences throughout Ocean Beach.[63] Census records describe these and other residents on Fire Island.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF FIRE ISLAND 1910 DECENNIAL CENSUS

Early census records for Fire Island are unfortunately sparse. Most of the census records for the 19th and early-20th centuries for Fire Island appear to have been lost. The first available census record for the island is the 1880 United States Federal Census. The census roll simply states the residence of those counted as "Fire Island," and does not give a breakdown of each community. In addition, because the existing 1880 census was for the township of Islip, it did not include the community of Point O'Woods, located within the township of Brookhaven. No records explicitly state why Brookhaven was not recorded in the 1800 census. This could indicate that there were no year-round residents in the Brookhaven section of Fire Island at the time, or simply that the census taker did not make his way to this portion of Fire Island.

According to the 1880 census, a total of 68 individuals were residing across nine households in the Islip township section of Fire Island. Most of these residents were men, with a total of 26 women and 42 men. There were only four African-American residents on Fire Island at this time—one female and three males, all servants.

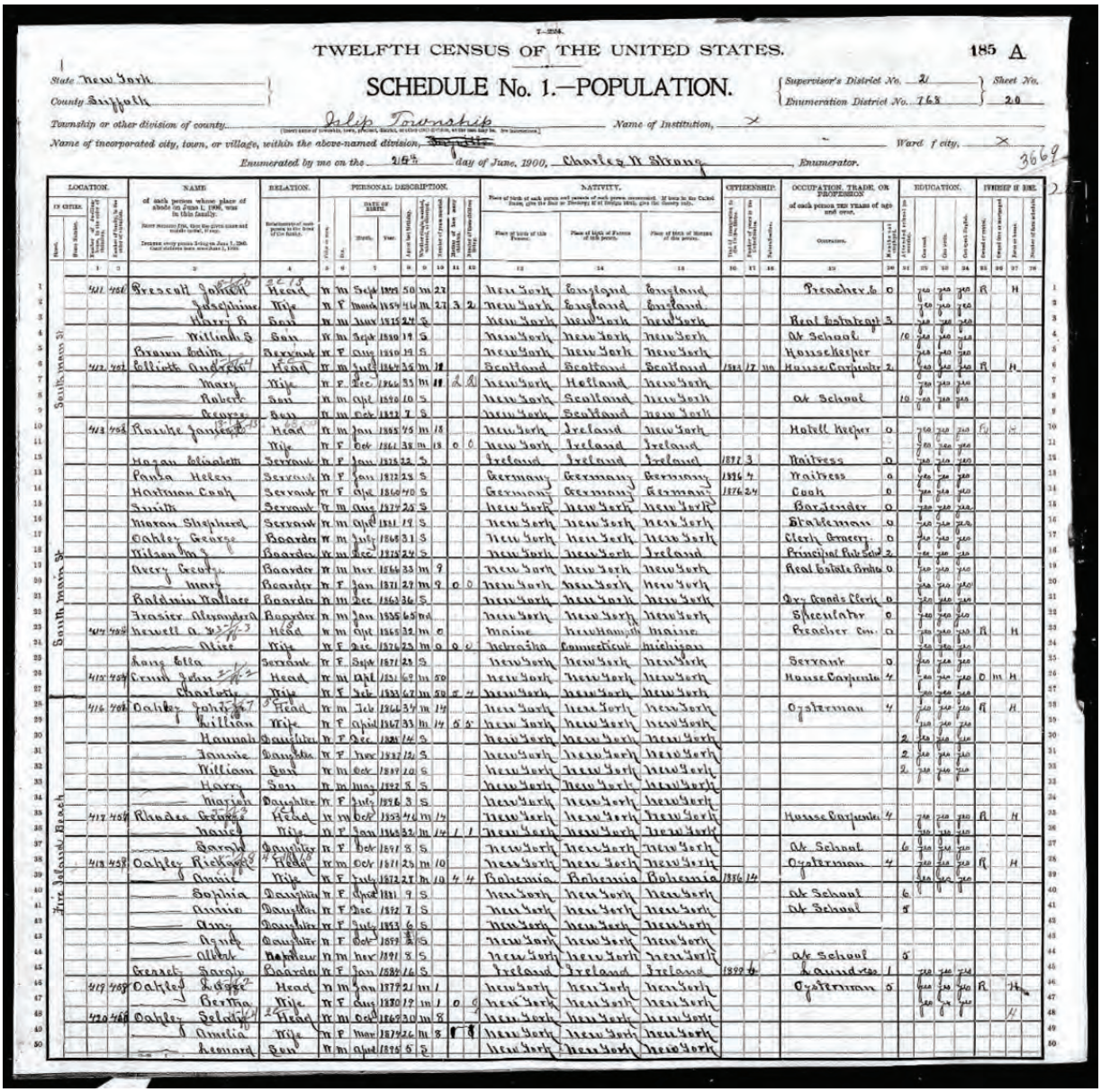
There were only four family households noted in the census, and the rest of the population was composed of working boarders. Of these families, one head of household acted as a hotel keeper while two others listed their occupations as fisherman; the fourth noted his occupation as clergyman. One residence was home to 12 men who worked in the nearby fish factory. Most of the residents were born in New York State; a total of 18 residents were from other countries, including 12 from Ireland, 5 from Germany, and 1 from England. Of the 12 Irish residents, 10 were female, and all listed their occupations as either waiter or servant. The two Irish men both worked in the fish factory, as did four of the German men. Only one German man worked outside the fish factory, and he listed his occupation as servant. The lone English worker was a male servant as well.

The average age of female servants and laborers on Fire Island in 1880 was around 34, while the average age of male laborers was 36.

The only other available census from this time period is the 1900 Federal Census. The 1890 Federal Census was lost in a fire, while the New York State censuses from 1885, 1895, and 1905 either do not include Fire Island or do not include Suffolk County and Islip Township.

Like the 1880 census, the 1900 census did not split the residents into any of the existing communities, but merely labeled them as residents of Fire Island Beach (Figure 1-22). In June 1900, this census roll recorded only 27 residents distributed over eight households, showing a large drop from the 68 who were residing there in 1880. All the residents of Fire Island in 1900 were recorded as white. Only four of these individuals were born outside of New York, hailing from Bohemia, Ireland,

Holland, and New Jersey. Of these foreign-born individuals, one was a housewife born in Bohemia, two were servants who lived in their own households, and the fourth was listed as a laundress from Ireland who lived in her own household. Notably, the Oakley family, who are well known to have had a strong presence on Fire Island in the early-20th century, occupied four of these eight households, eventually establishing the community of Oakleyville. Each of the four Oakley heads of household listed his occupation as oysterman. One additional head of household gave his occupation as a house carpenter. One household, inhabited by a single woman named Mary Hoag, did not list any occupation. These eight households of 27 residents nonetheless contributed to a strong, if perhaps largely seasonal, group of communities at the turn of the 20th century.


TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES. 185 A

SCHEDULE No. 1.—POPULATION.

State New York. County Suffolk. Township or other division of county. Islip Township. Name of Institution, ×

Name of incorporated city, town, or village, within the above-named division, ×. Ward of city, ×

Enumerated by me on the 26th day of June, 1900, Charles W Strong. Enumerator.

Supervisor's District No. 21. Enumeration District No. 163. Sheet No. 20

South main St. — Fire Island Beach

| | | |

COMMUNITIES ESTABLISHED ON FIRE ISLAND BY 1915

The residential communities on Fire Island are those areas—the towns, developments, neighborhoods, associations, hamlets, and villages—that predate the establishment of the Fire Island National Seashore. As discussed earlier, the communities were built to accommodate different groups of people. Some were built to accommodate the laborers who worked on Fire Island; others grew around the hotels, to accommodate vacationers; and one grew to accommodate workers at the local fish factory. The earliest community was Point O'Woods established in 1894, followed by Oakleyville, which was founded when John Oakley built the first residence there, in 1897. Lonelyville began in 1905 and Saltaire in 1910.

The modern names of the communities are used as headings in this and subsequent chapters. This chapter discusses those fledgling residential communities that were formally planned or established by 1915. They are Saltaire, Lonelyville, Atlantique, Corneille Estates, Ocean Beach, Seaview, Ocean Bay Park, Point O'Woods, Oakleyville, Cherry Grove, and Water Island. These communities are discussed in geographical order from west to east along Fire Island. Development in some areas began during this time period but are not discussed in detail here, as these communities were not yet formally established by 1915. For example, the Dominy House and Surf Hotel were constructed within the area that would later be known as Kismet, but since the community of Kismet was not yet established, it is not described in this chapter. A 1915 map, known as the Hyde Atlas, created and published by the E. Belcher Hyde Map Company, is an important resource for understanding the cultural landscape of the island in 1915, and how it had developed since the Sammis Maps of 1878. Discussion of communities is presented in conjunction with relevant excerpts from the Hyde Atlas.

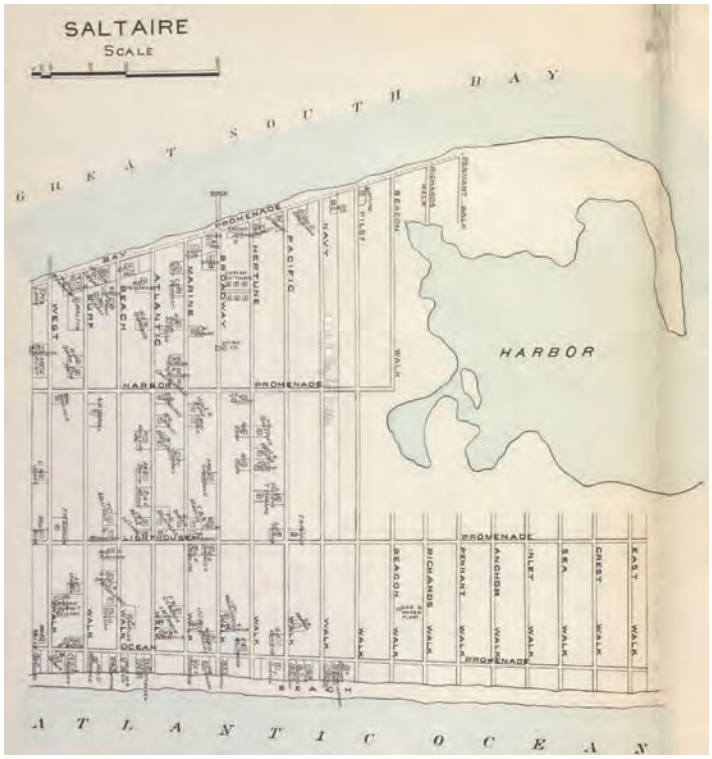


Figure 1-23. Saltaire, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

SALTAIRE, FIGURE 1-23

Otis Loucks and L. E. Bliss owned the Fire Island Development Company, which established the community of Saltaire on Lot 5 of the 1878 Sammis Map in 1910. Otis Loucks and L. E. Bliss, who had previously worked together on a similar venture in Miami Beach years earlier, owned the Fire Island Development Company. The plot of land measured 3,500 feet wide, and the previous landowners reserved approximately 240 feet of the land, reaching from the bay to the ocean.[64] By 1912, over 100 structures had been built in Saltaire, including a yacht club and a homeowner's association.

In 1913, the Fire Island Development Company contracted Mike Coffey, who would come to be known as the master builder of the community, to continue building houses. After little more than a year, he left the company to become an independent contractor and continued construction of the community. His craftsman bungalow houses with their distinctive arched windows still characterize much of the vernacular architecture of Saltaire.[65]

By 1915, Saltaire was a developed community with a grid pattern of walks that ran north–south from the bay to the ocean and three intersecting east–west walks. No construction, except for a gas and water plant, had occurred on the streets south of the harbor. Eighteen houses were situated along the western oceanfront of Saltaire.

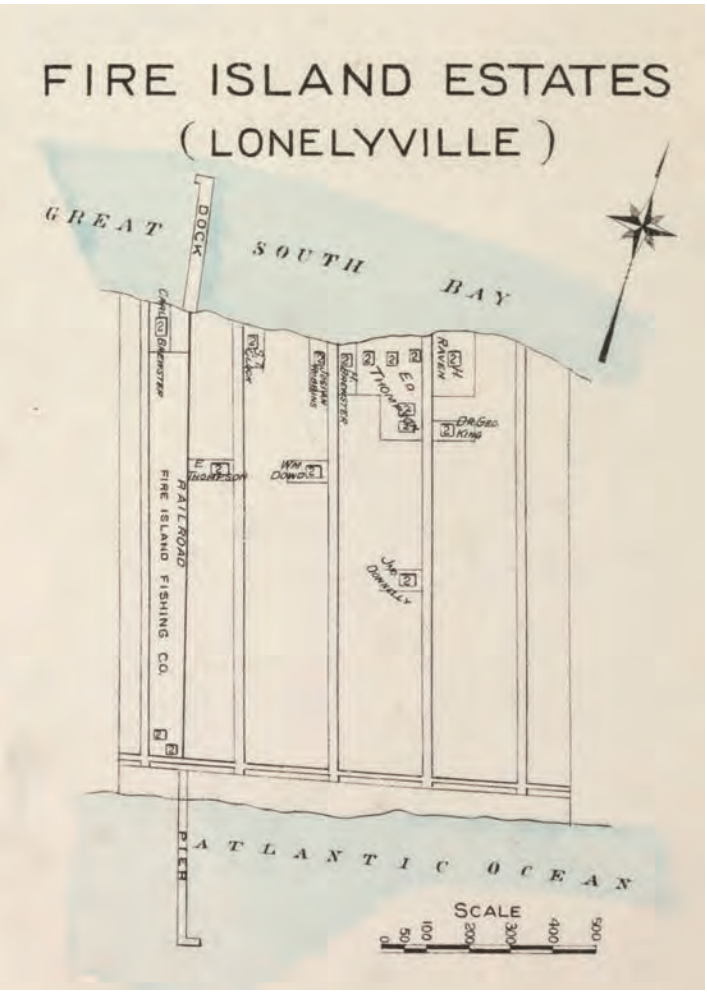


Figure 1-24. Lonelyville, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

LONELYVILLE, FIGURE 1-24

The Lonelyville community was originally referred to as Fire Island Estates.[66] Captain Selah Clock of the Fire Island Fishing Company first established the Lonelyville area in the late 1800s on the eastern portion of Lot 7 of the 1878 Sammis Map. Unlike the resort areas of Fire Island, Clock initially developed the community for commercial fishing. Rather than make the tedious journey around the Fire Island inlet to gain access to fresh catches in the ocean, Clock innovated the construction of two piers, each extending hundreds of feet into the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean.[67] A narrow-gauge railroad was constructed between the two piers, and donkeys pulled carts of fresh fish between the two piers, cutting in half the time it took to transport fresh fish from the ocean to New York City and beyond. Clock eventually sold his fishing company in favor of real estate development. He subdivided his land tract for residential sale in 1905, and the South Shore Realty Company shortly began selling those lots (Figure 1-25).[68] The first residences constructed were those of the Clyde Oakley, John Donnely, and Dr. George King.[69]

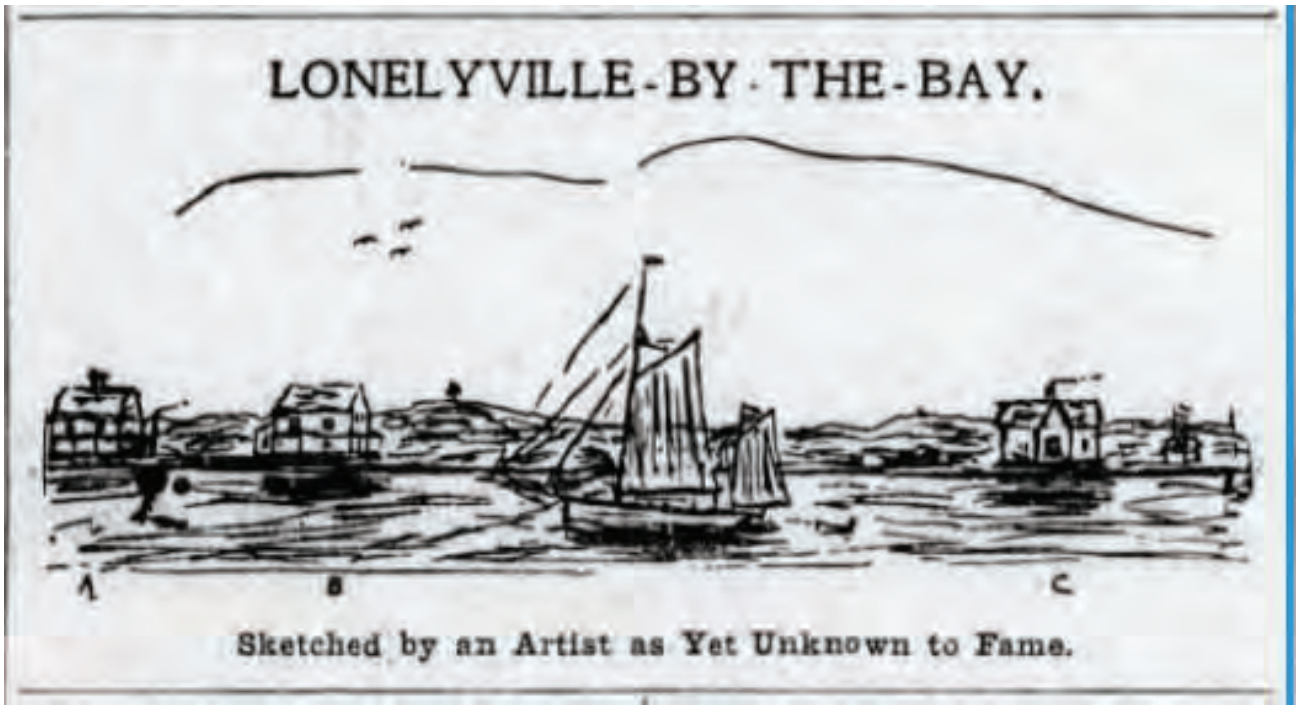


Figure 1-25. This 1908 image is a sketch of the appearance of Lonelyville from the Great South Bay. It depicts one-to-two-story house on the shoreline and an elevated topography behind them (Brooklyn Daily Eagle).

Bylaws for Lonelyville were drafted in 1908 with some some humor. The laws determined that the community would keep their commercial activities such as saloons, dives and gambling resorts a mile from any church or schoolhouse. In addition, gambling activities would not occur on Sundays including cock fights, horse races, or firemen's tournaments. The laws also required that all residential buildings be at least six feet by eight feet and one story in height. Wild animals were not allowed (lions, tigers, and whales) and families would not be allowed to keep more than six servants and two vehicles but were allowed as many yachts as they wished. The article also claims that the "Board of Aldermen will be responsible and shall see that the tide rises and falls every day, and that the surf continues to roll in."[70]

The layout of the community in 1915 followed five north–south walks and one east–west path along the oceanfront. The 1915 Hyde map shows the two piers and the railroad between the two structures. Sixteen two-story buildings were in Lonelyville at this time. Two of these structures belonged to the Fire Island Fishing Company near the ocean.[71]

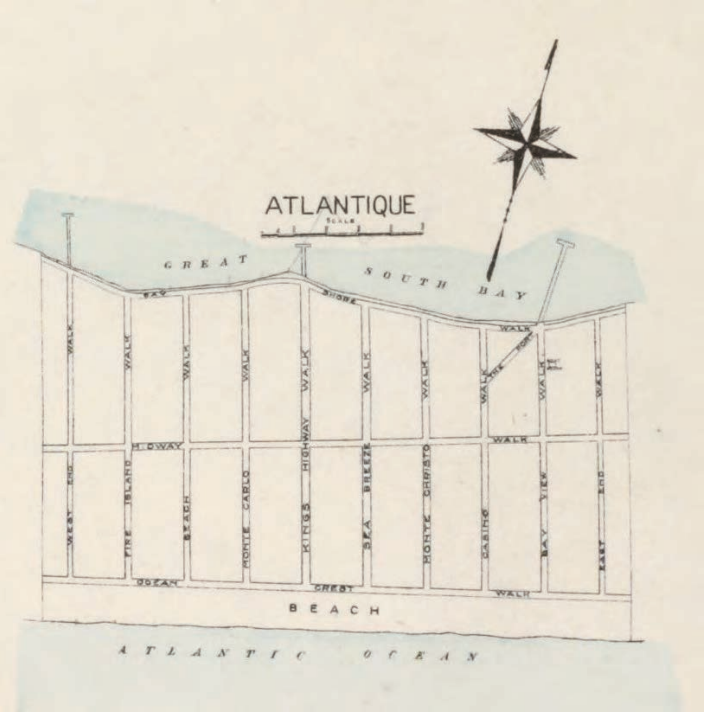


Figure 1-26. Atlantique, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

ATLANTIQUE, FIGURE 1-26

Carlton Brewster and Dr. George King founded Atlantique on Lots 8 and 9 of the 1878 Sammis Map in 1912.[72] During this time, only a few small dwellings were present on the bay side, though no structures were documented on the 1915 Hyde map.[73] Three walks traversed the community east–west, along with ten north–south walks between the bay and ocean. Great South Beach Development Company prepared a plan for Atlantique in 1912 with 12 blocks and 489 individual lots (Figure 1-27).

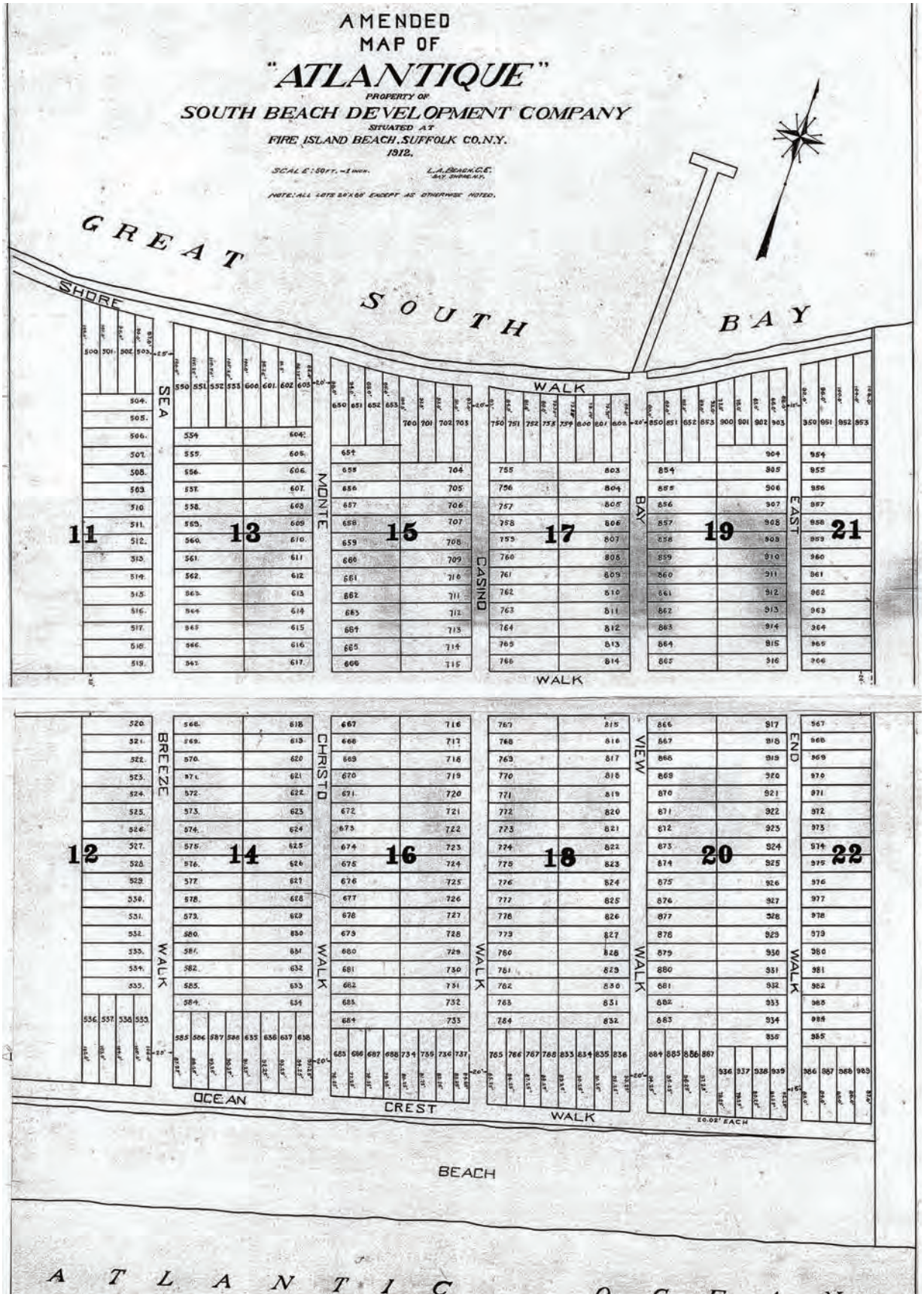


Figure 1-27. Original 1912 development plan by South Beach Development Company for Atlantique. The blocks and lots are a continuation of a numbering system of another community plan, although research did not identify which community held Blocks 1–10. This plan shows 12 blocks and a total of 489 lots (FIIS Archives, Jim Rosenthall Collection).

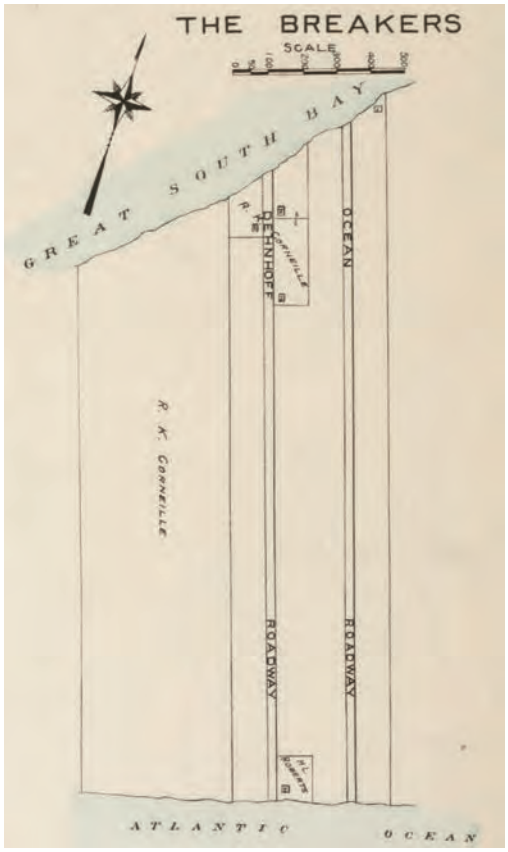


Figure 1-28. Corneille Estates was first referred to al The Breakers, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

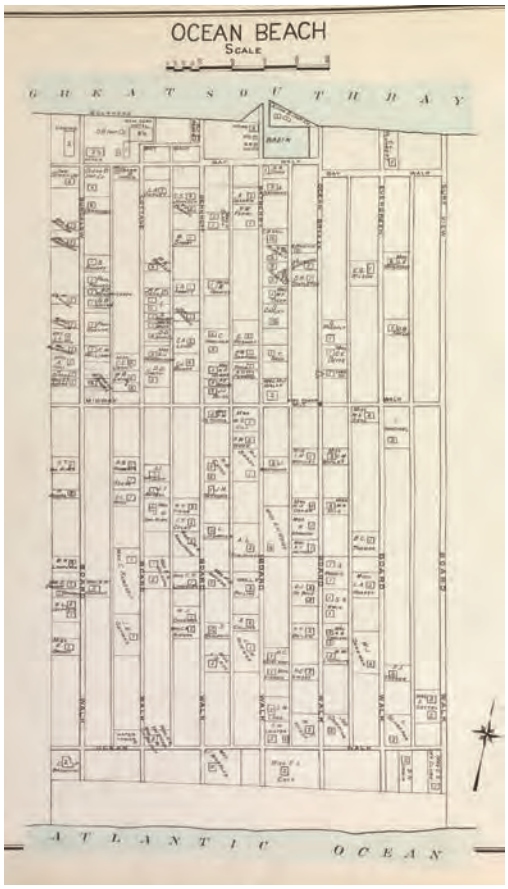


Figure 1-29. Ocean Beach, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

CORNEILLE ESTATES, FIGURE 1-28

Corneille Estates was originally referred to as "The Breakers." By 1915, R. K. Corneille owned most of the area (Lot 10 of the 1878 Sammis Map) and had built three structures on it. It consisted of only one and one-half residential blocks. Two north–south streets are visible on the 1915 map. One lot with a house owned by H. L. Roberts was on the oceanfront, with all other buildings on the bay side. [74]

OCEAN BEACH, FIGURE 1-29

The Ocean Beach community is centrally located on Fire Island. Because of its development history, where residences were built on small plots, the landscape is one of a densely settled community.[75] The Ocean Beach Development Company, located in Bay Shore, Long Island, began construction of the community in the first decade of the 20th century.

The village comprises Lots 15, 16, and 17 of the original lots which were owned originally by the large property owners on the south shore of Long Island.[76] The earliest structures in Ocean Beach date to the early 1900s.[77] In 1908, John A. Wilbur purchased and subdivided the eastern lots (Lots 16 and 17) into about 1,000 plots. Later, Lot 15 was purchased by Wilmot M. Smith. At his death, his heirs subdivided the westernmost lot and dubbed the property Stay-A-While Estates. Three north–south streets and three east–west walks divided this particular lot in 1915, with 26 buildings ranging from one to two stories sited between the bay and ocean; however, no one had yet constructed buildings along the oceanfront. The 1915 Hyde map labeled this area as "Stay-A-While-Beach."

By 1915, 154 residences existed throughout this area of Ocean Beach. The casino, the New Surf Hotel with an annex, a store, a post office, and the Ocean Beach development office were along the bay side.[78] The 1912 tax assessment records for Ocean Beach show that most of the residences were for people who maintained primary residences elsewhere.[79] This early commercial area in Ocean Beach served surrounding communities as well.

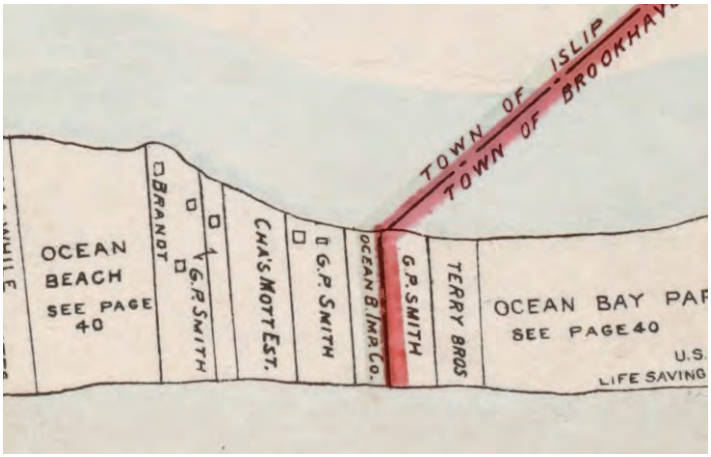


Figure 1-30. Seaview, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

SEAVIEW, FIGURE 1-30

Seaview is located immediately east of Ocean Beach, straddling the township borders between Islip and Brookhaven. It corresponds to 1878 Lots 19, 20, and 21. Wilson J. Terry, who established the South Bay Oil and Guano Company, first settled the community in 1878. The same year, Samuel Green of Sayville began operating a fish oil business, likely under the employment of Gilbert Smith, who owned a menhaden processing factory in the vicinity.[80] In 1895, the first residents of Seaview—factory workers employed by Gilbert Smith—came to live in the community.[81]

In its early years, Seaview was largely a community to house factory workers employed by the various fishing companies in the area. It was not until 1907 that Smith began to sell that property to vacationers, with the transfer of several lots. As part of these sales, the land was no longer to be used for fish processing, as the processing business was no longer desirable The property transfers included stipulations and covenants that the properties could no longer be used to operate fish factories, or any purpose related to the processing of fish. Real estate development began soon thereafter.[82] In addition to these restrictions on property use, originally Seaview banned sales of properties to Jews. This covenant was lifted in 1928.[83] Seaview has retained this early 20th-century residential character, and most traces of its fish-processing origins have vanished from the landscape.

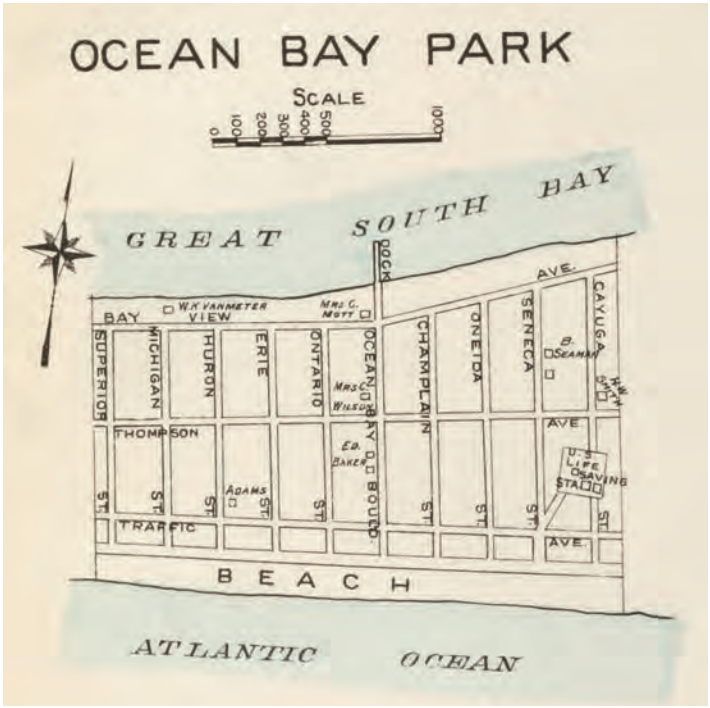


Figure 1-31. Ocean Bay Park, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

OCEAN BAY PARK, FIGURE 1-31

Ocean Bay Park is located east of Seaview, and was developed on the original Lot 21. The 1912 tax records show the area owned by the William H. Moffitt Realty Company at that time. Other lots were owned by people from New York City and New Jersey.[84] The 1915 Hyde map shows the street plan, with ten north–south walks and three east–west walks.[85] At this time, there were only nine houses, four of which were sited along the central walk that ran from the bayside pier to the ocean. In addition, the Point O'Woods Life-Saving Station was in the southeastern corner of this community.

POINT O'WOODS, FIGURE 1-32

Point O'Woods was the earliest established community on Fire Island.[86] It was part of the original Lot 21 from the 1878 partition. The South Bay Oil and Guano Company held this tract of land from 1878 to 1894. In 1894, the Long Island Chautauqua Assembly Association—a cultural and religious revival group established by several Long Island Methodist ministers—acquired the land. The group, whose focus was "the advancement of religion, science, art, innocent recreation and physical perfection," chose Point O'Woods as the location of its planned community. The arrangement and location of Point O'Woods was designed to reflect their goals of close community, academic pursuit, and self-improvement.[87]

The Association hired the well-known landscape architect John Yapp Culyer. In the 1860s, Culyer had worked with Frederick Law Olmsted in New York to help engineer and construct Brooklyn's Prospect Park. Culyer surveyed the land and planned the new community, which was then known as the Chautauqua Assembly.[88] His design called for the community to be laid out more like a college campus rather than the gridded plots of land seen elsewhere on the island, ones that had been laid out by developers for maximum density. Culyer designed the auditorium to be at the center of the community, with eight streets radiating outward and the area around the ferry terminal and the northwest as a location for stores.[89]

The Chautauqua Assembly had a brief but notable presence on Fire Island, attracting thousands of visitors each season with their educational, recreational, and cultural activities. Despite the success of their programs, they could not finance the assembly's larger goals, and, in 1898, the Chautauqua Assembly went bankrupt. Although their dreams for their organization did not come to fruition, their brief presence on Fire Island is still visible in the landscape today: Point O'Woods is the only community on Fire Island without a gridded street layout.[90]

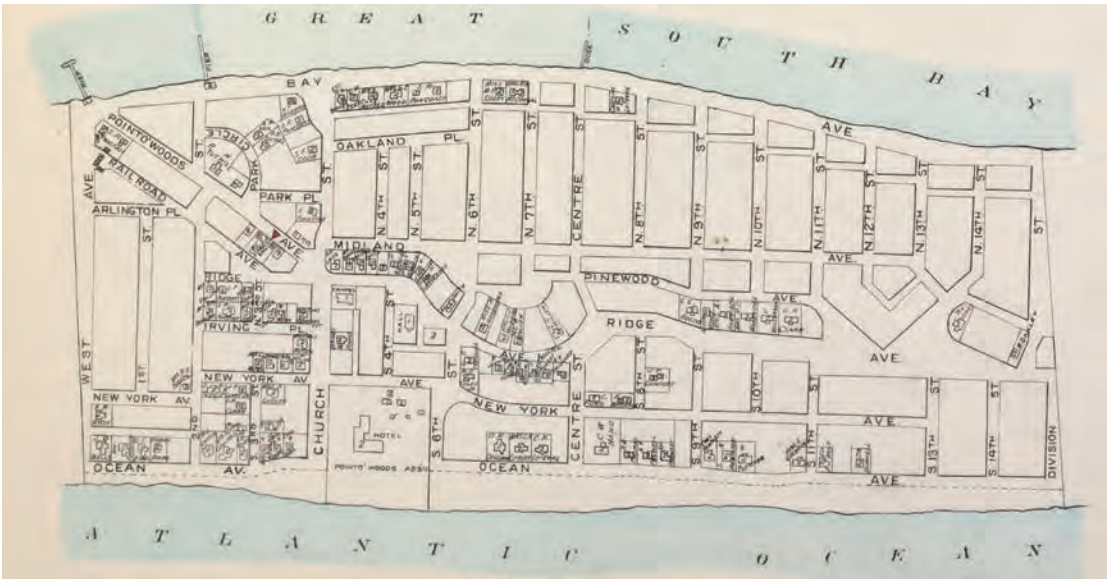


Figure 1-32. Point O'Woods, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

In 1898, following the dissolution of the Chautauqua Assembly, the Point O'Woods Association assumed all the debts of the previous landowners and purchased the land. The company also took over all sources of income established by the assembly and encouraged the construction of new cottages on empty plots. The newly formed association retained a great deal of control over the land, retaining ownership itself and leasing the cottages to residents for 99-year terms.

By 1915, Point O'Woods was a thriving community with a post office, fire house, a chapel, a large hotel, a town hall, and approximately 100 houses.[91] During this period, the Point O'Woods continued to be an exclusive community listing high rental prices for cottages between $200 to $800 for the summer season. Leasing the land to build a permanent residence the cost cost between $500 to $5,000.[92] Point O'Woods developed into a private community, with most residents being upper-middle or upper class, as reflected in the landscape and in the large, shingle-style Victorian houses constructed during the 1890s and early 1900s.[93]

OAKLEYVILLE

This community was named for the Oakley family, who built the first residence in the area in 1897 east of Point O'Woods and within the Sunken Forest. The Oakleys and their neighbors labored for Point O'Woods residents as cooks, carpenters, cleaners, and electricians; they were also keepers of the lifesaving stations, baymen, hunters, and hunting guides.[94] The family were originally said to be squatters, but some sources dispute this, stating that those who did not own the land on which their houses sat had leases from the landowner. The Oakleys were said to have rented their house sites from Dr. George Mills.[95] Since its beginning, Oakleyville was a small, unobtrusive, and isolated community.[96] Originally most of the houses were small, one-room residences, and the various homes were inhabited by related families; a network of kinship ties and business associates were required to purchase land in this community.[97]

CHERRY GROVE, FIGURE 1-33

Cherry Grove is the location of the former Perkinson Hotel, allegedly the longest-inhabited resort/hotel on Fire Island. The first improvements were made by Archer and Elizabeth Perkinson in 1869. The couple purchased a house and began serving meals on the coast for their visitors. By 1880, they were able to build their own two-story Perkinson Hotel.[98] The Perkinsons leveled the sand dunes so their guests could view the ocean and walk to it more easily. Cherry Grove was part of the original Lot 26.

The Perkinson property adjoined the eastern boundary of Cherry Grove Park, established in 1909. Rather than developers buying plots of land, the Cherry Grove community developed as Long Islanders built cabins for hunting, vacation, and other recreational activities.[99] As with Seaview, property transfers stipulated that no fish factories could be built or operated within Cherry Grove.[100]

The original cottages lacked running water, plumbing, and electricity and were usually adapted from utilitarian structures floated across the bay. They were one-story structures built on piers several feet off the ground with a screened-in porch, a combined living room and kitchen area, and two small bedrooms.[101]

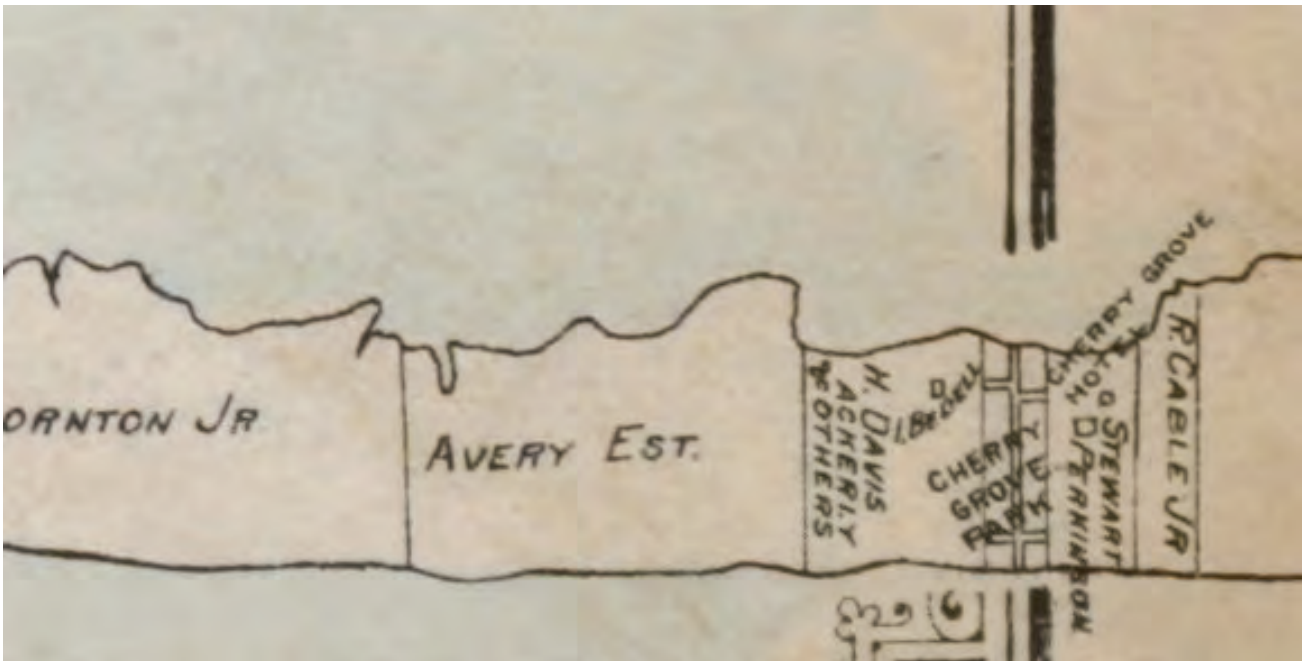


Figure 1-33. Cherry Grove, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

WATER ISLAND, FIGURE 1-34

Water Island was the site of three early resort hotels that operated in the late 1800s and early 1900s: the White House, established in 1890, followed by the Atlantic House and Water Island Hotel which were established in the early 1900s. Water Island was located on Lot 32.[102] The Caldwell Realty Company began development in 1906.[103] The 1915 Hyde map depicts four north–south streets, an Ocean Walk, and a Bay Walk, as well as the Water Island Hotel on the bay side.[104] Owners were originally descendants of larger land holders from Patchogue, New York.

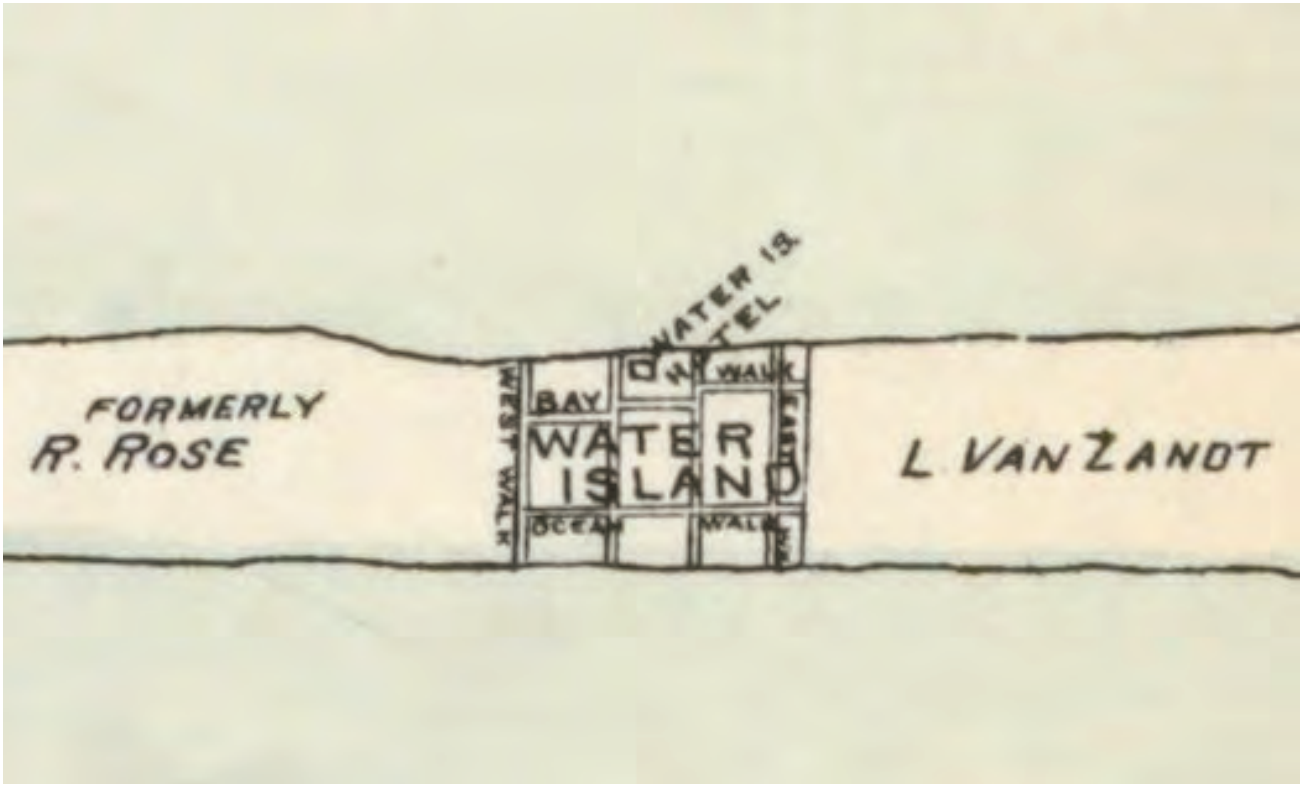


Figure 1-34. Water Island, 1915 (Hyde Atlas).

END OF PERIOD LANDSCAPE NARRATIVE SUMMARY (PERIOD PLAN)

A variety of characteristics contribute to our understanding of cultural landscapes. On Fire Island, each of the communities discussed above as well as the geology and natural history of the island presented at the beginning of this chapter all contribute to the site history of the cultural landscape. These characteristics include natural systems, topography, spatial organization, land use, circulation, vegetation, and buildings and structures. This section documents these characteristics and the associated features that have had an impact on the development of the Fire Island National Seashore landscape. The following description is that of the Fire Island landscape in 1915 and the individual landscape characteristics, both physical and intangible.

Fire Island is a long barrier island off Long Island, New York. In 1915, the western half of the island compared to the eastern half was more developed, had less vegetation and fewer stands of woods, and was more populated with both vacationers and laborers. The island was a place of both recreation and industry. It had resorts, casinos, and vacation homes, along with fish processing factories, fishing and hunting shacks, and laid out residential communities. The island also served as a base for navigational aids, lifesaving services, and communication facilities for vessels on the surrounding waters.

The period plan maps, Figures 1-35 through 1-39 (located at the end of the chapter), depict conditions on Fire Island from approximately 1915. These maps were produced from information taken from contemporary maps of the late 1800s and early 1900s particularly the Hyde Atlas of 1915. Additional source maps include several by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey including the 1919 map of Shinnecock Light to Fire Island Light, the 1895 map of Fire Island Beach to Rockaway Beach, and the 1896 map of Montauk Point to Long Island Sound.

NATURAL SYSTEMS AND TOPOGRAPHY

Fire Island is composed mostly of sand and mud with tidal wetlands on the north side facing the Great South Bay and a sandy each on the south side facing the Atlantic Ocean. The following is a description of the island during this period:

The outline of the inner shore is most irregular… making coves and points and creeks and channels… A third of the distance across the Beach, the meadow ends and sand begins. This slopes gradually up for another third of the distance, to the foot of the sand hills… sometimes three tiers of them deep, sometimes two, and sometimes only one….The biggest of them are not more than sixty feet high . . .. [105]

The dunes extended along the length of the island; dunes on the far western end in front of the developed communities were most likely smaller than those on the eastern end. The dunes in front of Saltaire were possibly reduced or removed altogether to provide extensive views of the beach for the developing vacation community.

In addition to the wetlands, marshlands, and beaches, the rest of the island was composed of wooded areas and large stretches of seagrasses covering flatlands to an undulating topography typical of a dune and swale profile.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND USE

The westernmost portion of the island was devoted in 1915 to the lighthouse, telegraph company, and lifesaving station. The land uses of this area were for transportation and communication with much of the land open and unoccupied. The new Fire Island State Park was located east of the lighthouse and was a place for recreation and social gatherings (Figure 1-40).

East of the lighthouse and state park were several planned communities and clusters of developments each separated by dunes, marshland, and grasses. The uses within the communities were primarily residential with recreation focused on the beaches, the community pavilions, and the harbors, which were used for swimming during the summer months. Some communities had commercial facilities and residential support structures such as markets and churches. One or two communities still had industrial uses primarily seen in the form of fish processing—one such community was Lonelyville, home to the Fire Island Fishing Company.

The bay side in these communities had a dock for the arrival and departure of boats transporting seasonal visitors. The areas around the docks typically became a commercial and social area for each community. The ocean side was accessible by the boardwalks; however, very little had been built on the oceanfront by 1915. The bay side was the more populous location on the island because it was the direct landing point for all visitors.

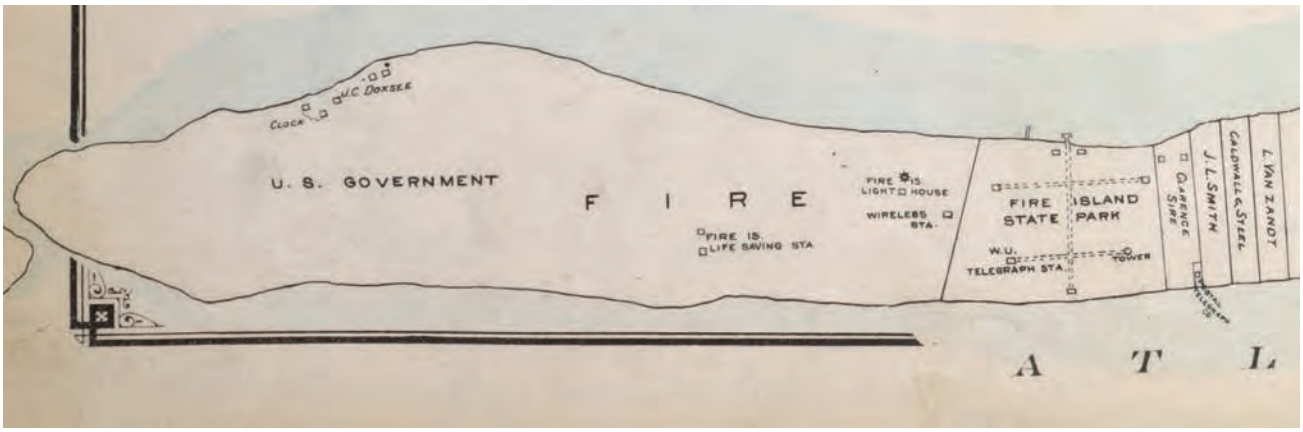


Figure 1-40. Fire Island State Park was located east of Fire Island lighthouse. By 1915, it covered a large area from the bay to ocean with one central boardwalk and two east-west boardwalks. The 1915 Hyde Map shows the locations of seven buildings including the Western Union Telegraph Station and the associated watch tower (FIIS Archives).

Outside of the planned communities between the State Park and the forested areas near the center of the island (presently known as the Sunken Forest) were large swaths of land that were in the process of development. East of this forest, two small communities were being developed: Cherry Grove and Water Island.

There were two lifesaving stations on the very eastern end of Fire Island: Smith Point and Forge River. However, for the most part, this eastern half of Fire Island consisted of uninhabited wetlands and near wilderness.

The bay islands in 1915 were uninhabited except for hunting shacks constructed by residents of Long Island. Research did not identify any other uses of the bay islands at this time.

CIRCULATION

Visitors typically arrived at the communities by sailboat or steamboat, and, upon arrival, moved around the communities on foot or bicycle. Available maps from the early 20th century do not suggest that there was an island-wide road that provided access from one end to the other end of the island. However, based on the presence of the seven lifesaving stations across the length of the island and the necessity of traveling between them to monitor the waters, some sort of trail or beach road most likely existed by 1915.

Visitors used wheeled wagon carts and donkeys to transport luggage and goods from the dock to the resorts or cottages. Lonelyville and Point O'Woods had a rail line in place by 1915 that could also carry cargo and freight from the dock. In Lonelyville, a rail pier was built out from the beach into the ocean at least 800 feet, to transport fish from the fishing boats across the island to the factories and to the bay side pier that extended 400 feet out into the Great South Bay. Between 700 to 800 pilings were used to set the pier, and nets were placed between the pilings to force the caught fish to a trap at the end of the pier.[106]

Grid patterns using raised boardwalks were developed in nearly all of the new communities, with the notable exception of Point O'Woods. The grid system allowed for the highest number of lots available for construction of cottages along the boardwalks. Within most of the communities, circulation was by way of a boardwalk grid with a central boardwalk leading from the bay side dock toward the ocean, with two cross walks. A grid pattern was also used at the Fire Island State Park, with primary entry from the bay side with a central walk that led directly to the ocean. Point O'Woods used an organic, curvilinear plan for its walks and placement of buildings; much of the land within the community was undeveloped.

VEGETATION

The landscape of these communities was quite open in 1915, with some low scrub brush but very little in the way of woody vegetation and overgrowth. There was perhaps some scrub vegetation growing between cottages in the communities.

Portions of the island were wetlands, all entirely on the bay side. Fire Island State Park was planted with pine, willow poplars, and black locust. The area now referred to as the Sunken Forest contained 100- to 200-year-old American holly trees and several other species of trees and understory vegetation. Research did not identify any documentation of the type of vegetation throughout the eastern half of the island in 1915; however, it appears very little has changed during the 20th century, which suggests that this area was primarily covered with a variety of seagrasses, shrubs, and several different types of trees, both evergreens and deciduous types. Examples of vegetation include American holly, bayberry scrub, pitch pine woodland, and shadblow trees, to name a few.

BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Fire Island was originally developed for laborers, farmers, and fishermen. After the Great Partition of 1878, developers saw the financial advantages of replacing worker housing and fish factories with hotels and residences for summer residents.

A variety of buildings and structures existed on Fire Island in 1915 ranging from hotels, cottages, restaurants, factories, churches, stables, barns, and seven lifesaving stations and their support structures (Figure 1-41). The lighthouse area consisted of the 185-foot tall Fire Island Lighthouse and the keeper's dwelling. Nearby was the Fire Island Life-Saving Station and buildings associated with the Western Union Telegraph Company. On the western side of the boardwalk, approximately 200 feet from the ocean, was the Western Union Telegraph Station, and on the opposite side was a marine observation station (built in 1885), which was a wooden building about 40 feet in height.[107] The adjacent Fire Island State Park had a recreation building, water tank, bathing houses, pavilion, and food concessions.

In 1915, some communities already had a number of one- or two-story houses, mainly sited along the bay or the central bay-to-ocean boardwalks. The largest of these communities were Saltaire, Ocean Beach, and Point O'Woods. These communities included some commercial enterprises such as casinos and hotels, whereas the much smaller communities were still entirely residential. In 1915, Saltaire was a new but developed community with a grid pattern of boardwalks. Ocean Beach had a casino, the New Surf Hotel, a store, a post office, and a real estate development office. Point O'Woods had its own post office, fire engine, a chapel, a large hotel, and a town hall. Between these large

communities of Saltaire, Ocean Beach, and Point O'Woods were several small clusters of buildings with ten or fewer buildings, or planned communities in the process of construction.

Cherry Grove bordered the Sunken Forest on the east and although it was one of the oldest resort areas of Fire Island, it was primarily an area of small lots with very modest cabins. Water Island's largest commercial enterprise was the Water Island Hotel, which was located on the bay side.

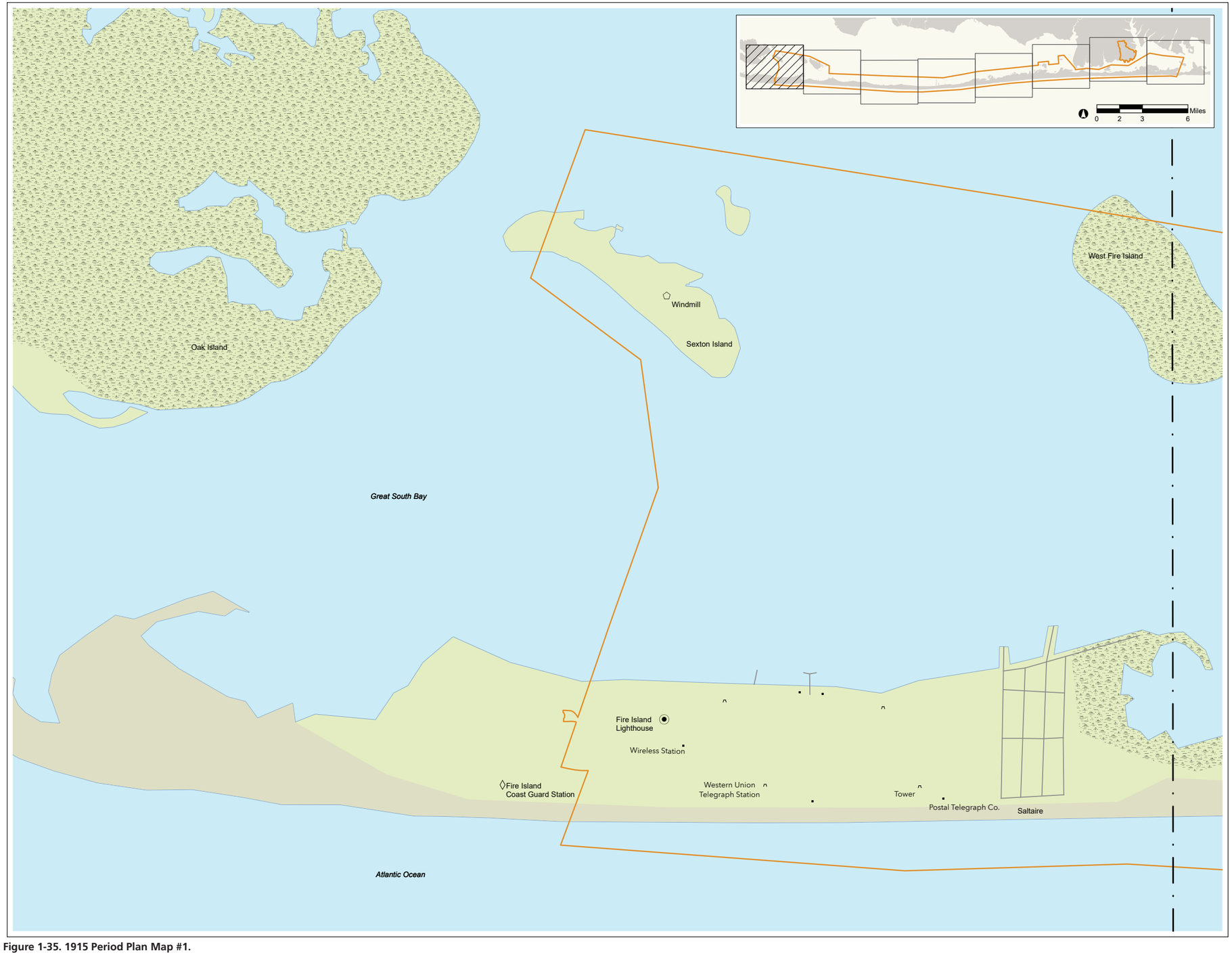
In addition to the residential communities, there were seven lifesaving stations across the length of Fire Island, each with its own landscape of support structures, such as store houses, barns, stables, outbuildings, flagstaffs, and drill poles. Stations from west to east included Fire Island (near the lighthouse), Point O'Woods, Lone Hill, Blue Point, Bellport, Smith's Point, and Forge River.

VIEWS AND VISTAS

In 1915, there were many vistas and views of both the bay and the ocean within many of the communities across Fire Island due to the absence of major woody vegetation. In addition to these general views, the cupola atop the Surf Hotel provided excellent views and was formerly used for marine observations by the Western Union Telegraph Company.[108]



Figure 1-41. This circa 1910 postcard shows one-and-a-half story bungalows immediately behind the dune line on the ocean front (www.worthpoint.com).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1915 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Light to Fire Island Light, 1919
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Fire Island Beach to Rockaway Beach, 1895
3. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Montauk Point to Long Island Sound, 1896
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Hyde Atlas, Oak Island Beach and Part of Fire Island Beach (Plate 14), 1915
6. Hyde Atlas, Saltaire; Gilgo Beach; Atlantique; Stay - A - While Beach (Plate 27), 1915

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Dirt Roads or Paths
  Docks
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Compass Station
- Tank

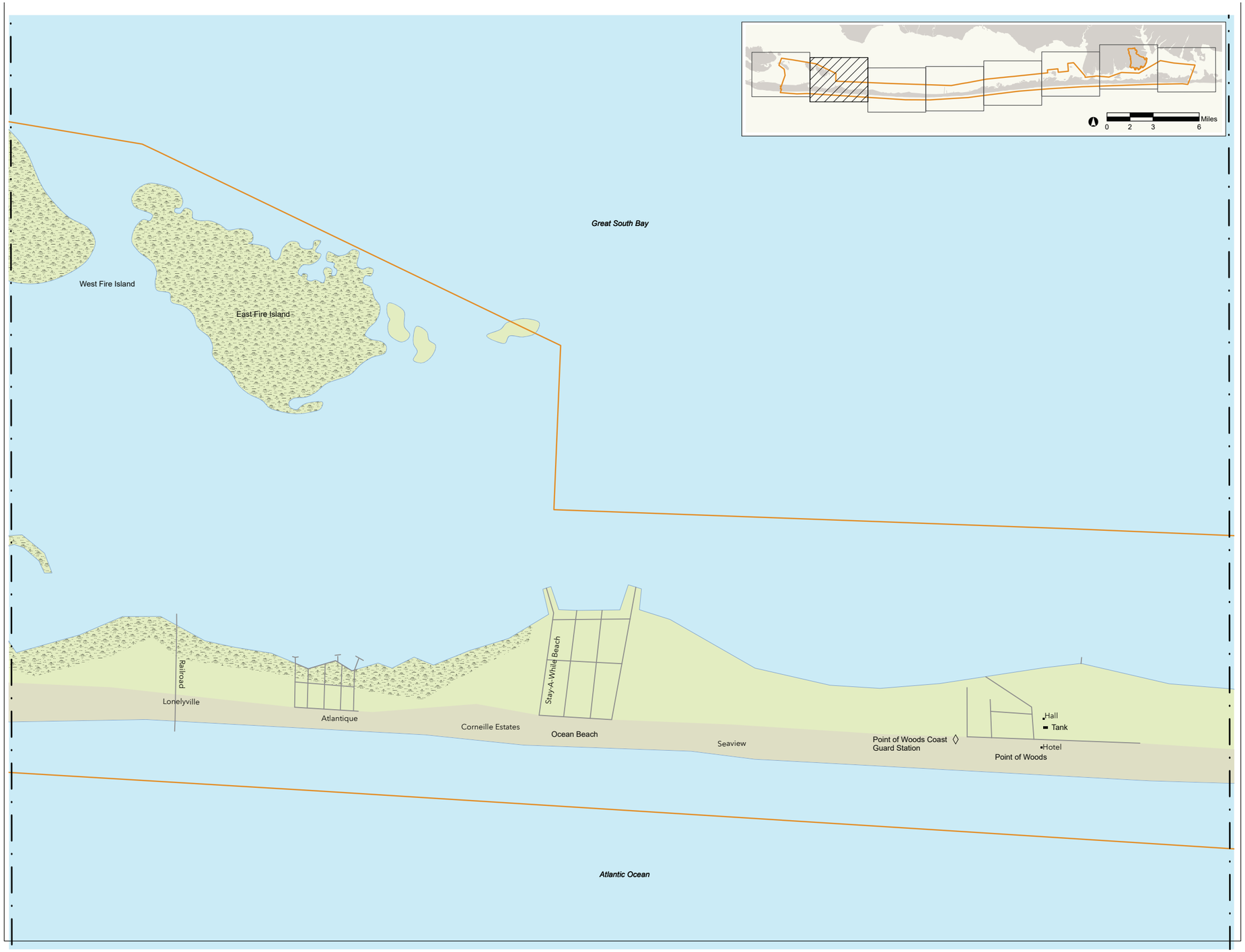
NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
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Drawing 2.1

Figure 1-35. 1915 Period Plan Map #1.



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1915 Period Plan

National Park Service

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3. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Montauk Point to Long Island Sound, 1896
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Hyde Atlas, Saltaire; Gilgo Beach; Atlantique; Stay - A - While Beach (Plate 27), 1915
6. Hyde Atlas, Point O' Woods; Part of Patchogue (Plate 31), 1915
7. Hyde Atlas, Oak Island Beach; Muncie Island; Fire Island Estates (Lonelyville) (Plate 39), 1915
8. Hyde Atlas, Ocean Beach; Ocean Bay Park; The Breakers (Plate 40), 1915

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Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Dirt Roads or Paths
- Docks
- Coast Guard Station
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- Tank

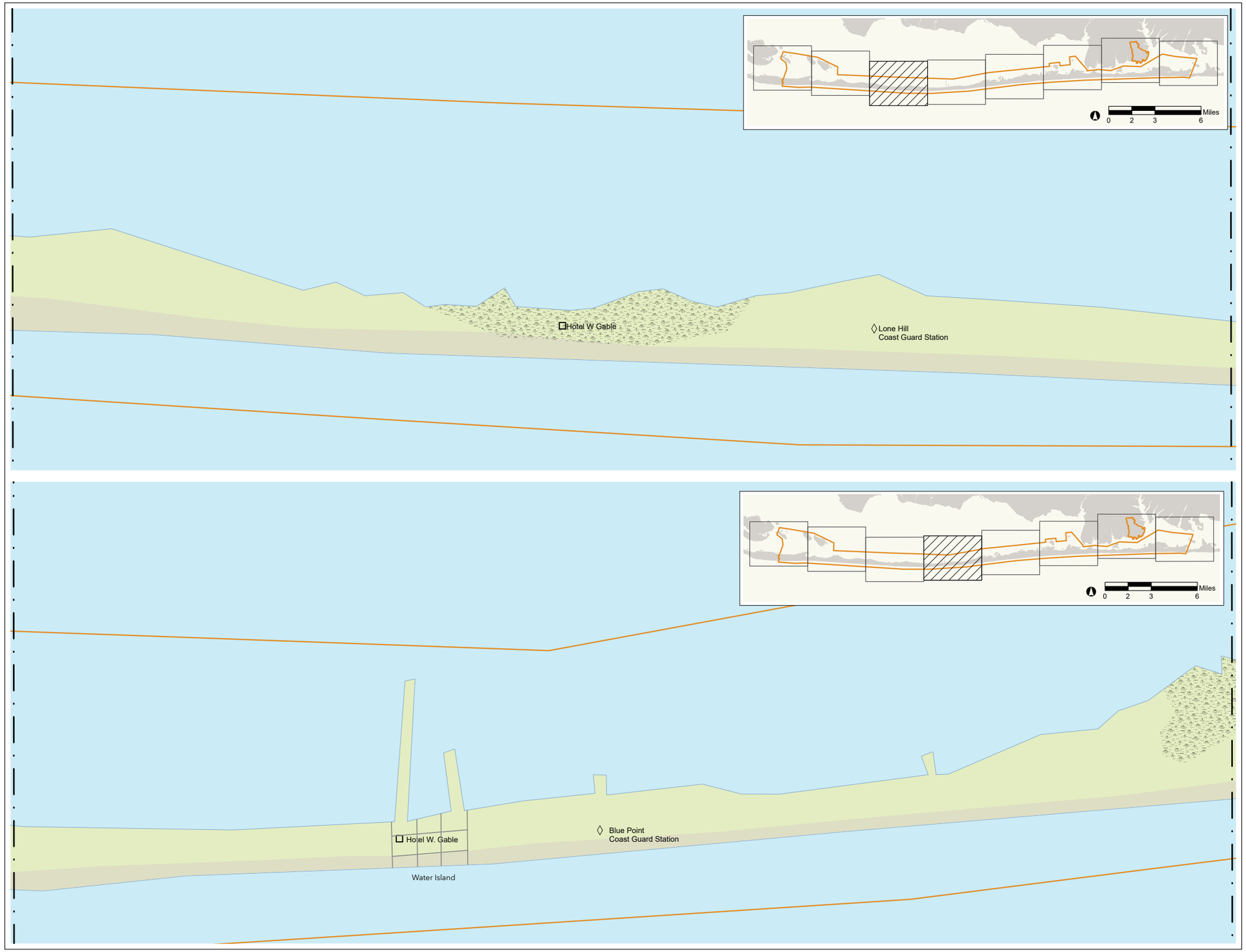
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2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
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Drawing 2.2

Figure 1-36. 1915 Period Plan Map #2.



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1915 Period Plan

National Park Service
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SOURCES

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2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Fire Island Beach to Rockaway Beach, 1895
3. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Montauk Point to Long Island Sound, 1896
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. i. Hyde Atlas, Part of Fire Island Beach (Plate 15), 1915

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Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Dirt Roads or Paths
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Compass Station
- Tank

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
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Drawing 2.4

Figure 1-37. 1915 Period Plan Maps #3 (top) and #4 (bottom).

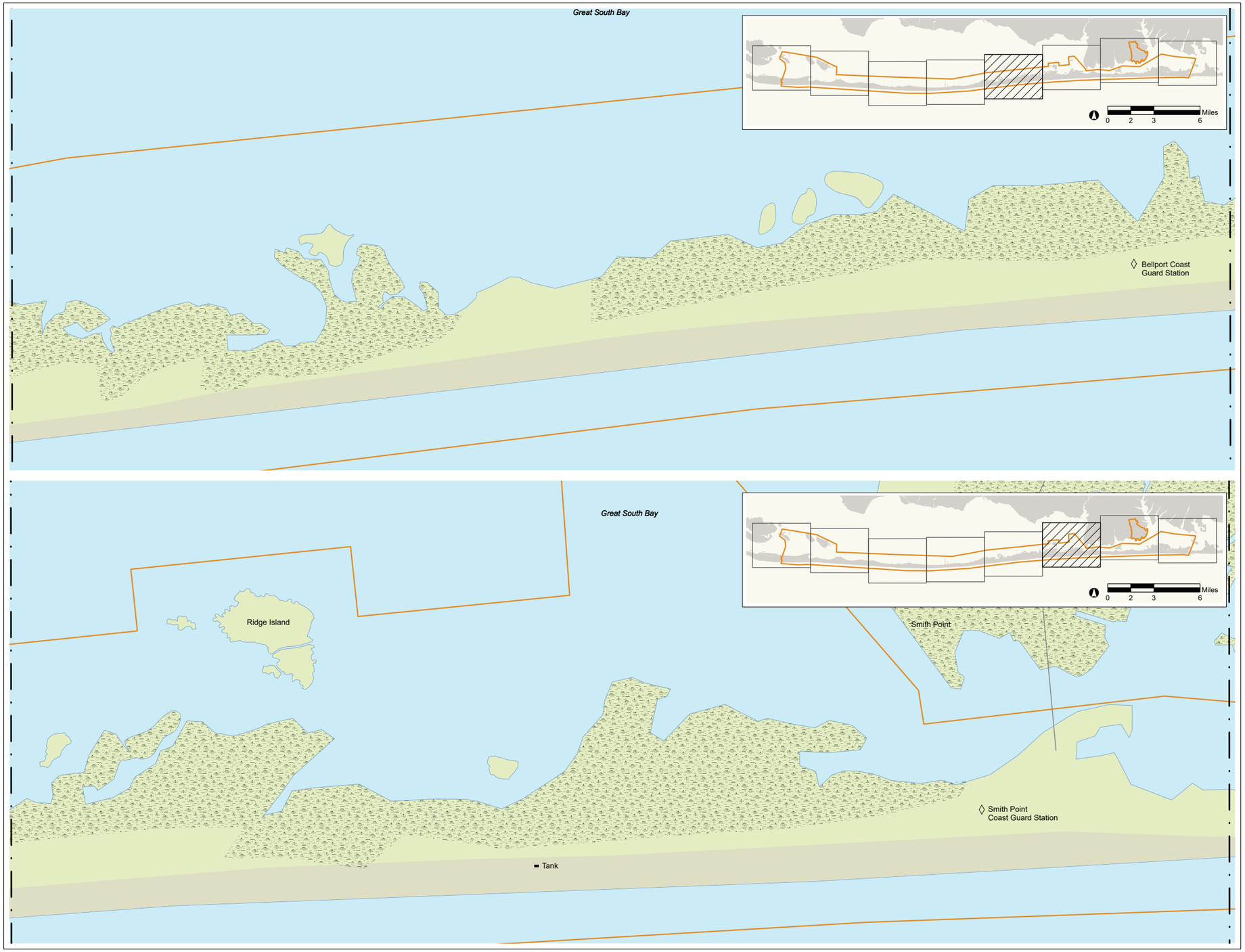


Figure 1-38. 1915 Period Plan Maps #5 (top) and #6 (bottom).

Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1915 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

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3. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Montauk Point to Long Island Sound, 1896
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

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LEGEND

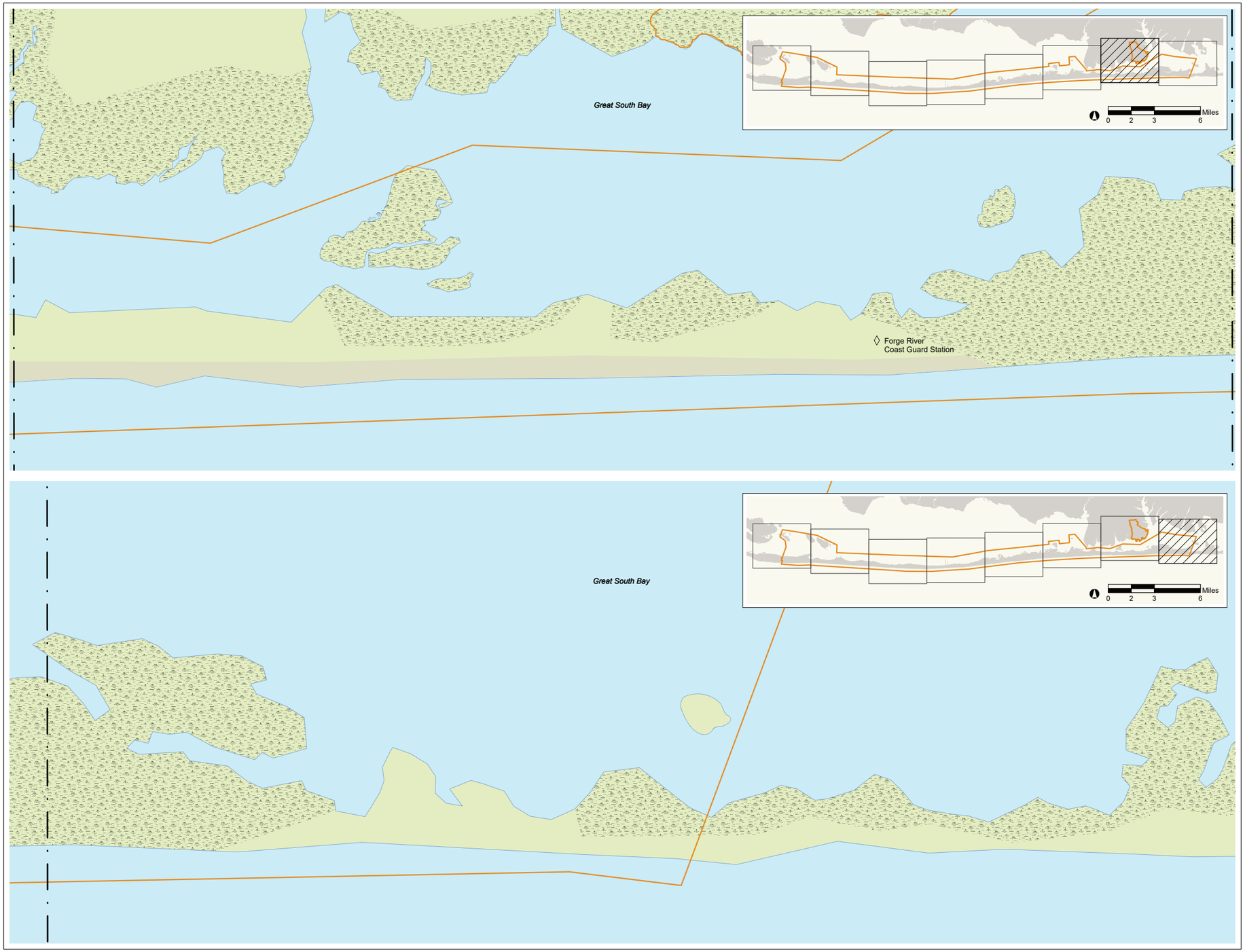
- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Dirt Roads or Paths
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Compass Station
- Tank

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 2.6



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1915 Period Plan

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

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2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Fire Island Beach to Rockaway Beach, 1895
3. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Montauk Point to Long Island Sound, 1896
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Dirt Roads or Paths
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Compass Station
- Tank

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
0 375 750 1,500

Drawing 2.8

Figure 1-39. 1915 Period Plan Maps #7 (top) and #8 (bottom).

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ENDNOTES

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Chapter 2: 1916–1940

Fire Island is 'mostly roadless, trackless, isolated, and alluring,' existing 'as if in an unworldly trance,' a place whose beach offered 'infinite solace for body and soul,' displaying 'not only the usual charms of an unspoiled seashore' but also an assemblage of plants and animals 'so rare in our northern latitudes that they are in the nature of wonders.'

Robert Cushman Murphy – curator emeritus of the American Museum of Natural History, 1933[1]

This chapter covers the time period from just before World War I, through the Great Depression and the 1938 hurricane, to the pre-World War II period. As the quote from Murphy shows, at the beginning of this period Fire Island was still a somewhat wild and "unspoiled" place.

THE STATE PARK ESTABLISHMENT AS A CATALYST FOR VISITATION AND DEVELOPMENT

At the start of this time period, shipping safety and communication infrastructure were two of the key functions and components on the western end of Fire Island. However, this area was also becoming popular with vacationers from Long Island and other parts of New York (Figure 2-1). The western end of Fire Island, home



Figure 2-1. Visitors waiting on the pier for the ferry, circa 1930. Note the use of the wagons to transport luggage and goods (worthpoint.com).

to both the state park and the Surf Hotel, was sprinkled with docks, bathhouses, food booths, and ocean bathing pavilions for swimming and water sports (Figures 2-2 and 2-3). As a result, the area attracted tourists who came to Fire Island to seek refuge from the chaos of the city and to enjoy island recreation. The ocean environment was also highly sought after for respite from the polluted city, and for relief from health issues like hay fever.

Fire Island State Park and its amenities was one of the main attractions of the island, contributing to the successful marketing of the island. Saltaire, one of the communities closest to the state park, felt the effects of this increased tourism during the 1910s and the community grew substantially up to 1917, when the United States entered the First World War (1917—1919). Growth in the United States at this time either dropped or ceased in areas all together and Fire Island was no exception. Entry into World War I put financial pressure on its citizens, and in some cases, residents of Fire Island wished to control their own taxes and development over that of the town governments. To best control the community's development, zoning, and planning and have more financial autonomy the residents voted to incorporate in October 1917 (Figure 2-4).

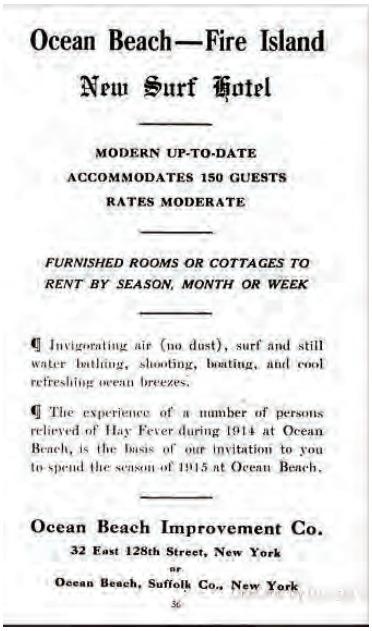
Fire Island saw firsthand the effects of the First World War. German U-boats traveled along the coast and were spotted at times from Fire Island. Numerous rescues took place by the Coast Guard from Navy ships struck by mines or targeted by U-boats. At one point, a German mine was found floating in the waters along the Fire Island State Park.[2]

The United States' entry into World War I created significant impacts on the economy with increased wage and increased jobs supported by major industrial efforts. Government spending was not funneled to areas that did not have an immediate need. The lack of funding for continued improvements and maintenance to the Fire Island State Park was one such example. Usually, the repairs were paid for by donations and fundraising.[3] Unfortunately, in 1918 a brush fire destroyed large sections of the park, and major repairs were needed.

Figure 2-2. Ocean Beach was home to the expansive New Surf Hotel located directly on the bay front (US Hay Fever Association 1915) (below).

Figure 2-3. This 1920s era postcard shows the swimming dock at Saltaire. The dock included a slide that extended into the Great South Bay. Ocean swimming was not permitted until the mid-1920s (T.A. Lange postcard; worthpoint.com) (bottom right).

Figure 2-4. Saltaire was possibly the smallest incorporated village in New York State when it voted to incorporate in 1917. There were 25 residents and 75 acres within its bounds (*The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*) (bottom left).



Ocean Beach—Fire Island
New Surf Hotel

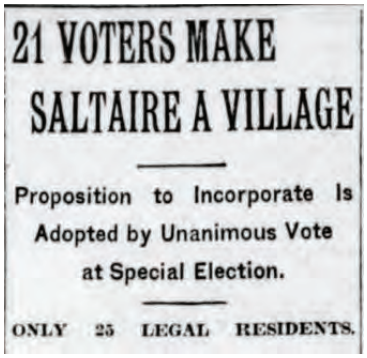
MODERN UP-TO-DATE
ACCOMMODATES 150 GUESTS
RATES MODERATE

FURNISHED ROOMS OR COTTAGES TO RENT BY SEASON, MONTH OR WEEK

¶ Invigorating air (no dust), surf and still water bathing, shooting, boating, and cool refreshing ocean breezes.

¶ The experience of a number of persons relieved of Hay Fever during 1914 at Ocean Beach, is the basis of our invitation to you to spend the season of 1915 at Ocean Beach.

Ocean Beach Improvement Co.
32 East 128th Street, New York
or
Ocean Beach, Suffolk Co., New York



21 VOTERS MAKE SALTAIRE A VILLAGE

Proposition to Incorporate Is Adopted by Unanimous Vote at Special Election.

ONLY 25 LEGAL RESIDENTS.



Swimming Dock Saltaire, Fire Island, N Y.

Because of the post-war economic situation, the commission was unable to pay for most of these repairs.[4] Eventually improvements occurred, but not until New York State changed the purpose of the state commission.

In the early 1920s, Governor Al Smith envisioned a grand scheme of state parks and connecting parkways outside of New York City, to provide recreational outlets for a growing population. By this time, the economy was recovering and there was a real estate boom throughout the country. The real estate boom throughout New York and the development of suburbs in Queens, Nassau, an Suffolk Counties created a dramatic increase in property values outside of the city. New development also created substantial traffic and jammed roadways. Smith's idea was to acquire substantial lands along the south shore of Long Island and on the barrier islands to protect these highly valuable lands from future development, and instead, set them aside for public use. To accomplish his goal, in April 1923, Smith requested that the New York State legislature create the Long Island State Park Commission, to replace the Fire Island State Park Commission.[5] With the commission created in 1924, Robert Moses and two other commissioners were appointed to improve the condition of Fire Island State Park and begin acquiring land to expand the park, and to acquire land for additional proposed parks and parkways on Long Island (Figure 2-5).

In June 1924, Moses' first accomplishment as chair of the State Park Commission was the acquisition of four miles of beach accretion west of the Fire Island lighthouse. This was land that had built up since the lighthouse was first constructed in 1825. The New York State Council of Parks accepted the transfer of



Figure 2-5. Robert Moses, born in 1888, received his PhD in political science from Columbia University and then sought a career in politics. Moses created the Long Island State Park Commission, was appointed Secretary of State for New York, and held numerous other city and state titles, most of them simultaneously. He pioneered the parkway system in New York and was successful in building many new highways, bridges, and parks across the state (Wichary) (right).

600 acres of land from the United States Lighthouse Department.[6] This expansion of Fire Island State Park increased its acreage to 800 acres.[7] This expansion made Fire Island State Park the "largest beach tract on the Atlantic Coast in public ownership, with eight miles of shore front…with immense possibilities for recreation."[8] Funding had increased for the newly expanded state park, buildings and boardwalks were being repaired, playground equipment was being installed, a ferry from Long Island was added, and sanitation facilities were improved. In 1924, equipment (including safety ropes and lifeguard stands) was installed on the ocean side so swimming and bathing activities could safely occur on both sides of the island.[9] Newspapers such as the *New York Times* reported these improvements to potential recreation seekers in New York City and beyond.

During the early 1920s, Suffolk County had little to offer with regards to recreational opportunities for the public. These were located mostly in town and village parks and beaches, and in the less accessible town lands off the south shore of Long Island.[10] An improved Fire Island State Park was important as a place of recreation and relaxation for residents in the county and for people from the metropolitan areas who were able to travel. Improving Fire Island State Park was the spark for New York State to identify additional areas in the state for public parks. In addition, the state coupled that intent with plans to improve and increase the transportation structure to these parks, creating a system of parkways from New York City and other areas of Long Island.

The development of parkways in New York State became a popular enterprise in regional planning beginning in the early 1900s and continuing through the first half of the 20th century. Many of these roads were advocated by the powerful Robert Moses, when he was at the helm of the Long Island State Park Commission. The real estate boom and the development of suburbs during the early 1920s on Long Island were not supported with sufficient public improvements, including transportation infrastructure and basic public services such as sewerage, water, fire, police, and zoning. By 1926, Robert Moses felt strongly that New York State, local municipalities, and local landowners and supporters had to quickly create a system of scenic parkways to ease traffic outside of New York City. He called his plan the "greatest park and parkway system in the world."[11] Moses argued that this parkway system would increase the values of adjoining property, and that the widening of highways and the establishment of new through routes was of critical importance (Figure 2-6). He felt that if acquisition of the necessary lands was delayed, that would cause great inconvenience and expense in the end because of rising land costs.[12] To Robert Moses, it was not a matter of if these roads would be built, it was a matter of when.

Meanwhile, the New York State Park Commission invited charitable organizations to provide opportunities to the public to use its first state park, Fire Island State Park. The commission offered beach recreational opportunities and camping

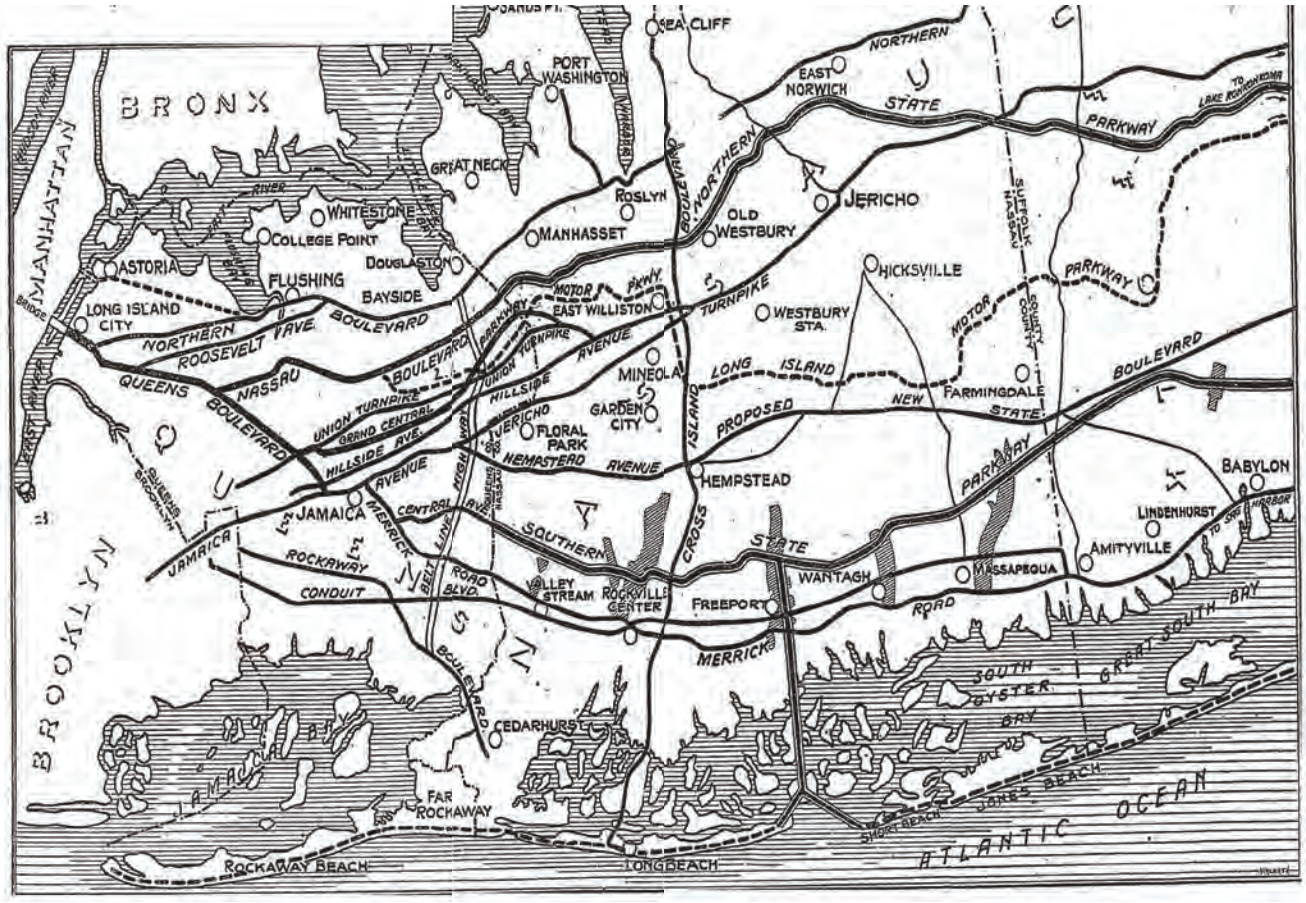


Figure 2-6. Parkways map from 1926 by Robert Moses shows the proposed Northern and Southern parkways and a causeway along Rockaway Beach, Long Beach, and Jones Beach (Moses).

Figure 2-7. Camp Cheerful included nine cabins, a recreation hall, an administration building, a storehouse, an infirmary, a dining hall, helpers' quarters, a water tower, flagstaff, and outside restrooms (The Rotarian 1932) (below).

Figure 2-8. Camp Cheerful, established by the Rotary Club of New York in 1926, used the east side of Fire Island State Park as a camp facility for handicapped boys (The Rotarian 1932) (bottom).

facilities, and encouraged groups such as the Boy Scouts and church groups to take advantage of improvements to the newly expanded park.[13] In 1926, the Rotary Club of New York worked with Moses to provide a camp for children on the land east of the lighthouse, which at that time was mostly vacant.[14] Camp Cheerful, as it became known, was a charitable camp established for handicapped boys to come and enjoy the beach front park (Figures 2-7 and 2-8).[15] The Rotary Club of New York built "nine cabins, an administration building, a storehouse, an infirmary, a mess hall, helpers' quarters, a water delivery system, outside restrooms, and related sanitary facilities and equipment."[16] The Long Island State Park Commission's contribution were the boardwalks and public access facilities to this part of the park.





A portion of the parkway plan Robert Moses proposed for the south shore of Long Island included a branch off the proposed Southern Parkway, which started at the border of Queens and Nassau Counties just north of Valley Stream, and ran east. This proposed north-south branch included a bridge that would lead to Jones Beach State Park. A causeway along Jones Beach Island would be built to a point directly across from Fire Island State Park. Moses' early plan required one to take a ferry to reach Fire Island State Park.[17] Moses' parkway plan along the shorefront was introduced to the public in 1926.[18] Moses himself penned an article for the *New York Times* describing the benefits of his plan with a sense of urgency. He argued with the locals' hesitation with these new improvements by saying that they "do not realize that they are fighting against a resistless avalanche…So long as Manhattanites insist on traveling in the direction of Montauk, it is much better to give them a fine shore road under conditions ideally suited to their needs."[19] By 1928, Moses had proposed that the causeway from Jones Beach Island would cross Fire Island inlet and travel the length of Fire Island to Smith Point (Figure 2-9).

In 1928, within four years of the establishment of the Long Island State Park Commission, state park acreage went from 200 acres to nearly 10,000 acres.[20] That first 200 acres was the Fire Island State Park. The commission had developed a chain of 15 state parks that would be connected by the Southern Parkway, the Northern Parkway, and other smaller parkway connections.[21] Small portions of these parkways were completed by this time, e.g., the Southern Parkway was only 25 percent complete in August 1928.[22]

Although only small portions of the parkways had been built by this time, there had been significant planning and development focused on Fire Island for a real estate boom to occur there. Real estate developers were buying up land, creating lots, and selling them at auction using the ease of access by the proposed parkways and huge increase of land values as their driving points (Figure 2-10).

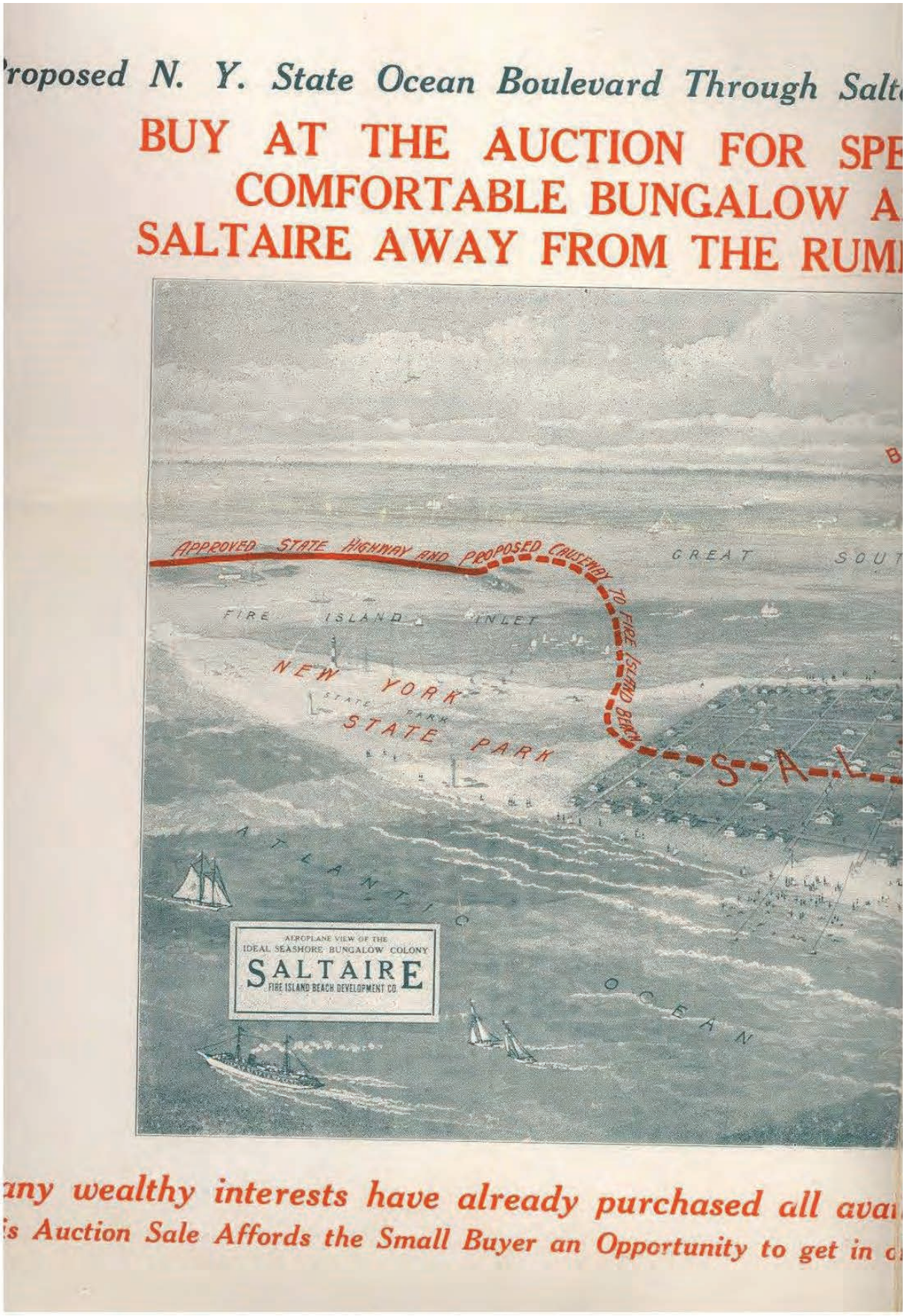
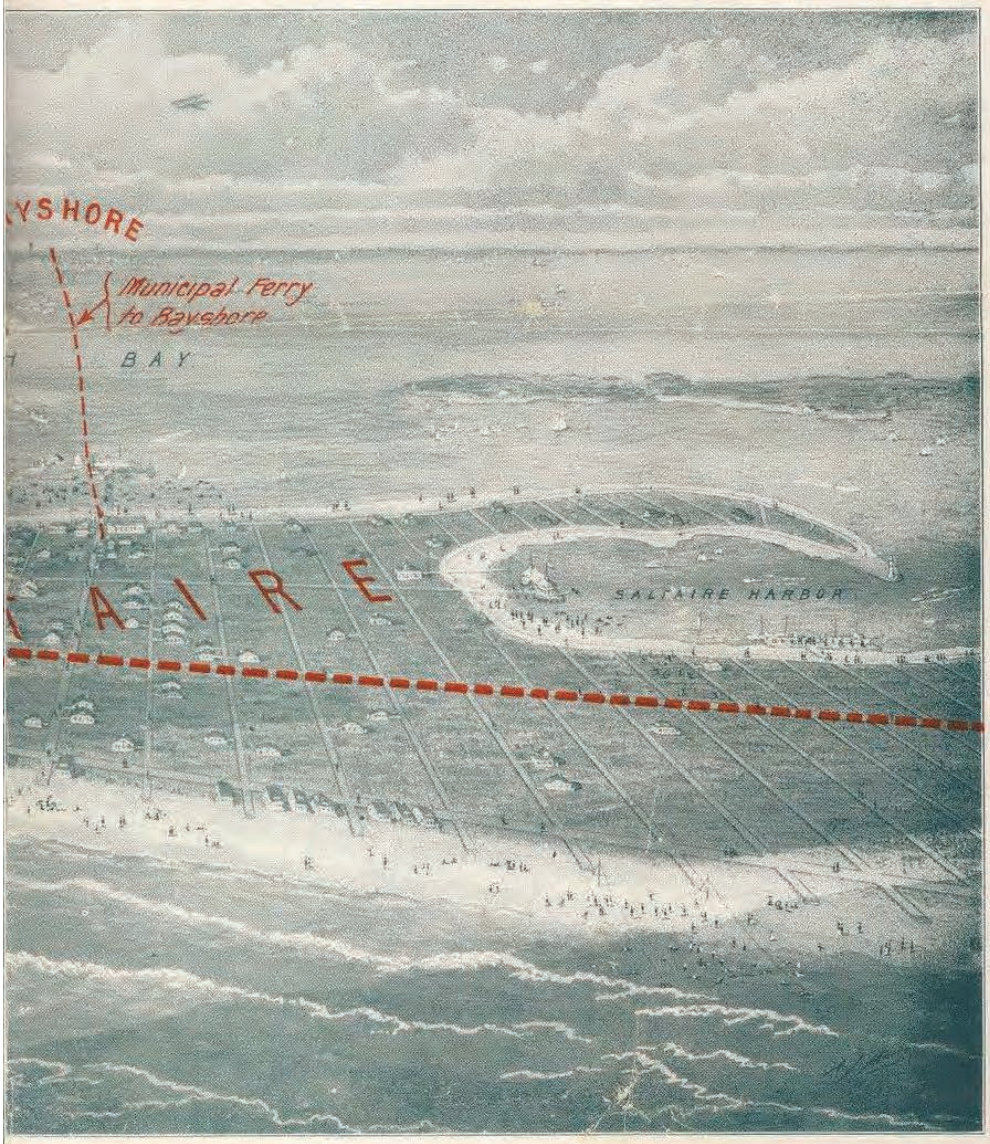


Figure 2-9. 1928 advertisement for Saltaire real estate depicting the proposed state causeway running through the middle of the Saltaire community (FIIS Archives, Jim Rosenthall Collection).

ire should Make These Lots an Attractive Investment

CULATION OR BUILD YOUR OWN
ND SPEND YOUR SUMMERS AT
LE AND GRUMBLE OF CITY NOISE



lable large parcels for investment on Fire Island Beach.
n the Ground Floor in an Established Community on Very Easy Terms



Proposed N. Y. State Ocean Boulevard THROUGH SALTAIRE
Will Cause a Big Increase in Land Values in This Section

JERE JOHNSON JR. CO., Real Estate Auctioneers
FRED B. SNOW, Auctioneer
WILL SELL AT

Public Auction

Business Established 1866

By Order of FIRE ISLAND BEACH DEVELOPMENT CO.

Wednesday, July 4th, 1928

at 2 o'clock P. M. on the Premises, Rain or Shine Under Large Tent

293 CHOICE LOTS

INCLUDING 15 BUSINESS LOTS
Lying Between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great South Bay

FIRE ISLAND BEACH, L. I.

SALTAIRE

(Opposite Bay Shore)

A SCENE AT SALTAIRE OVERLOOKING GREAT SOUTH BAY

SALTAIRE is an Incorporated Village—an established colony of refined families where you may buy and build your summer bungalow at moderate cost. Modern improvement, best of boating, fishing, surf and still water bathing. Ideal for children and grown-ups. Lots may be paid for in MONTHLY INSTALMENTS or discount for all cash.

Train will leave Pennsylvania Station, New York and Flatbush Avenue Station, Brooklyn at 10:39 o'clock A. M. on day of sale, connecting with boat leaving Bay Shore at 12:00 noon for Saltaire.

Those attending Auction Sale from Bay Shore, Babylon and other points on Long Island, take ferry boat "SALTAIRE" AT FOOT OF MAPLE AVENUE BAY SHORE, AT 12 O'CLOCK NOON.

Autos may be parked near the boat landing at Bay Shore until the return trip from Saltaire after the sale.

Free Railroad and Boat Tickets will be furnished on application. Luncheon will be served on arrival at Saltaire.

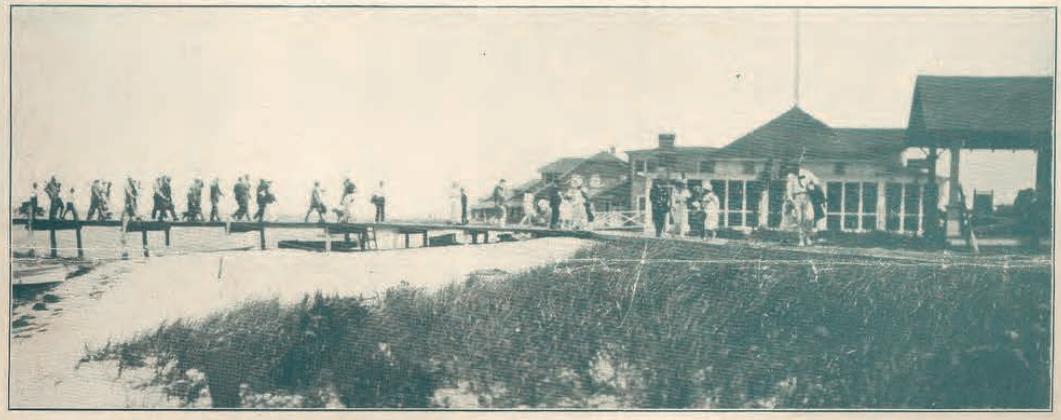
TERMS OF SALE: 10% of the purchase price and the Auctioneers' fee to be paid at time of sale, 10% additional within 15 days and the balance in 24 equal monthly payments. Or a discount of 5% will be allowed for all cash.

ADDITIONAL PARTICULARS FROM

JERE. JOHNSON JR. CO., Auctioneers, 193 Montague St., B'klyn, Phone: Triangle 1308

(2368)

Figure 2-10. Real estate companies marketed to potential buyers interested in owning property on the beach, using the proposed ocean causeway as a selling point. Buyers were told the road would increase land values and make owning a house and lot on Fire Island a great investment (FIIS Archives, Jim Rosenthal Collection).



Casino and Boat Landing on the Bay, Saltaire

What Saltaire Boasts Of!

It is an Incorporated Village with a Summer population of about 1200 owning its water works system furnishing the purest Artesian Well Water for drinking and fire protection; its Gas Plant; its Municipal Ferry to Bay Shore, connecting with express trains to and from the city.

Its many comfortable Cottages and Bungalows.

Its active Yacht Club, with Tennis Courts, etc.

Its Casino—famous for its shore dinners.

Its Excellent Stores which supply groceries, meats, fruits, vegetables, milk, ice, &c.

Its Government Post Office and Western Union Telegraph Office.

Its Unexcelled Boating, Bathing and Fishing.

Its never-failing Cool Summer Nights.

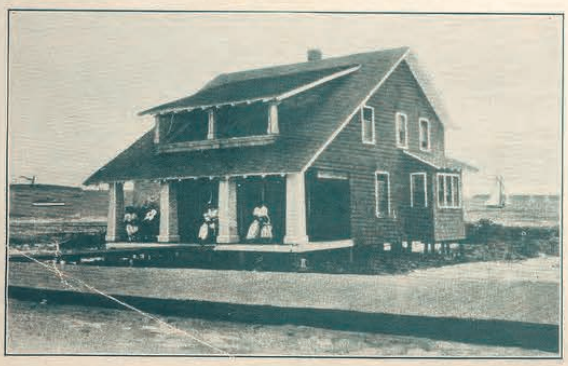
Its High Class Residents, with a truly co-operative spirit and an unusual civic pride.

Its good, protective, but reasonable Restrictions.

It is the Largest Development on Fire Island Beach, and the most accessible to New York City.

In a word—Its irresistible appeal to all city folks who want to leave the noise, heat and dust of the city for rest, recreation and pleasure.

Buy at This Sale for the Ideal Summer Home or a Profitable Investment



One of the Attractive Bungalows at Saltaire

Don't Forget the Date of this Auction Sale

WED., JULY 4th, 1928

at 2 P. M. Under the Big Tent on the Premises, Rain or Shine

JERE. JOHNSON JR. CO.
Auctioneers

Jones Beach State Park opened in August 1929 along with Ocean Parkway, which ran along 15 miles of Jones Beach Island (Figure 2-11). In 1933, Meadowbrook Parkway provided a route between the Southern Parkway and Ocean Parkway. By 1934, the State Parks Commission had developed 13 parkways but there still was no access to Fire Island State Park by road.[23]

Moses wanted Fire Island to be a place accessible to all; he envisioned grand bridges on both ends of the island, with a parkway running through the middle of it connecting the two. He felt his proposed road would be a "democratic advantage, opening up Long Island's beaches to ordinary folks" with "the road itself offering beautiful views towards the ocean and the bay."[24] His plan received initial approval in 1931; however, it went nowhere for a lack of funds.

Figure 2-11. Opening day for Jones Beach State Park, August 29, 1929. The photograph shows Ocean Parkway, with the water tower in the background (New York State Parks and Archives).



DEVASTATION OF 1938

No action occurred on Moses' plan for an island-wide parkway on Fire Island during the 1930s due to a lack of funds and the economic effects on the Great Depression. The financial crises in the United States due to the collapse of the stock market in October 1929 was on the way to recovery until the fall of 1931. This was the start of a banking crisis throughout the nation with the fall of New York's Bank of the United States in November 1931. President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933 and immediately pushed through the Emergency Banking Act of 1933. He also began the Civilian Conservation Corps and later the Works Progress Administration to provide jobs to millions of Americans. According to historian Nick Taylor, "politics played a role in the W.P.A." and there is speculation that supporters of Roosevelt received substantial amounts of funding for their proposed projects. New York City alone received one out of every seven dollars spent by the Works Progress Administration. Moses was able to complete some of his parkway projects through this federal funding source, however, it was not all comprehensive. Moses and Roosevelt had an an antagonistic relationship that was one of disagreement and dislike, which had developed during the latter's role as governor of New York.[25] Funding for the Fire Island parkway was not provided, either because it was not submitted as a proposed project by Moses, or for either political or logistical reasons. In fact, no projects were completed on Fire Island by the Works Progress Administration. Projects closer to the city certainly benefited more workers and were logistically easier to carry out than one on an island.

On September 21, 1938, one of the most powerful hurricanes in recorded history swept over Long Island and New England and caused a great deal of destruction. The New England Hurricane, also referred to as the Long Island Express, sustained winds ranging between 121 and 186 miles per hour on land and the storm surge measured 17 feet above normal high tide. The storm caused the deaths of approximately 700 people, left approximately 63,000 people homeless, and completely destroyed about 8,900 houses.[26] Water works, gas, power, telephone, and telegraph lines were destroyed, and many of the sewers and cesspools were ruined. The bridges were damaged and ten new inlets were formed.[27] The storm killed 50 people on Long Island and destroyed hundreds of buildings on Fire Island (Figure 2-12). Dunes were leveled and vegetation was washed out (Figure 2-13). Of the 1,219 houses on Fire Island, 265 were destroyed and 32 damaged.[28]

Houses were flattened, buildings were swept into the ocean, and many structures were moved across ground. One person's account of the storm: "'Where are we?' someone asked. We were looking at the Great South Bay. The house in which we had found shelter was no longer near the ocean. It had sailed, with us in it, all the way across the island and become impaled on a telephone pole that kept us from being tossed into the frenzied waters of the bay."[29]

The Kismet schoolhouse that had just opened earlier that year was swept away. Ferry boats and docks were destroyed. Much of Saltaire was destroyed because development had bulldozed its protective foredune. The residents and developers had leveled the dunes, eliminating natural protections from storm surges. Four people died in that village and 90 homes were destroyed.[30] Cherry Grove was nearly wiped out, for the same reason, leaving only eight buildings after the storm. Fire Island State Park was also destroyed. Extreme destruction occurred across the entire island but was much more pronounced where the dunes were no longer standing to serve as a natural barrier (Figures 2-14 – 2-16).

Following the storm, a resident painted a verbal picture of the island, stating: "every bush, tree and blade of grass is dead. Gives the place . . . a look of utter desolation. Clear white sand where houses were . . . Pictures may show more houses standing but they are not good . . . Place is as flat as a pancake for ¾ of the way from the ocean to the bay. The whole damn place is BEACH,"[31] (Figure 2-17). The *New York World Telegram* reported that "the next zone inland, also cleared of cottages and deep scars gouged in the earth, still retains a foliage of clinging bayberry and scrub pine. And at intervals may be found bathtubs, or a door or part of a roof."[32]





Figure 2-12. More than 8,900 houses were destroyed across Long Island and southern New England by the 1938 hurricane. On Fire Island, approximately 265 buildings were demolished or swept away. This image of Saltaire shows the immense level of destruction (NOAA 2022b) (top right).

Figure 2-13. Aerial image of Saltaire immediately following the 1938 hurricane shows houses flattened, and others moved across the landscape. The top of the photograph shows the Atlantic Ocean and beach, with nearly all of the houses in that area swept away (NOAA 2022a) (bottom right).



Figures 2-14, 2-15, 2-16. Photographs immediately following the 1938 hurricane show Fire Island houses moved off their foundations with many swept out to the ocean (Pathcogue-Medford Library).







Figure 2-17. This 1939 aerial of Ocean Beach, Seaview, Ocean Bay Park was taken after the hurricane. Note the large amount of sand forced inland, shown on the bottom of the photograph. (USACE "Long Island Historic Aerial Photos").

Residents of the towns and villages, along with employees from the Works Progress Administration, rebuilt the dunes and systematically planted pine trees.[33] Within 48 hours of the storm, the village of Saltaire had 150 Works Progress Administration workers on site salvaging wood and removing debris.[34] With aid from the federal government, sand was pumped in from the bay to reconstruct the dunes, in some places as much as three feet higher than before.[35] To preserve these new dunes, the communities built walks over them, rather than through them.

Similar to the residential communities, the Fire Island State Park suffered great damage from the hurricane, including Camp Cheerful (Figure 2-18). After the hurricane, the original eastern section of Fire Island State Park remained mostly undeveloped, and only the western section was rebuilt. New facilities at the park included amenities such as a boat basin, new bathhouse, food stands, playgrounds, and walkways, which were open to the public by the summer of 1940.[36] [Note: these improvements were located three miles west of the lighthouse and are not within this study area.]

Figure 2-18. Building in Fire Island State Park destroyed by the 1938 hurricane (FIIS Archives).



ROBERT MOSES' PLAN TO SAVE THE DUNES FROM FURTHER DAMAGE

As a leader in the New York State government, Robert Moses was instrumental in the development of parks on the barrier beaches. Following the 1938 hurricane he reintroduced his ocean parkway concept. He was a powerful, politically connected urban planner who was responsible for the development of parkways, bridges, parks, playgrounds, and thousands of housing units in the New York Metropolitan area by this time.[37]

After the 1938 hurricane, Moses expressed doubts that the seashore could survive additional storms and further warned that his highway plan should not be delayed. He felt that it was essential to the future of the island. His plan, introduced to the Long Island State Park Commission, would cost $15.5 million and be constructed along 42 miles, from Fire Island Inlet to Southampton (Figure 2-19).[38] His plan was rejected by the Suffolk County Board of Supervisors in a vote of seven to three.[39] Earle Andrews, former chief aide to Robert Moses on the Long Island State Park Commission, then presented the commissioners with a modified plan that reduced the cost to $9.25 million. Moses' plan with Andrews' cost modifications was presented in the *Report on Plan to Restore and Protect Fire Island, Suffolk County – Long Island*.[40] The difference between the original plan and the modified version was the removal of the bridge between Jones Beach and Fire Island, and a change to the causeway so that it ended at Hampton Bays instead of at Southampton. All other details remained the same between the two schemes (Figures 2-20 and 2-21).

Moses used the survival and success of the Jones Beach Ocean Parkway as his example of success in protecting a vulnerable oceanfront against powerful storms. This parkway was built in 1929 on a vast amount of hydraulic fill and not only survived the storm but suffered little damage. He wrote that the parkway "demonstrated beyond reasonable question that this type of bold, comprehensive, large scale planning with the use of natural material constitutes the only successful bulwark against storm and erosion."[41] Moses' opponents argued that the island would lose its charm, founded in its isolation and natural beauty, if the parkway were built through it. He argued that Fire Island had already been destroyed and was now unsafe following the hurricane. He felt that an immense hydraulic fill was the only way to stop the erosion. Moses concluded that this massive expenditure would require a recreational park at the proposed Smith Point Bridge to anchor the hydraulic fill on that end of the road.

Figure 2-19. At a meeting of 200 people, Moses introduced his $15.5 million plan to build a causeway on Fire Island. He declared that the damage from the hurricane "was shocking and it would be a great pity if no lessons were learned from it" (*NYT*, 1938).

MOSES OFFERS PLAN TO SAVE FIRE ISLAND

Would Dredge Bay Channel to Fill Ocean Beach Torn by the Hurricane

COST PUT AT $15,500,000

43-Mile Parkway, 3 State Parks and 4 Toll Bridges Included in Project

In detail, the modified Moses plan consisted of 35,000,000 cubic yards of sand pumped onto Fire Island to create a continuous embankment between the Fire Island Coast Guard Station and Shinnecock Inlet, approximately 20 miles east of Smith Point. This embankment would have been 14.5 feet in height and leveled on top to create an 80-foot-wide roadway (Figure 2-22). The sand to form this road structure would be dredged from the Great South Bay creating a new boat channel that would be 200 feet wide and at a minimum 15 feet deep. The two-lane road would be covered with eight-inches of concrete and would also feature nine-foot-wide turf shoulders. Approximately 40 underpasses, and a bridge at Smith's Point, were included in the proposal.[42]

At the end of 1938, after the Suffolk County Board of Supervisors rejected it, Moses' original plan for Fire Island faded into the background. The Board of Supervisors instead enacted a plan, completed over the course of the following year, which consisted of closing off inlets that had been created by the storm; constructing a barrier of engineered dunes; and constructing hundreds of feet of sand fencing. However, shortly after these erosion-protection measures were completed, a storm in November 1939 destroyed most of the new dunes, numerous overwashes were created, and nearly 2,000 feet of fencing was swept away.[43] Fire Island was again left with little to no protective infrastructure in 1940. Because of this second storm, there was a renewed interest in Moses' plan for an ocean parkway and more discussions for potential solutions for erosion and storm protection.

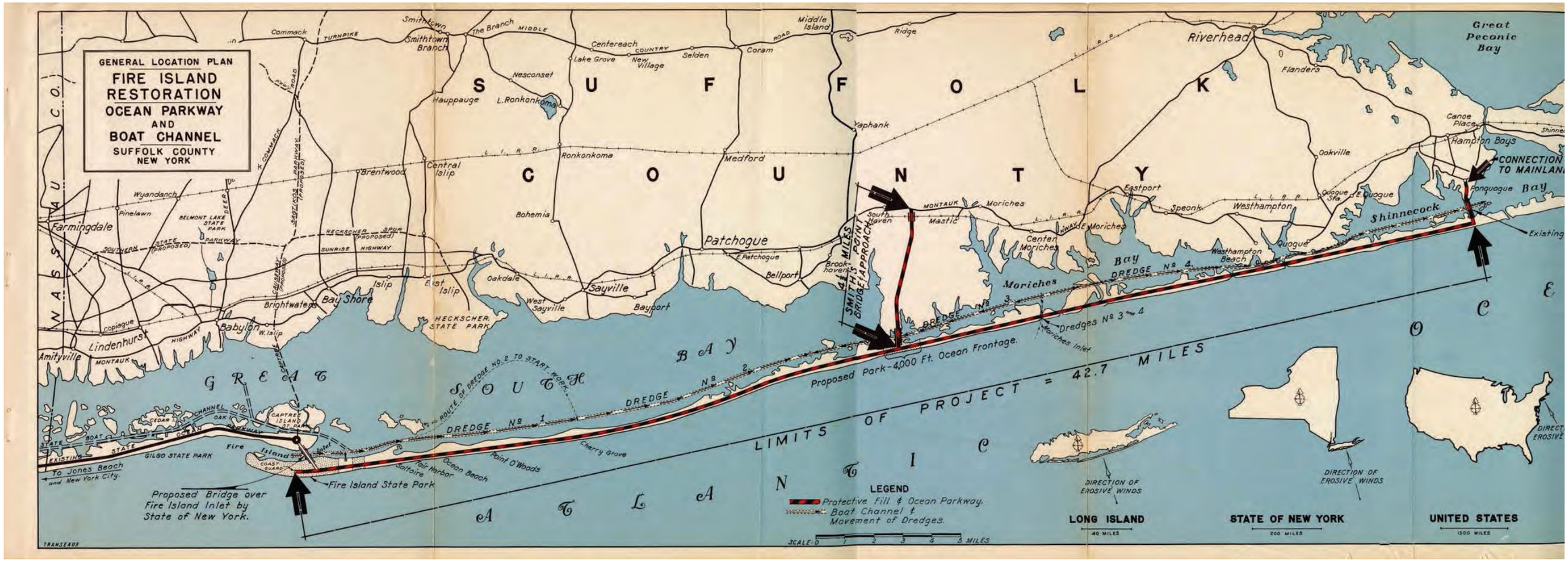
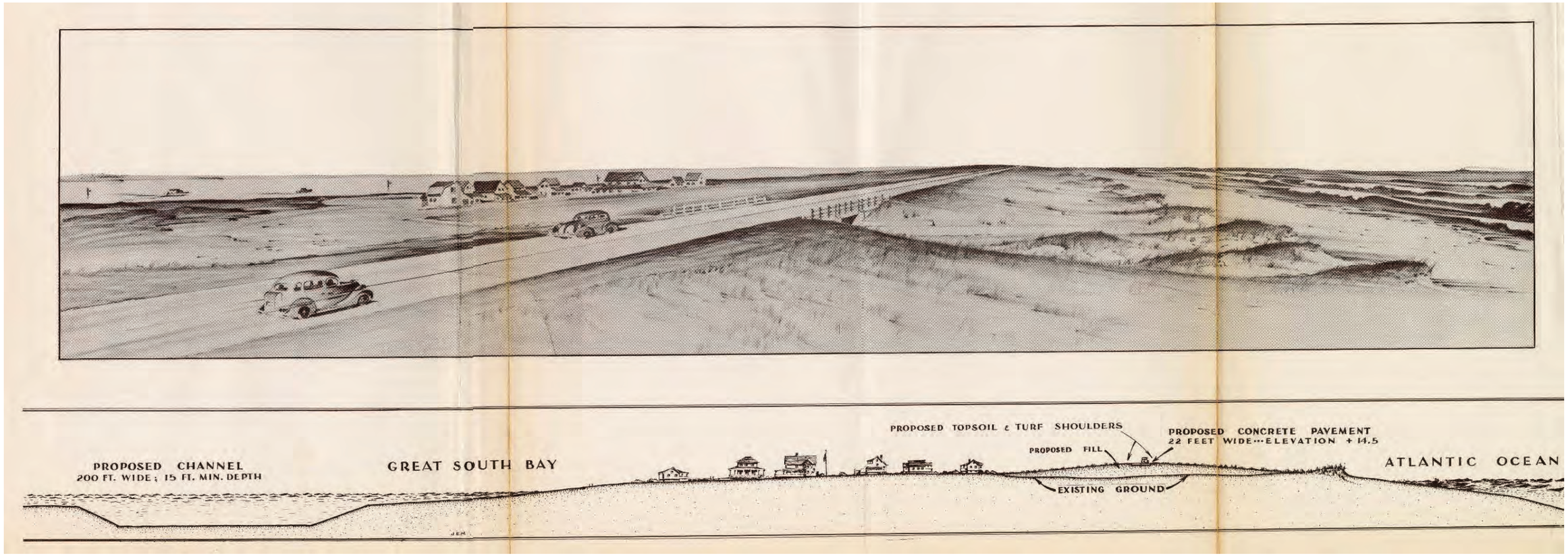


Figure 2-20. Robert Moses' ocean causeway plan of 1938. This plan depicts the proposed roadway on Fire Island and the two proposed bridges, one over Fire Island inlet and the other at Smith Point. The plan also illustrates a proposed park with 4,000 feet of ocean frontage on Fire Island at Smith Point (FIIS Archives).

Figure 2-21. The parkways and boulevards through New York City and Long Island all led to the proposed Fire Island ocean causeway (Andrews 1938) (right).



Figure 2-22. A 1938 schematic drawing of the proposed ocean causeway showing houses on the bay side of the road and the ocean on the right. The proposed road was to be 22 feet wide with an elevation of 14.5 feet (FIIS Archives) (below).



DEMOGRAPHICS OF FIRE ISLAND: 1940 CENSUS

Following the Great Depression, and prior to the United States' entry into World War II, the 1940 census shows a recovering country. This census indicates that the population of the country rose 7.2 percent from the previous decade.[44] In contrast to this national trend, between 1930 and 1940, there was a significant decrease in population on Fire Island. A total of 162 people lived in residential communities on Fire Island in 1940. This number consists of 81 people in the village of Ocean Beach, 22 in the village of Saltaire, 32 in the area that included Seaview, Robbins Rest, Lonelyville, and Fair Harbor, 20 in Ocean Bay Beach, and seven at the Fire Island Lighthouse. In addition to those people residing in the communities, 67 residents were counted at the three Coast Guard Stations, Fire Island, Bellport, and Forge River.[45]

Immediately after the 1938 hurricane there were just over 700 houses recorded on Fire Island. Between the 1938 and 1940 there was significant construction; however, it is unclear exactly how many houses were built during this time. The 1940 census recorded families and individuals in seven communities, which accounted for 62 houses occupied at the time of the census. Ocean Beach had the highest number of households, with a total of 36 individuals. Ocean Bay Beach had seven households, whereas Seaview, Robbins Rest, Lonelyville, and Fair Harbor combined to have 14 households, and Saltaire recorded five households. In addition, two families occupied the property at the Fire Island Lighthouse at the time of the census.[46]

Of the 229 people residing on Fire Island full time (162 of those residing in established communities), all were white. In addition, 72 percent of the population was male, leaving less than one-third of the population as female. Within the communities there were 65 females and 97 males. The people counted at the Coast Guard Stations were entirely male, 67 in total.[47]

Ages ranged from very young children to a few elderly residents in their 70s. The majority of the population within the residential communities were in their 30s. The populations residing at the Coast Guard Stations ranged in age from 18 to 65, although people aged above 45 were only found at the Fire Island Lighthouse Coast Guard Station. This station had an average age of 39, whereas the other two stations averaged ages in the 20s.[48]

In 1940, average yearly incomes ranged from approximately $800 to $1000, and the majority of the employed people worked as laborers. Most of these people were carpenters supplemented by plumbers, electricians, and painters. Other laborers included a truck driver, a chef, a machinist, and several mechanics. Several people worked in fields outside of the labor category. These people included a doctor, a hotel manager, clerks, a grocer, a bartender, and several real estate brokers.[49]

General wealth can also be analyzed by home values. On Fire Island, homes were typically owned, and were valued anywhere between $1000 to $5000, with a few dwellings above and below that range. On average the home values were around $2000. This reflected a typical lower middle-class home value in 1940.[50]

The majority of the residents on Fire Island (except for the Coast Guard employees) had completed some high school, or had graduated. Only 15 people on the island had completed four years of college. The Coast Guard individuals had completed varying amounts of education, ranging from completing the third grade, to completing some grades in high school, with only 25 percent of them having graduated from high school.[51]

Three-quarters of the households were families, consisting of either a husband and wife, or husband and/or wife and children (sometimes the family consisted of a male head of household with only a son or a nephew). Nearly 39 percent of the family households had anywhere from one to four children. One-quarter of the households consisted of just the head of the house, males in all cases but one. Most of these men were not married; a few were widowed.[52]

According to the 1940 census, over half of Fire Island residents, 53 percent of the individuals counted on Fire Island, had been born in New York State. A large portion of residents were also foreign born, coming from countries such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Canada, and Italy. A total of 32 residents were born outside of the United States, which accounted for nearly 20 percent of the population. Only 20 percent of the men residing on Fire Island and stationed at one of the three Coast Guard Stations were born in New York State, and five were born outside of the United States.[53]

DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL RESORT COMMUNITIES

By the end of World War I, there were 11 communities that were just beginning or already thriving: Saltaire, Lonelyville, Atlantique, Corneille Estates, Ocean Beach, Seaview, Ocean Bay Park, Point O' Woods, Oakleyville, Cherry Grove, and Water Island. Although these areas grew from the popularity of the Fire Island resorts, they continued to grow on their own through the 1920s. Development intensified in the 1920s and several more communities were developed: Kismet, Fair Harbor, and Robbins Rest. These began as prosperous years on the island, until the combination of the Great Depression, which slowed expansion, and the Great Hurricane of 1938, which leveled many structures. The fourteen communities of Fire Island are briefly described below, roughly west to east.

KISMET

The Kismet community is the furthest west of all the Fire Island communities, with Fire Island State Park on the west and Saltaire on the east. Previously, the Dominy House Hotel and Surf Hotel were within this area, but, by 1916, these lots were largely undeveloped.[54] Two structures were on the bay side, and the Postal Telegraph Company owned a small area along the oceanfront. Kismet was officially established when the Kismet Park Corporation, owned by Frederick Weis, purchased this lot from the Sammis Estate in October 1925.[55] Following the establishment of Kismet, a construction boom took place in the community in the late 1920s and early 1930s.[56] By 1933, the year-round population had grown enough to necessitate the construction of a schoolhouse in the community. The 1938 hurricane devastated Kismet, destroying 22 of its 25 dwellings.[57]

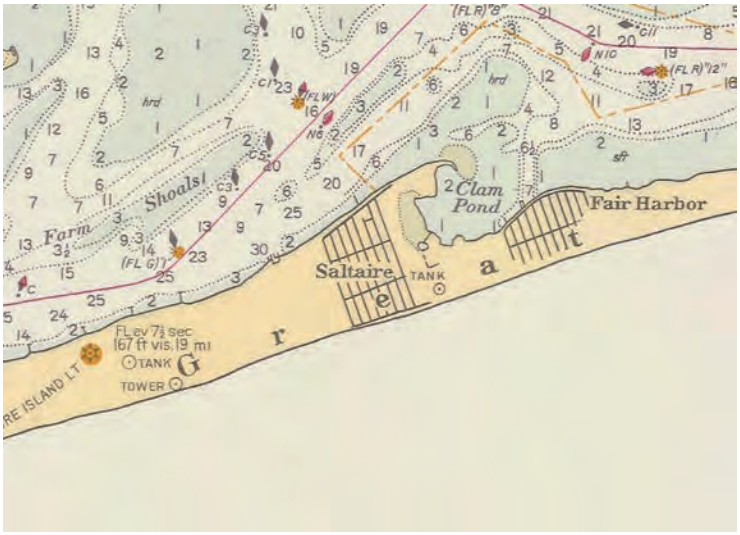


Figure 2-23. Saltaire to Fair Harbor (United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1941).

SALTAIRE, FIGURE 2-23

The construction boom continued in Saltaire until 1917, when the United States entered World War I. Saltaire had flourished up until this time and boasted 200 cottages and 1,500 summer residents. However, the war had financial repercussions for the Fire Island Development Company, which could no longer afford the upkeep of community accommodations, such as the boardwalks.[58] In response, the residents of Saltaire formed their own incorporated village with an independent political entity in 1917, responsible for their own upkeep and holding their own elections. Saltaire thus became the first incorporated village on Fire Island (Figures 2-4

and 2-24).[59] Development spurred once again following the close of World War I, and the 1920s brought further improvements to Saltaire. A post office opened in 1924, and, in 1932, Saltaire expanded to the west. By 1936, electricity was available to the community. Around this time, development was concentrated mostly on the bay and oceanfront and along the central north–south walk.[60] Saltaire boasted a yacht club, tennis courts, a casino, several food markets, a post office, and a telegraph office (Figure 2-25).

The 1938 hurricane destroyed about half of the homes on Saltaire and eroded almost 200 feet of oceanfront.[61] An article in September 1938 reported that only eight out of 90 houses were left standing.[62] South of Lighthouse Promenade, the storm washed away any cultural features that may have been previously present. The utter destruction of Saltaire compared to other areas of the island could largely be blamed on the Fire Island Development Company, which had leveled the dunes to allow for better ocean views.[63] The Works Progress Administration, with the help of a loan by the New York State Teachers Association, was responsible for dune reconstruction and replanting pine trees within the community.[64]

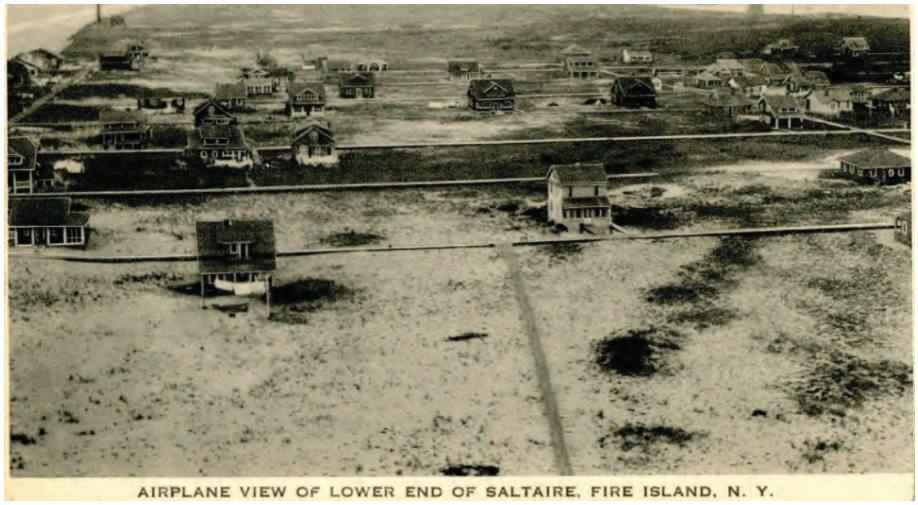


Figure 2-24. Aerial of Saltaire from 1918, one year after incorporation. The image shows the north-south walkways that transect the community with the ocean on the left and bay on the right. There is one sand path that leads east at the bottom of the photograph. Note the houses on the oceanfront, the lack of vegetation, and open landscape (worthpoint.com) (top right).



Figure 2-25. Saltaire Casino was a popular destination during prohibition (1920–1933). A gangster from Hell's Kitchen in mid-town Manhattan, William "Big Bill" Dwyer used the area as part of his rum running territory. During prohibition, an average of 750 cases of liquor came here and were shipped to the mainland. Post card from 1916 (worthpoint.com) (bottom right).

FAIR HARBOR, FIGURE 2-23

The Fair Harbor community is east of Saltaire. Prior to this time, this land was an unclaimed lot (Lot 6) that was purchased by Sammis and left undeveloped until the 1920s. In 1923, Captain Selah T. Clock and George Weeks purchased the property.[65] Clock, an important local seaman, had previously been instrumental in the development of the Lonelyville community. The community of Fair Harbor was established with the premise of becoming a resort affordable to working and middle-class families. Many of the first homeowners in Fair Harbor were year-round residents of Bay Shore.[66] The first houses built in the community were modest-sized bungalows affordable to the middle class, and some houses were moved there from Long Island.[67]

Development was gradual in the first years of Fair Harbor's establishment, which came to be known as such in 1929.[68] The 1932 tax records indicate that most of the lots were held by the Fair Harbor Development Company, which went bankrupt later that decade. The demographic of the average homeowner in Fair Harbor shifted slightly during the 1930s. Rather than most owners coming from Bay Shore, there were a number of homeowners from Brooklyn and several from out of state.[69] A community well and watermains were installed as development increased during this time period.[70] The 1938 hurricane destroyed much of the Fair Harbor community.

LONELYVILLE

Ownership of the lots in Lonelyville exchanged hands several times during these years and small-scale residential development began in the early-20th century. Tax assessment records from 1922 show that the S. T. Clock Realty Company had purchased the acreage and was developing the community. The structures built during this time period were nearly all destroyed by the 1938 hurricane.[71] Only one building out of five in Lonelyville survived the hurricane. The narrow-gauge railroad track that was constructed in the late 1880s remained in use into the 1920s until it was also destroyed by the 1938 storm.[72]

ATLANTIQUE

The community of Atlantique remained remote during this time with minimal development. A local resident said that a stable was located at the northeast corner of the community on the bay side. A circa 1928 bungalow was reportedly pushed into the bay by the 1938 hurricane and subsequently relocated within this community to Monte Christo Walk.[73]

ROBBINS REST

Ed Robbins and Captain Selah Clock first purchased the area that would be called Robbins Rest in 1904; the 1915 Hyde map shows seven structures, one called "Robbins Rest." The Robbins family formally founded this community in 1925. Growth was slow with few houses and cottages being constructed.[74]

CORNEILLE ESTATES

Corneille Estates remained mostly undeveloped during this time with only a few houses. Sources contain scant information on this community's history. One resident stated that Corneille Estates was used in the early 20th century as a "changing room [for owners to] sail over, anchor, and cross over to the beach to swim."[75]

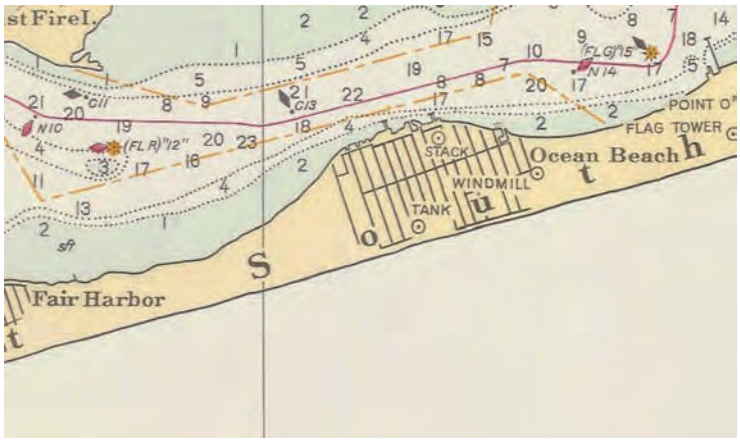


Figure 2-26. Fair Harbor to Ocean Beach, 1941 (United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1941).

OCEAN BEACH, FIGURE 2-26

By the late 1910s, Ocean Beach was already prosperous. The first elementary school was established here in 1918. By 1921, Ocean Beach and Stay-A-While Estates joined together and formed the incorporated village of Ocean Beach. Tax records from 1922 list a total of 170 houses in the community and there were several important buildings including a community house, a fire house, and the New Surf Hotel (Figures 2-27 – 2-29). Ocean Beach dunes prior to the storm of 1938 had not been leveled and were about 20 feet in height, protecting many of the buildings in the community from damage seen elsewhere in 1938.[76]

Development occurred on small plots, which gave the appearance of a densely settled community. Ocean Beach's grid was laid out with short east–west blocks and long north–south blocks between the bay and the ocean to provide the greatest possible number of house lots. The earliest walks were wooden but were removed in favor of concrete walks before the hurricane of 1938, the catastrophic impacts of which Ocean Beach was largely spared.[77] A 1940 map of Ocean Beach shows that there were 16 north–south walks, two more than in 1915, and three east–west walks. In addition, very few houses were located along the oceanfront.[78]

SEAVIEW

Islip tax records from 1922 list the Great South Beach Development Company as the main developer, with Gilbert Smith as the owner of most of the properties. Seaview became a modest lower-middle class community, increasing from 12







Figures 2-27, 2-28, 2-29. Ocean Beach was a large village with numerous amenities, community services, and a large hotel. These 1920s postcards depict views of the community house, fire house, and the New Surf Hotel (Top two images: FIIS Archives; bottom image: worthpoint.com).

houses in 1922, up to 40 by the end of the 1920s.[79] The sand dunes fronting Seaview were not removed; therefore, this community was not damaged by the 1938 hurricane as other neighboring areas. The Seaview Association was founded in the 1930s. Though it was a homeowner's association, the Seaview Association evolved over time to resemble a local government.[80]

OCEAN BAY PARK

The land was first developed in the 1920s with a plan for 40 houses meant for working-class vacationers, although it is unclear if this plan came to fruition. One longtime resident noted that when he came to Fire Island in 1930, there were only 26 structures in the community. In the early years of Ocean Bay Park, many of the residents worked in labor and other domestic pursuits for their wealthier neighbors in Point O' Woods. The Great Depression ceased all construction in Ocean Bay Park for many years following the bankruptcy of Ocean Bay Park developers.[81]

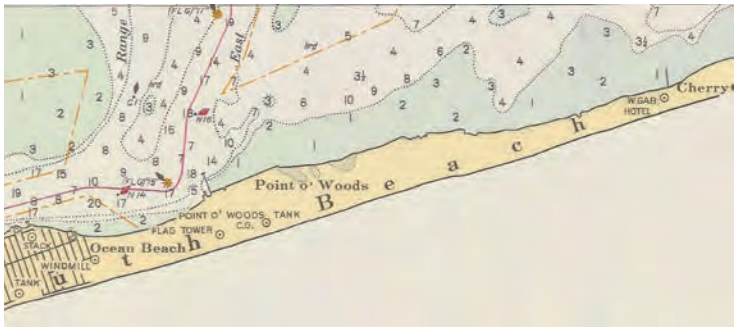


Figure 2-30. Ocean Beach and Point O'Woods, 1941 (United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1941).

POINT O'WOODS, FIGURE 2-30

During this period, Point O'Woods continued to be an exclusive community, with high summer rental prices for cottages—between $200 and $800—for the season. The Point O'Woods Association would lease the land for periods of 99 years, at a cost between $500 to $5,000. Those that leased the land could then build a permanent residence on that land.[82] By 1930, nearly all of the land was leased from the Point O'Woods Association, a total of 122 listings.[83] The residents in Point O'Woods were upper-middle to upper-class whites coming from Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Flushing. New Jersey, and Long Island.[84] The predominant house style in Point O'Woods during this period was a large, shingle-style structure—much more elaborate than many of the neighboring communities' cottages and bungalows.[85]

Little mention is made in local newspapers of the damage caused to Point O' Woods by the 1938 hurricane. This is most likely due to the extreme seasonal nature of the community; few to no people were in the area when the storm hit. In addition, because Point O'Woods had retained its sand dunes, the damage was not as severe as it was elsewhere. The moderate damages totaled approximately $80,000.[86]

OAKLEYVILLE

Following Dr. Miller's death, his land was sold to I. Howard Snedecor circa 1919. Little development occurred in Oakleyville, and this community remained small and sparse. The "Ocean Beach" ferry ran aground in Oakleyville during the 1938 storm, and passengers were stranded there on a sand bar until they were later rescued.[87]

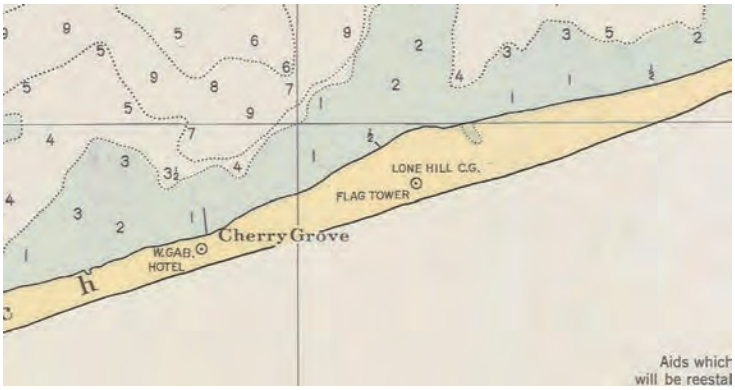


Figure 2-31. Cherry Grove, 1941 (United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1941).

CHERRY GROVE, FIGURE 2-31

By 1920, Cherry Grove was a small settlement of tiny cottages, a hotel, and a bayside dock. A single wood-plank walkway ran parallel to the beach. Early on, in the 1920s, Cherry Grove was known as a community that welcomed lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered individuals, and queers (LGBTQ) as guests.[88] As a result Cherry Grove was established early as a safe gay community.

It was during this decade that Cherry Grove became a fashionable place to summer, with many of New York's elite and those from the arts and entertainment sector flocking to the community. Residents opposed major improvements and development, wanting to avoid the type of urbanization that had overtaken places like Ocean Beach. The geographical landscape of the secluded community, as well as the island itself, nearby but isolated from New York City, heavily influenced the demographics of Cherry Grove. Members of the lesbian and gay community felt they had the freedom here to live their lives openly, without public scrutiny.[89]

As other developers had done before them, the Perkinsons chose to level the dunes along the coastline, which led to catastrophe during the 1938 hurricane. Much of the community was destroyed, and the community became ever more secluded (Figure 2-32). Following the hurricane, Perkinson's hotel was sold to Ed Duffy, and it was renamed Duffy's Hotel.[90]



Figure 2-32. Cherry Grove in 1940 shows a recovering community – rebuilding as a primarily residential community and renewing dunes and beach grasses for better protection from future storms (Luss).

Lesbian and Gay Community of Cherry Grove

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, it had become increasingly difficult and to find places that would tolerate gay and lesbian behaviors in New York City that were not frequently patrolled by law enforcement. Fear was a constant for those that were gay and those that supported gays. The performing and literary arts of New York City had a significant LGBTQ population and were under scrutiny for their so-called illegal behaviors as early as 1927.[91] At this time, the New York Legislature passed the Wales Padlock Law, which made it illegal for establishments to show anything dealing with indecency, sex degeneracy, or sex perversion. At the time homosexuality was legally defined as perversion. If an establishment and performers were found guilty, the place of business would be forced to close for one year and the performers would be placed in jail. This included theaters. Only family-oriented productions remained legal, and the closing of theatres had the potential consequence of bankruptcy among other financial burdens.

Those in the performing arts, whether they be writers, playwrights, actors and actresses, or theatre owners could no longer produce freely without severe consequences. One such example was Mae West and her own play titled *Sex*, in which she played the leading role as a prostitute. The play was forced to close in 1927 under the Wales Padlock Law. She was convicted of public obscenity and served a 10-day sentence in prison. West's next piece, *The Drag*, opened in Connecticut in January 1927, was more risqué and served as one of the earliest examples of homosexual theatre in the New York area. It lasted only 10 performances before it was banned. The imprisonment of Mae West and the banning of her homosexual plays were important moments in theatrical and LGBTQ history. Homosexual identify was growing in the 1920s and Mae West attempted to move it in view of the mainstream by running a homosexual play acted by homosexuals within the New York metropolitan area. Although Mae West suffered the consequences from the Wales Padlock Law, she gained success and support, except from the police and judicial community. Her experiences reflect an important moment in the history of the gay and lesbian theatrical community. Mae West's productions were highly successful albeit for a brief period. There was support to continue this type of expression by the gay and lesbian community, who merely lacked a safe space to do so.

By word of mouth within the arts community of New York City, already an intimate and tight knit group, gays learned of Cherry Grove and began flocking to its beaches with substantial numbers in the 1930s. The area became a significant hub for those that lacked freedom of expression in New York City.

At this time, Cherry Grove was growing into one of the first gay and lesbian towns in the United States. Several factors contributed to Cherry Grove's acceptance of LGBTQ individuals within its community during these early years: lack of strict real estate covenants and community regulations determining community demographics; geographical seclusion; the absence of a police presence; and the ease of transportation from New York City. Unlike several communities elsewhere on Fire Island, there was no real estate development company in Cherry Grove. There were no regulations that required community members and property owners to have a family as seen in Point O'Woods. In addition, it was not an affluent community and without a resort and resort amenities, Cherry Grove was an ideal location valued by middle-class and working-class families, especially those from small towns on Long Island. Many of these families did not discriminate against renters based on sexual preference.

The isolation of Cherry Grove made this location outside of New York City ideal for those seeking refuge. Large stretches of woods on either side of the community contributed to its isolation. The geographic seclusion of Cherry Grove on Fire Island also provided LGBTQ individuals protection from strict moral codes visible in the neighboring communities to the west. This isolation from other communities and from Long Island made it difficult to police. The town police had to take a boat or ferry when called upon or they would do occasional patrols, sometimes as infrequently as once a year.

Traveling to Fire Island at the end of the 1920s had expanded from rail to include automobile routes. The introduction of Moses' parkways particularly the Ocean Causeway along Jones Beach Island increased visitor rates along all of Fire Island including Cherry Grove. Due to the lack of a police presence on Fire Island, its remoteness from other island communities, and the ease of transportation by rail and car between the city and Fire Island, Cherry Grove was an ideal location for those wanting refuge from New York City.



Figure 2-33. Water Island, 1941 (United States Coast and Geodetic Survey, 1941).

WATER ISLAND, FIGURE 2-33

This small community nearly disappeared during World War I, but it became a popular destination during prohibition. The hotels there openly served alcohol, thus attracting patrons in search of drink and nightlife. In the 1920s there were only about 14 structures in Water Island, the most significant of which was the White House Hotel.[92] After prohibition was repealed in 1933, the hotel and boardwalks fell into disrepair and Water Island became a remote, somewhat isolated community. Residents resisted the introduction of electricity and water lines during this period.[93]

END OF PERIOD LANDSCAPE NARRATIVE SUMMARY (PERIOD PLAN)

In 1940, Fire Island was both a summer destination for vacationers and a recreational location for locals. The island was unique for its roadless character, and the residents of the entire island sought to maintain that feeling and geography. The western half of the island developed into resort areas and distinct communities that catered to those choosing it as a summer destination, while the eastern half was a recreational and vacation destination mostly for vacationers from Long Island, New York City, and Southampton. The real estate and construction boom of the 1920s caused a significant amount of speculative housing on the island, creating some entirely new communities and expanding others. The western half of Fire Island and its 14 communities had become a popular summer destination, but also attracted a growing year-round population. Small bungalows and cottages dotted the communities along a grid of north-south and east-west walkways. Most of the communities were separated by unoccupied stretches of land and as a result, each community maintained their own piers, boat docks, and in some cases, a marina.

The western half of the island was also distinct because it was the location of the Sunken Forest. The forest was still pristine and included American holly trees two centuries old, and it was largely maintained as a natural environment, where no construction could occur. In addition, the western half of Fire Island was home to the Fire Island Lighthouse, a navigational aid to ships in the ocean waters. Three miles west of the lighthouse area (outside of the current Fire Island National Seashore) was the new location of the Fire Island State Park.

The eastern half of the island was important for the available hunting and fishing. The area remained remote and isolated, providing ideal environments for these activities. Fishing and hunting shacks were built in the dunes, swale, and the wooded lands that predominate in this section of the barrier island.

The period plan maps, Figures 2-34 through 2-38 (located at the end of the chapter), depict conditions on Fire Island from 1940. These maps were produced from information taken from contemporary maps of the 1930s up to 1941 such as the the 1941 United States Coast and Geodetic Survey of Shinnecock Bay to the Great South Bay and the United States Geologic Survey maps from 1941.

NATURAL SYSTEMS AND TOPOGRAPHY

In 1940, Fire Island was a barrier island off the Long Island coast that was composed of dunes, swale, scrub vegetation, wetlands, marshland, and forestland. The topography ranged from flat marshland on the bayside to dunes, ranging from 10 to 40 feet in height, within the undeveloped wilderness area on the eastern end of the island. The Sunken Forest featured an interesting topography consisting of a holly forest set between the secondary dune line and the marshland on the bayside. In addition, a former breach in the island, which had filled in during the 1800s, was recreated during a 1931 storm, and called Moriches Inlet. The inlet grew in width and depth between 1931 and 1938, at which time its growth either stopped or slowed down due to a new breach at Shinnecock Inlet, further east, created by the 1938 hurricane.

In 1940, the dune line did not stretch the entire length of the island. Dunes had been completely removed by developers in front of Kismet, Saltaire, and Cherry Grove, and perhaps lowered in other communities, to provide better views of the ocean. The lack of dunes at these locations also meant the lack of a natural protective barrier from the ocean during the 1938 hurricane. Around this time, a resident of Ocean Beach recalled that the "general look of the place was open and bare."[94]

In 1940, in the aftermath of the 1938 hurricane, approximately 100,000 cubic yards of sand was dredged from the Fire Island inlet and used to re-form the dunes along the oceanfront of the Fire Island State Park.[95] Research has not identified which communities had their dunes removed prior to the 1938 hurricane and which communities had dunes rebuilt after the hurricane.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND USE

In 1940, the bulk of the western half of the island was devoted to residential, commercial, and recreational uses, while the eastern half remained in a somewhat natural state, albeit with some communities and recreational infrastructure. At this time, there were 14 communities on Fire Island, although several of them were

quite small, either from the hurricane devastation two years prior or from the lack of construction and expansion. The communities were primarily residential, with hundreds of single-family houses divided among the developments. In addition, there were several resorts located across the island, with hotels and cottages for lease. The most populated community was Ocean Beach, located between Corneille Estates on the west and Seaview on the east.

Zoning on the island was enforced in the villages of Ocean Beach and Saltaire. Ocean Beach regulations required a front yard of 20 feet and side yards of 8 feet, and no two buildings could be closer than 16 feet from one another. Essentially this allowed for plots that were at least 40 feet wide. The communities of Ocean Bay Park, Point O'Woods, Cherry Grove, and Water Island within the town of Brookhaven were also zoned. Most of the land within these communities was zoned for plots of 6,000 square feet. Areas outside of these four communities within the town of Brookhaven required plots of 4,000 square feet.[96]

Additional land uses in the communities included ecclesiastical, industrial, and government properties and structures, as well as transportation needs. Some communities had fire stations and post offices, and the two incorporated villages of Saltaire and Ocean Beach had town offices. Some of the communities had a marina and ferry access. Recreational opportunities were more abundant in the larger communities. These amenities included tennis courts, piers, and pavilions along the beach or on the bayside to allow fishing and sunbathing.

Within the communities, dwellings were scattered along walkways, with many of the dwellings situated closer to the bay or along the central north–south boardwalk. By 1938, communities had a number of dwellings along their ocean boardwalks. Point O'Woods differed from the other developments because it was organic in appearance, with curvilinear and diagonal walkways. There were no ocean-to-bay walks, but instead there were shorter north–south streets, which did not run the entire north-south length of the island. The development within Point O'Woods was primarily on the western end and was focused primarily from the center of the community down to the oceanside, keeping much of the forested land intact in the remaining areas.

Outside of the communities on the western half of the island, land remained undeveloped, or was part of either the Fire Island Lighthouse area, Fire Island State Park, or the Sunken Forest. The facilities of the Fire Island State Park, originally sited east of the lighthouse, were destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. By 1940, all that remained of the state park east of the lighthouse was open space, with open views from the bay to the ocean.

The Sunken Forest served as an informal demarcation boundary between the older communities on the west and the natural, nearly uninhabited parts of the island on the east. Between the communities in the west were large plots of

undeveloped and unused land consisting of flat sandy lands that were covered with seagrass. Large stretches of woods were present within Point O'Woods, and to the east, including the Sunken Forest.

Although most of it was left uninhabited, the eastern half of the island had some residential uses; however, the bulk of the land use was for recreation, such as fishing or hunting, or the land was left almost entirely as a natural zone.

The islands in Great South Bay within the legislative boundary of Fire Island National Seashore remained mostly uninhabited and were largely used for hunting in 1940. West Fire Island was the only island with any significant population, although it was essentially inhabited by seasonal residents. It had a visible walkway grid pattern and several buildings.

CIRCULATION

Circulation associated with Fire Island is composed of travel to the barrier island and within the island. Travel to Fire Island was by way of ferries or other types of boats. Oral histories suggest that some of the ferries during this early period were sailboats.[97] Many people boated directly to their community destination and arrived on the bay side at a boat dock or marina. The only communities with direct ferry access were Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Ocean Beach, Point O'Woods, and Cherry Grove.[98] Most of the developed communities had their own piers and boat slips.

Travel around Fire Island was typically by foot, boat, or bicycle. The narrow-gauge baggage railroad within Point O'Woods ran for approximately one-half-mile; however, passengers were not permitted, it only carried freight. Access between the communities was usually by foot along the beach or sand paths within the communities. There were no paved roads in 1940, however, the year-round residents did use automobiles when necessary, traveling mostly along the beach (Figure 2-39).[99]



Figure 2-39. Vehicles were used on Fire Island although there were no paved roads. They were driven on the beach or on sand paths through the communities. This circa 1940 photograph shows residents unsuccessfully transporting heavy, unused pilings from the new jetty along the beach (Kahlke).

All of the communities, except for Point O'Woods, had a grid pattern of walks as the primary method of access between the houses, ferry, and beach. The walks consisted mostly of slatted boards raised above ground, and many ran in a straight line from bay to ocean. All of the communities had at least one east-west walkway and many had a central boardwalk, a bayside boardwalk, and an ocean boardwalk. The largest communities had anywhere from seven to ten ocean-to-bay walks. Both Ocean Beach and Ocean Bay Park had ten north south walks. Cherry Grove had nine, Saltaire had eight, and Fair Harbor and Seaview each had seven north-south walks. The smaller communities had a smaller number of north-south walks. This group includes Kismet (two), Lonelyville (one), Robbins Rest (two) and Water Island (four). In 1940, the paths within the communities were either slatted boardwalks, concrete walkways, or sand paths. Very few existed in Atlantique, Corneille Estates, and Oakleyville.

VEGETATION

A summer resident explained that during the 1920s "there was much less vegetation—mostly sand and dune grass near the bay . . . there were pine trees and huckleberry bushes and beach plums, but the general look of the place was open and bare."[100] This was even more evident following the 1938 hurricane, because the surge of saltwater over the land dumped large amounts of sand on the sparse vegetation. After the hurricane, trees and grasses were replanted in some areas, and dunes were reconstructed as part of conservation efforts. Another resident recalled the poison ivy and blueberry bushes that grew everywhere and the wild fir trees they would cut down for use as their Christmas trees.[101]

The 1938 *Report on the Plan to Restore and Protect Fire Island* by the Long Island State Park Commission provides the best overview of plant life on Fire Island as near to 1940 as possible. Beach grass was the predominant plant throughout the landscape. The salt-resistant plants included "sea rocket, coast amaranth, seaside spurge, sand wort, and dusty miller," which were located in the fore dunes and on the beaches above high tide. The salt marshes and the flat areas between the dunes and the bay were composed of "marsh elder, groundsel shrub, salt meadow grasses, sedges, salt marsh bull-rushes, sea-blight, and mallows."[102] The swales were primarily covered with several types of sea grasses but also beach plums, bayberry, poison ivy, bearberry, beach heather, pine and red cedar."[103] Vegetation of the coastal plain type grew in areas where it was protected from the harsh ocean winds. In 1940, flora within the Sunken Forest included "hollies, sour gums, sassafras, birch, pines, oaks and swamp maples, shad bushes, blueberry bushes, sweet gales, huckleberries, cranberries, sweet pepper bushes, cat briars, Virginia creepers, poison summacs," and any plant that was native to the coastal plain swamps of Long Island.[104]

BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

In 1940, buildings and structures on Fire Island were concentrated in 14 residential communities on the western half of the island. Solitary dwellings were also scattered between many of these communities. In addition, the very western end included the Fire Island Lighthouse, keeper's house, and the Fire Island Coast Guard Station. The eastern half of Fire Island was largely undeveloped. There were a few clusters of cottages between Cherry Grove and the eastern end of the island; however, these were very small settlements. The large, wooded area just west of the Blue Point Coast Guard Station, Water Island, had a large gabled building documented on the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey map of 1941. The authors do not know which hotel this represented. The primary loci of buildings on the eastern half of the island were the Coast Guard Stations east of Cherry Grove: Lone Hill, Blue Point, Bellport, Smith Point, and Forge River. All were abandoned by 1940.

The extreme western end of Fire Island consists mainly of federal land that includes the Fire Island Lighthouse and the keeper's dwelling. The Fire Island State Park was moved to the west side of the lighthouse in 1940 and replacement facilities constructed. This area is not located within the present-day Fire Island National Seashore, therefore, it is not included in this description of buildings and structures.

The densest concentration of buildings and structures lay within the incorporated village of Ocean Beach, with several hundred cottages. Building density within all other communities was much more dispersed. Little construction had occurred east of Point O'Woods during this time, except for the small village of Cherry Grove. The nearly 60 buildings within Cherry Grove were all new construction, except for eight buildings that had survived the 1938 hurricane.

Within the communities, the houses were mostly of wood-frame construction, and were one- to one-and-a-half-story bungalows. The 1938 *Report on the Plan to Restore and Protect Fire Island* stated that the dwellings on the eastern side of the island were typically larger than those on the western side, with some built for year-round occupancy.[105] Dunes were sometimes excavated during construction to build the dwellings close to the ocean. In some cases, various types of bulkheads (e.g., fencing, brush wind breaks, interlocking steel sheet pilings) were installed to separate these dwellings from the surf.[106]

The use of piers and marinas was of foremost importance to those who lived on and visited Fire Island. Some of the larger marinas are easily identifiable on the period plan maps; however, smaller ones may just appear as a pier on the period plans. The maps depict a pier and/or a marina at Kismet, Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Lonelyville, Ocean Beach, Seaview, Point O'Woods, Cherry Grove,

and Water Island. Five additional docks on Fire Island were interspersed along the eastern half of the island, between Cherry Grove and Moriches Inlet; one of these is associated with the Bellport Coast Guard Station.

Any buildings that would have been in the forest within or east of Point O'Woods were most likely hunting cabins or small huts occupied by squatters—all of which lacked running water and electricity.

One windmill on the east side of Ocean Beach next to the beach road is identified on the 1941 United States Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay nautical map.[107]

VIEWS AND VISTAS

The views and vistas on Fire Island in 1940 were typically anywhere near the water, either along the oceanfront or the bay. Water views could also be seen from the taller dunes, especially those on the eastern end of the island. Prior to the hurricane these water views within the communities were usually visible from the boardwalks looking north (toward the Great South Bay), or looking south, towards the ocean (Figure 2-40). Infrastructure to allow these views was being reconstructed by 1940. Views toward the ocean were also important from the lighthouse.

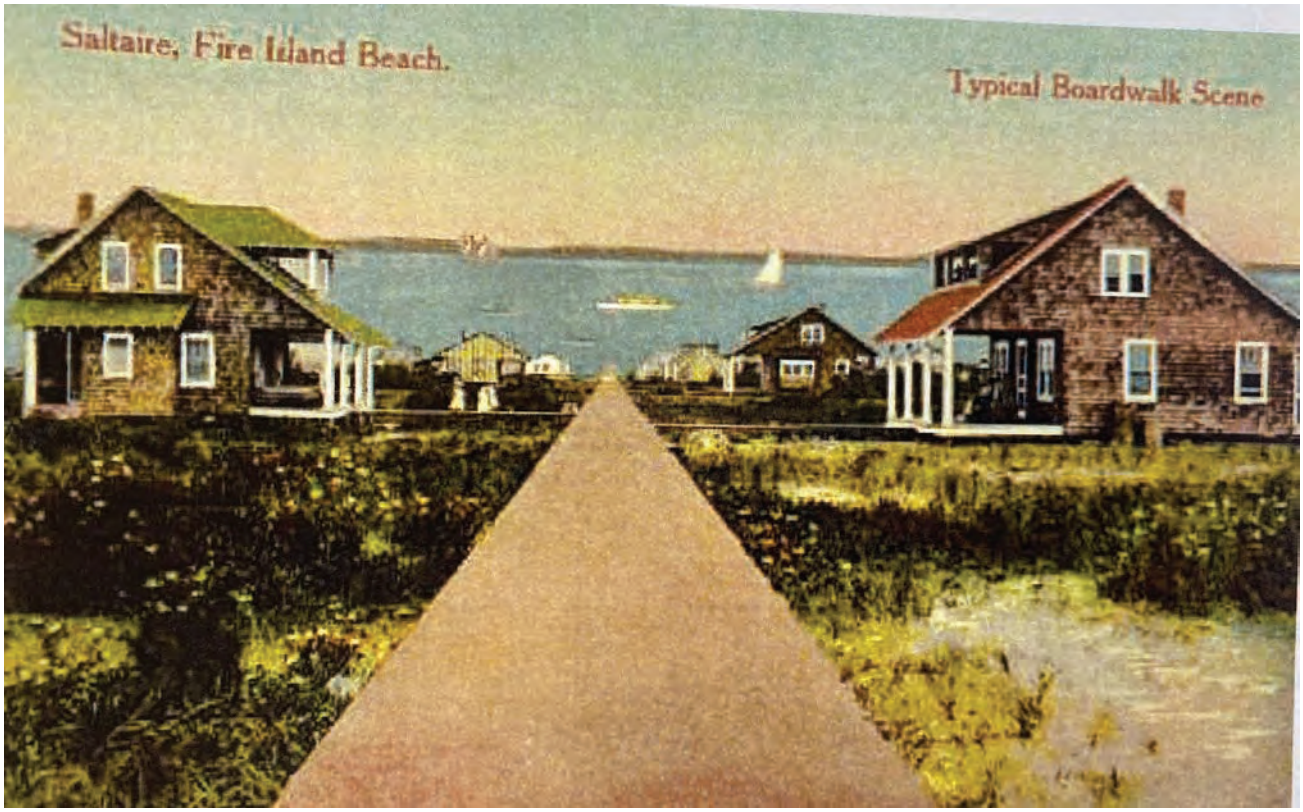
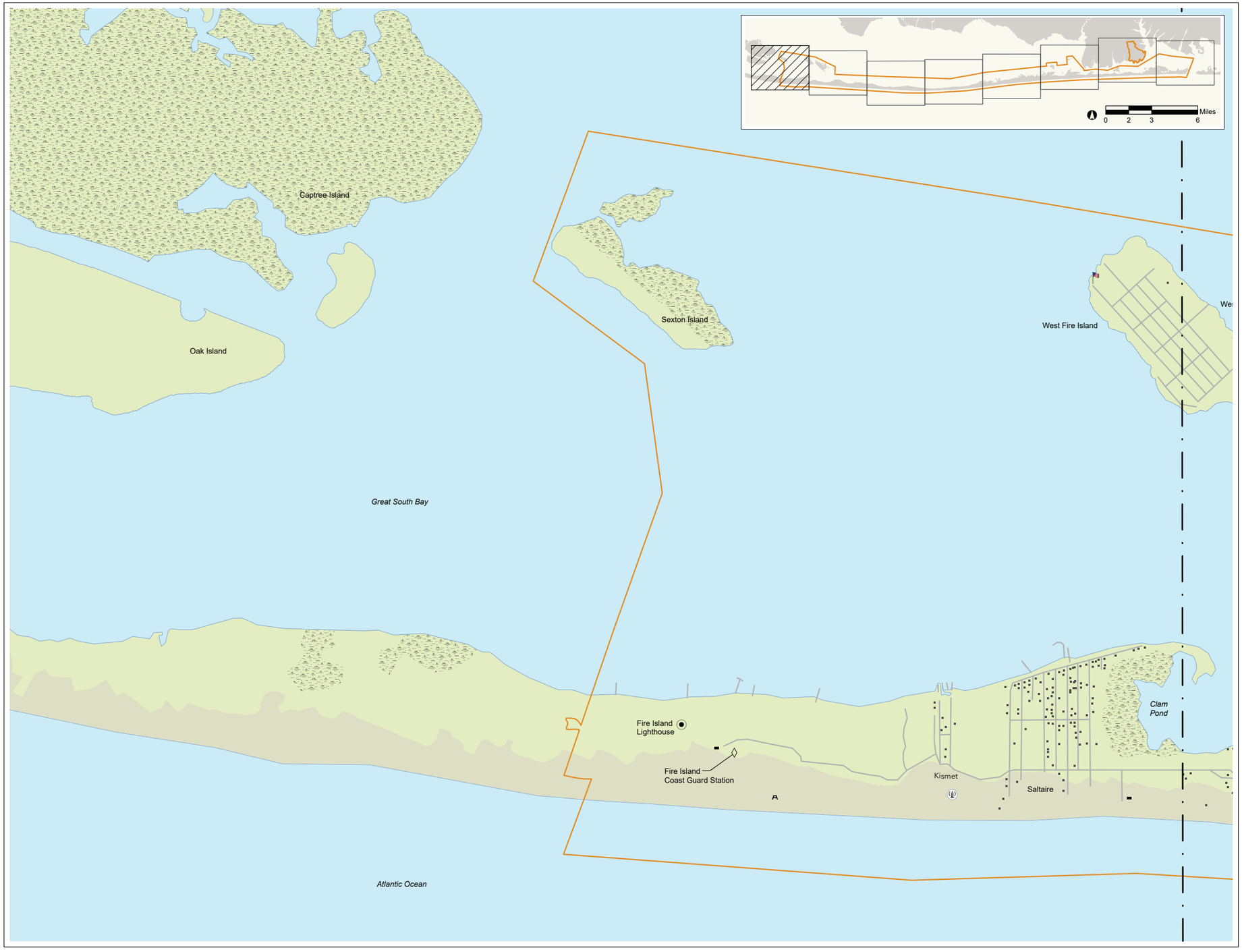


Figure 2-40. Significant views were a priority along the bay to ocean boardwalks in all of the communities except Point O'Woods. Views of the water, similar to the one shown in this 1920s postcard, would have been partially restored by 1940, with new boardwalks and new buildings (FIIS Archives, Jim Rosenthall Collection).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1940 Period Plan

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1941-1956
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1941
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
4. Unknown publisher, Map of Fire Island Beach, 1931 (FIIS Archives 15209).

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Woods
- PTC Radio
- Dirt Roads/Paths
- Docks
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building

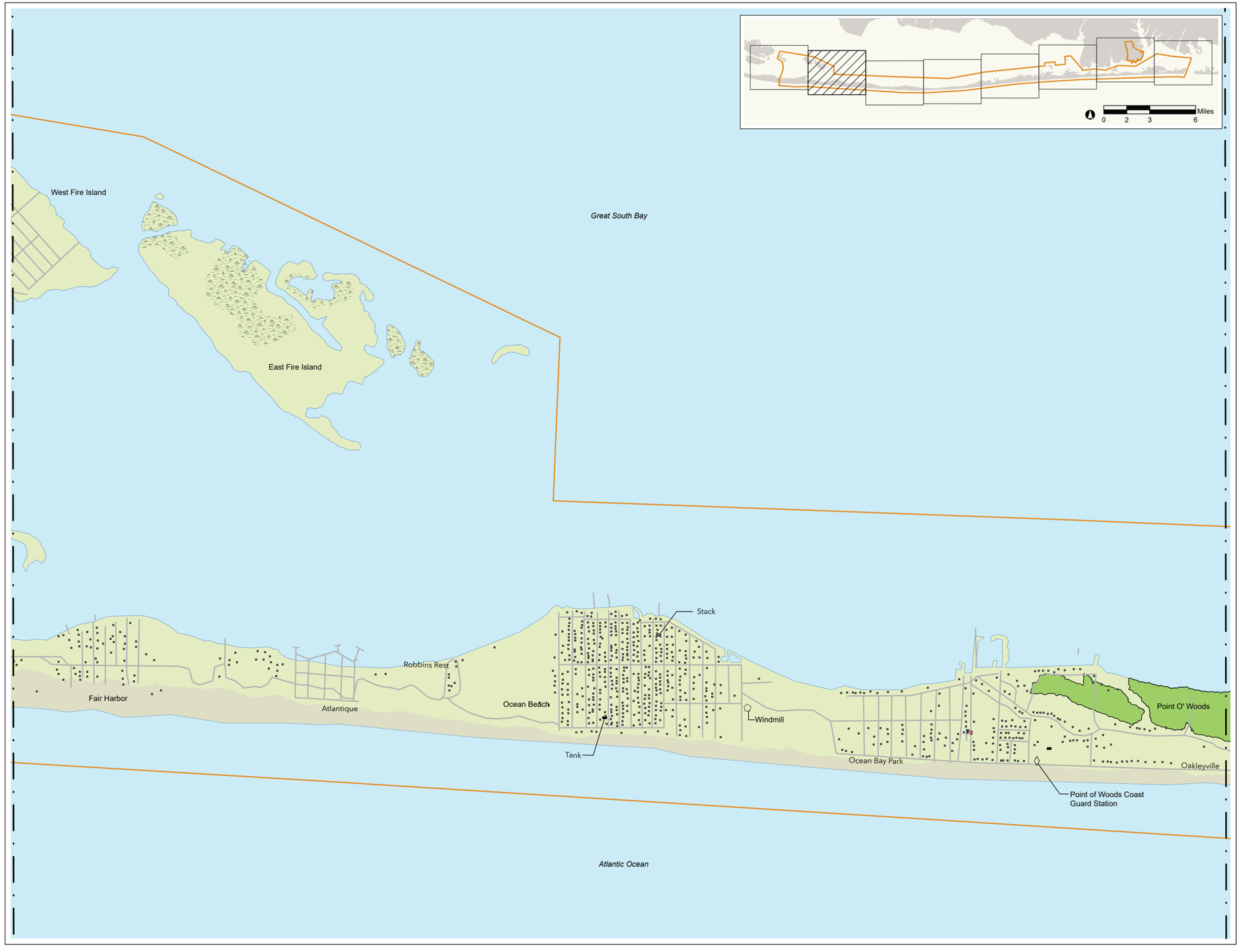
NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 3.1

Figure 2-34. 1940 Period Plan Map #1.



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1940 Period Plan

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1941-1956
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1941
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

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Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
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- Docks
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building

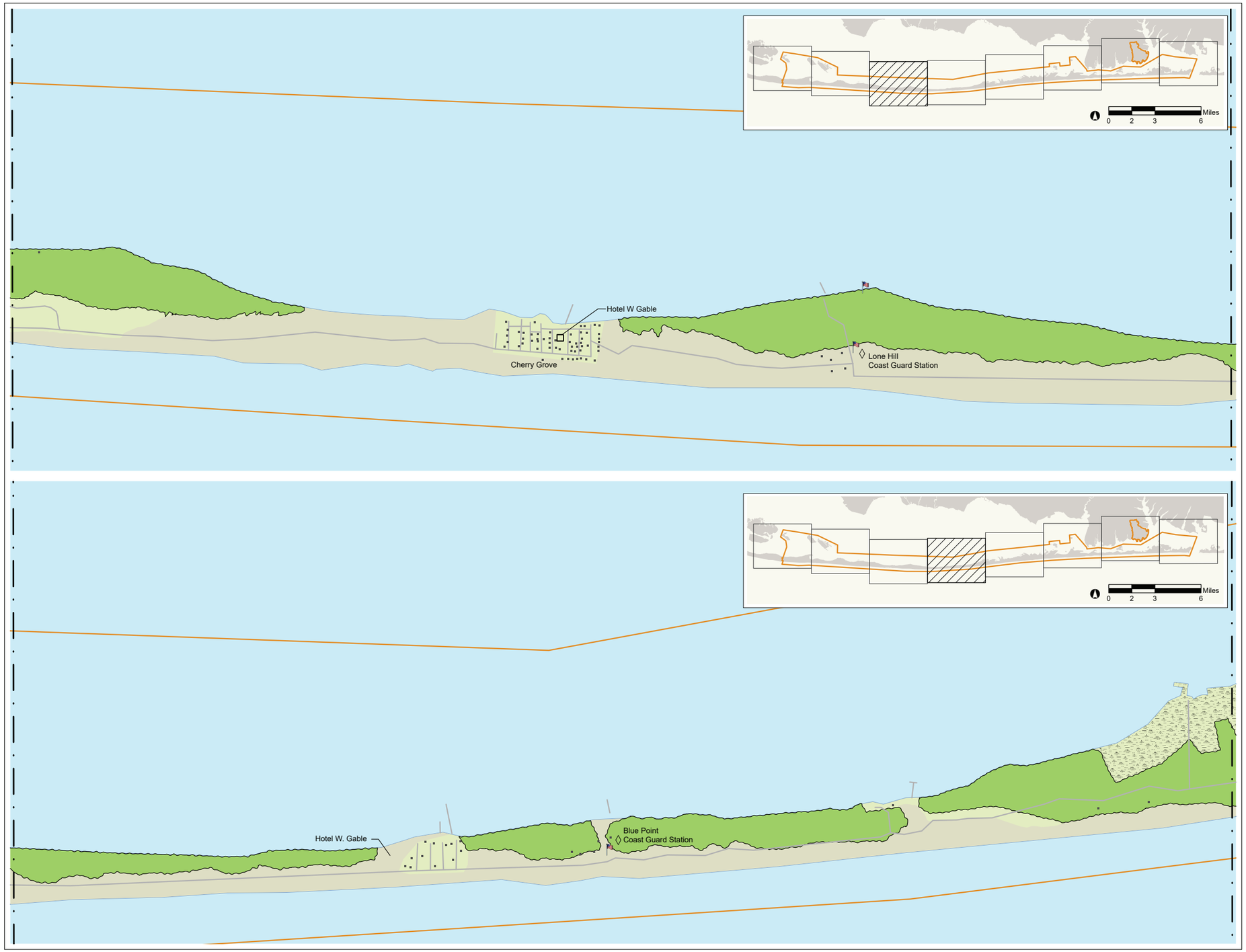
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2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
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Drawing 3.2

Figure 2-35. 1940 Period Plan Map #2.



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1940 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1941-1956
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1941
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Dirt Roads/Paths
- Docks
- Lawn
- Coast Guard Station
- Beach
- Windmill
- Wetland
- Radio Tower
- Hydrography
- Tank
- Woods
- Building

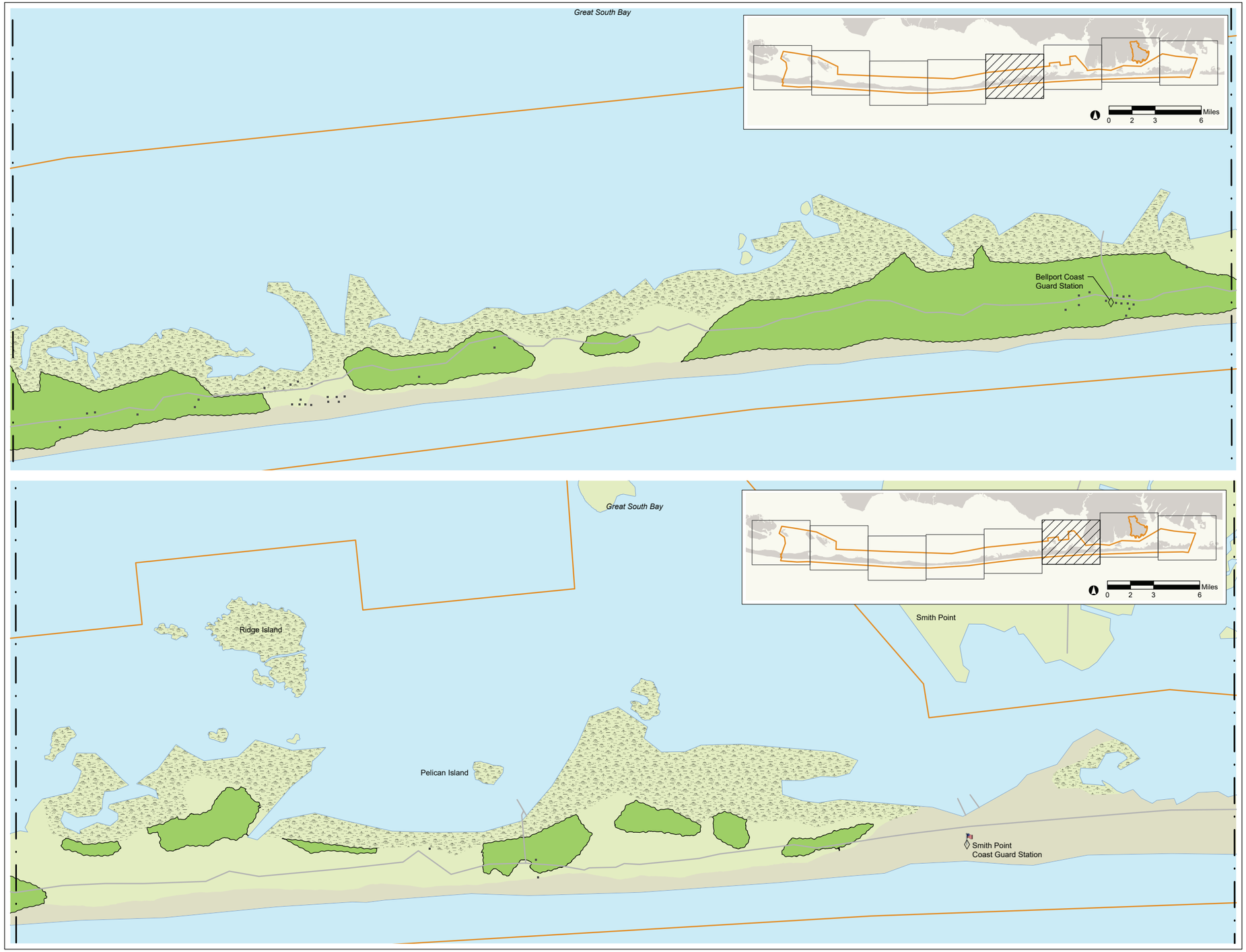
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2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
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Drawing 3.4

Figure 2-36. 1940 Period Plan Map #3 (top) and #4 (bottom).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1940 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1941-1956
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1941
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

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Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Woods
- Dirt Roads/Paths
- Docks
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building

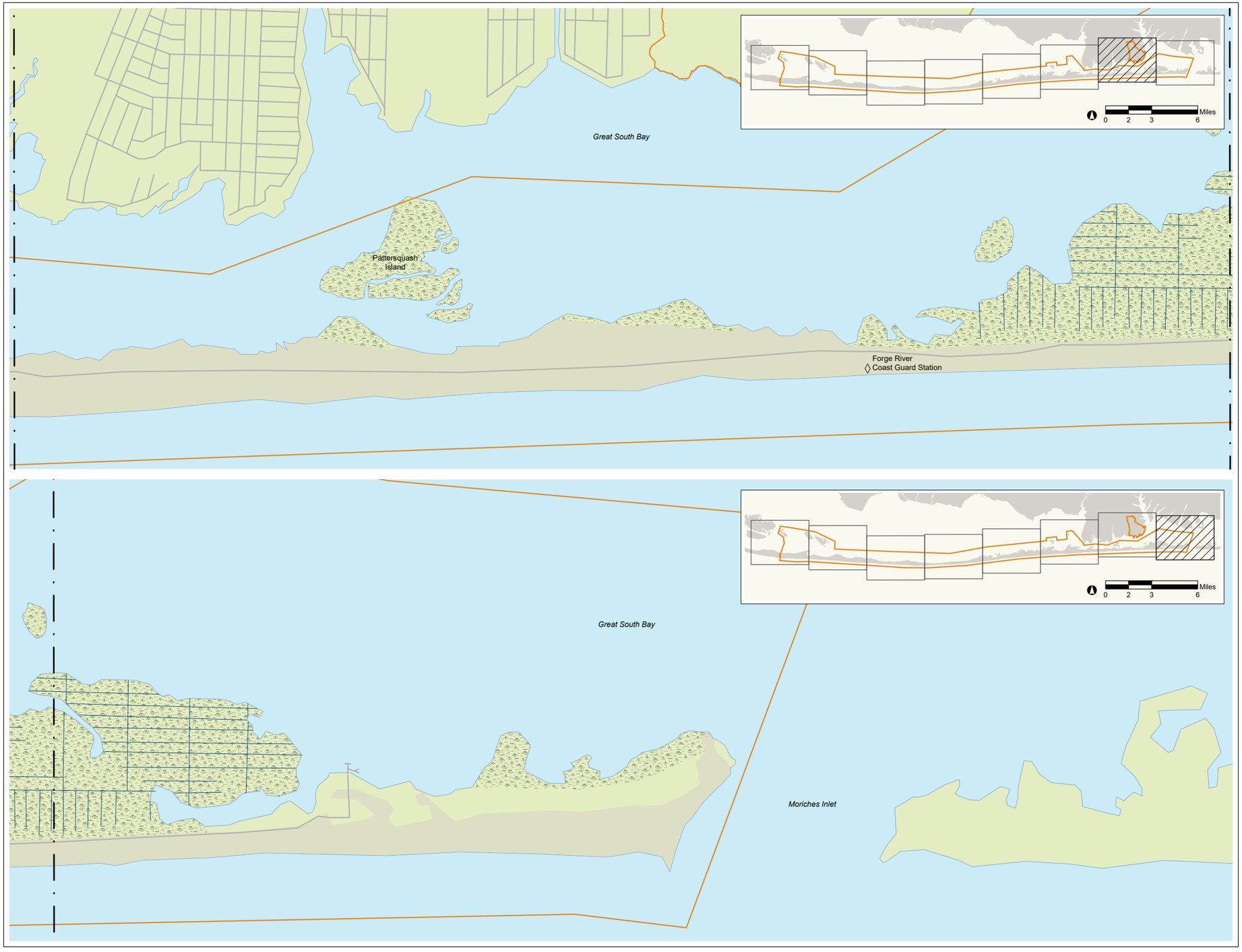
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1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 3.6

Figure 2-37. 1940 Period Plan Map #5 (top) and #6 (bottom).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1940 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1941-1956
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1941
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Woods
- Dirt Roads/Paths
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
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Drawing 3.8

Figure 2-38. 1940 Period Plan Map #7 (top) and #8 (bottom).

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ENDNOTES

1. United States Congress, Subcommittee on National Parks of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Hearings on H.R. 3693, H.R. 4999, H.R. 6111, H.R. 6213, H.R. 6934, H.R. 6936, H.R. 7107, H.R. 7297, H.R. 7359, and H.R. 7512, Bills to Establish the Fire Island National Seashore in the State of New York*, 88th Congress, 1964; 75. https://www.google.com/books/edition/Hearings/VhkCAAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0.

2. "Find German Mine Afloat." *New York Times*. September 8, 1918.

3. Jack Whitehouse, *Hidden History of Islip Town* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press 2021), 92.

4. Ibid.

5. Robert Chiles, "Working-Class Conservationism in New York: Governor Alfred E. Smith and 'The Property of the People of the State.'" *Environmental History 18, no. 1 (2013): 157–83*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41721485.

6. "Enlarge Fire Island Park." *New York Times,* July 14, 1924.

7. National Park Service, *Fire Island National Seashore, Cultural Landscape Inventory: Fire Island Light Station, Fire Island National Seashore* (National Park Service, 1998), 33.

8. "Hylan Art Site." *New York Times* June 23, 1924.

9. Ibid.

10. Robert Moses, "Thousands of Acres for a New System of Parks and Parkways." *New York Times,* May 2, 1926.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

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Chapter 3: 1941–1978

1941–1950: Effects of World War II on Fire Island Landscape and its Post-War Growth

America's entry into World War II halted the growth of the communities on Fire Island. With men and women joining the armed forces and leaving for the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific, development significantly slowed. In addition, due in part to its location on the Atlantic coast, during the war Fire Island was subject to blackouts and travel restrictions. Coast Guard patrols scanned the waters, ready to alert against possible landing parties from German submarines. One famous incident, at nearby Amagansett, on Long Island, occurred on June 1942, when eight Nazi saboteurs came ashore in a nighttime attempt to infiltrate the United States. This location was about 30 miles from Fire Island, and reinforced the importance of the blackouts and the need to remain vigilant. Fire Island was no longer a place of relaxation and recreation beginning that summer of 1942. The island was under strict beach curfews, suffered nightly blackouts, and in the evening it was canvased by army fighter pilots. In addition, the waters were no longer safe as bombs, albeit dead, floated to shore along with other wartime debris from torpedoed ships. A passage in the *New Yorker* aptly describes the landscape, mood, and setting, " . . . The people on the beach and in the shorefront cottages watch the sea, too, watch a black log, drifting in with the tide, watch the run of the horizon, where this year no boats pass. The Fire Island lightship is gone from her moorings and the lighthouse is dark; there are no lights in the village after the sun sets, only rows of blind houses and life hushed and invisible inside . . . "[3]

Several factors led to more visitors during the early 1940s. Fire Island was a potential breach point by infiltrators and was thus a post for the Army and the Coast Guard. Because of this function, there was a dramatic increase in the temporary population on Fire Island. Although civilian, demographic growth slowed down, there was an increase in visitors. Gasoline rationing forced more people from the region to look for local areas to vacation. Fire Island also became a place to escape for those in Europe.[4]

Major construction plans throughout the area were halted, including Robert Moses' plan for improved access to Fire Island from the mainland as discussed in the previous chapter. This plan had included the proposed steel bridges at Fire Island inlet and Smith Point County Park. Following the end of the war, these major construction projects did not start up right away due to the lack of financial support.

Rather than new construction, after the war it became common to float existing buildings over from the mainland, because building materials like nails, shingles, and wood had all been rationed for the war effort, causing scarcity of these items in the following years.[5] It was also common for existing buildings on Fire Island to be floated to different locations on the island when they were no longer desired at their current location.

Several of the lifesaving stations and their support structures were moved by water during the mid-to-late 1940s, and can be found in different communities throughout Fire Island. In 1946, the Point O'Woods Life Saving Station house and boathouse were moved to Ocean Bay Park to become part of Flynn's Hotel. The Lone Hill Life Saving Station's boathouse, barn, and oil house were bought by Frank Carrington and moved to the Carrington Tract in 1947. Forge River Life Saving Station was moved the following year to Ocean Beach Park to become part of Flynn's Hotel. In 1949, the Blue Point Life Saving Station was moved to Ocean Beach to become the clubhouse for the Fire Island Summer Club Condominium Association (Figure 3-1).[6]

POST-WAR GROWTH OF LOCAL RESORT COMMUNITIES

After World War II ended in 1945, the existing communities on Fire Island began expanding once again, with new construction in part replacing buildings that had been destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. In addition, four new communities sprang up, funded by real estate speculators. These new communities were Dunewood, Fire Island Summer Club/Corneille Estates, Fire Island Pines, and Davis Park. Both rebuilding and new construction were possible because of the improved economy once the war ended.

Some of the existing communities saw small increases in population; however, generally, the post-war era was a period of return to pre-war conditions. Saltaire and Ocean Beach are two examples of growth after World War II ended.[7]

Cherry Grove is another example of an established community that was nearly decimated by the 1938 hurricane and was slow to grow afterwards. Many of the landowners in Cherry Grove eventually sold their property to recoup some of their losses. Many of these properties were sold to gay and lesbian vacationers, because the landowners were already relatively tolerant and accepting of homosexual lodgers and renters. In addition, this particular demographic, mostly in the theater and arts community of New York City, was relatively affluent, especially compared to young families.[8] Cherry Grove lacked a strong police presence, which helped to established it as a sanctuary for the gay and lesbian community. The isolated summer community of Cherry Grove was likened to a "very gay private country club."[9]



Figure 3-1. The Blue Point Life-Saving Station was moved from Water Island to the community of Fire Island Summer Club in 1947. The station served as a clubhouse for community members (Greater Patchogue Historical Society).

One important fixture of Cherry Grove was the Community House and Theater (Figure 3-2). The original Art Project of Cherry Grove was started in 1948. Frank Carrington, a gay prominent theater director, along with Earl Blackwell Jr., Hellen Ely, and others founded the Art Project in Cherry Grove. Carrington owned a large six-acre tract immediately east of Cherry Grove, and in the 1940s, he had become an integral part of the local gay community (Figure 3-3).[10] The Art Project and the Community House Theater that grew out of it facilitated gay theater productions and helped the gay community gain a strong cultural presence on Fire Island. The inaugural performance was the "Cherry Grove Follies of 1948," with three showings only, all on one night in September 1948 (Figure 3-4). Numerous prestigious performers and producers rented or owned homes in Cherry Grove and contributed their talents to the show, ensuring its success. The Art Project sold 244 tickets and people came from all over the island as well as the mainland. Continuing to produce theatrical performances, the Community House quickly built a theater





Figure 3-2. The Cherry Grove Community House and Theater is exceptionally significant for its role in shaping the community as America's first gay and lesbian town (Luss) (top right).

Figure 3-3. Frank Carrington standing in front of his house on a 6-acre tract east of Cherry Grove. In 1947, Carrington co-founded the Arts Project of Cherry Grove and began producing gay theatrical productions at the Community House, along with other well-known artists residing in Cherry Grove (McDonald) (bottom right).

Figure 3-4. Cherry Grove Follies was the first production held at the Cherry Grove Community House, for one night only on September 25, 1947. After its success, a theater was added to the building and productions by and for gays and lesbians became popular and continued to grow throughout this era (Luss) (below).



addition the following year. It was considered the first gay theater in the United States putting on gay-themed and gay-identified plays and performances.[11]

A large number of gays and lesbians, representing the arts, theater, and the literary world based in New York City visited Cherry Grove in the 1940s. A few of these important figures influencing the cultural geography of Cherry Grove included W.H. Auden (poet), Christopher Isherwood (novelist), Noel Coward (playwright), Carson McCullers (novelist), Benjamin Britten (composer), Tennessee Williams (playwright), and Truman Capote (novelist).

1950–1962: Robert Moses and Postwar Threats to Fire Island

With the effects of the 1938 hurricane lingering in many of the communities, some of the people invested in Fire Island understood that action had to be taken to protect them from another devastating storm. As a result, the Fire Island Erosion Control Committee was formed in the early 1950s. Its purpose was to develop solutions that would shift the financial burden from the property owners to the government, including local, state, and federal agencies.[12] With substantial local support, the committee held a meeting in the summer of 1957, where more than 250 Fire Island locals met with Congressman Stuyvesant Wainwright of Suffolk County, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers, to discuss the federal government's plan for erosion control for Fire Island. The United States Army Corps of Engineers called for dune nourishment on the dunes and the beach, to raise the dunes to a height of 20 feet above mean high sea level and raise the beaches, which would be stabilized with groins. Wainwright proposed the creation of a National Park as an additional solution, in part so that the federal government would finance the necessary erosion-control solutions.[13]

The next year, in 1958, the state developed an erosion plan that looked much like Robert Moses' earlier plan, including a built-up dune crowned with a roadway along the length of the island. Encouraged by Congressman Wainwright's recommendation for a National Seashore, local residents created the Citizen's Committee for the Fire Island National Seashore to generate support to encourage the federal government to take on this burden. Around this time, the River and Harbor Act of 1960 was passed by Congress to authorize the United States Army Corps of Engineers to manage erosion control along waterways of the United States.[14] Specifically, $19.4 million was authorized for erosion control along the Atlantic coast shoreline between Fire Island inlet and Montauk Point.[15]

While these discussions regarding creation of a Fire Island National Seashore were underway, New York had already begun construction of portions of Robert Moses' proposed Fire Island Causeway plan, discussed in the preceding chapter. Construction was focused entirely on the access points at both ends of the island. This plan included a steel toll bridge at Smith Point on the eastern end of the

island, and a bridge across Fire Island Inlet on the western end. These bridges would provide greater access both for visitors and for property owners.

Spurred by the planning and impending construction of the island causeway, there were more urgent discussions regarding the proposal for a Fire Island National Park.[16] Congressman Wainwright introduced a bill for the establishment of a Fire Island National Park to Congress and expressed concern that he would lose his job over the bill . . . "but the principle behind [the] project is more important than whether I am or am not elected to Congress."[17]

The concept of a Fire Island National Park did not receive overwhelming support initially and the bill did not pass. Driven by Moses' continued push for his proposed island causeway, support for a national designation grew as a protection from New York State and Moses himself. One section of Moses' plan was completed in 1959—the Smith Point steel toll bridge and bathing beach on the east end of the island. This new structure was a replacement of a draw bridge that had collapsed more than 30 years before. The proposed bridge on the western end took longer for approval and construction due to its length of 4,300 feet and $10 million price tag. However, the steel structure was in place when the fight over the Fire Island causeway versus a national seashore came to head in 1962.[18]

The clash between Robert Moses and supporters of the national seashore came to a climax immediately after Fire Island was again devastated in 1962 by the Great Atlantic Storm (Figure 3-5). This storm caused major damage across the mid-Atlantic region and struck Fire Island on March 5th, giving it the name, the Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962. It was comparable in strength to the most powerful hurricanes in history and resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars of damage across six states.[19] On Fire Island, the storm destroyed 47 houses and damaged 75 more (Figure 3-6).[20]

Figure 3-5. Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962 destroyed 47 houses and damaged 75 more on Fire Island (Getty Images) (below left).

Figure 3-6. Houses on the dune line on Fire Island that were destroyed by the Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962 (Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society) (below right).





Dismayed by the damage caused by the Ash Wednesday Storm, Robert Moses reintroduced his vision for an Ocean Parkway. He argued that his proposed parkway would anchor the dunes on Fire Island from further destruction, protecting the communities from excessive damage from future storm events (Figure 3-7).[21] Property owners and residents saw his plan as a threat to their unique way of life and did not support it. In addition, numerous homes would require demolition to make way for the road and its right-of-way. Having already lost much from the storms of 1938 and 1962, Fire Island locals and interested parties did not find this acceptable (Figure 3-8).[22] Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall argued for more of a federal presence on the island and opposed Robert Moses and the New York State Park Commission.

Following the 1962 storm, Secretary Udall visited Fire Island and met with Moses to discuss the Ocean Parkway plan and the potential National Seashore plan. Moses bluntly told him he was "20 years too late . . . and [to] mind [his] own business."[23] Udall fired back and was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying that any plan regarding the development of the area needed "to provide for the preservation of the natural open spaces free of automobile traffic, parking lots and hot-dog stands."[24] Fire Island residents praised Udall, declaring that he "looks to the future, while Robert Moses still thinks back to the nineteen thirties."[25] Local support for Secretary Udall's and Congressman Wainwright's plan for a National Seashore grew during the early 1960s, while support for Moses' plan disintegrated (Figures 3-9, 3-10).[26]



Figure 3-8. Poster used protesting Robert Moses' roadway plan across Fire Island (Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society).

During this time in 1962, a drama was playing out at the highest levels of the New York government, between Robert Moses and New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. At this time, Moses oversaw five different New York State agencies, one of which was the State Council of Parks. Moses' popularity waned and tension between him and Governor Rockefeller grew, leading the governor to pursue appointing his brother, Laurance Rockefeller, into one of Moses' chairmanships. Moses was convinced that Governor Rockefeller would retreat from this idea when he threatened to resign from all state posts. However, the governor accepted his resignations, and Moses abruptly left state government.[27] The following year, Moses' ocean causeway was definitively put to rest due to a lack of funds and a lack of support.[28]

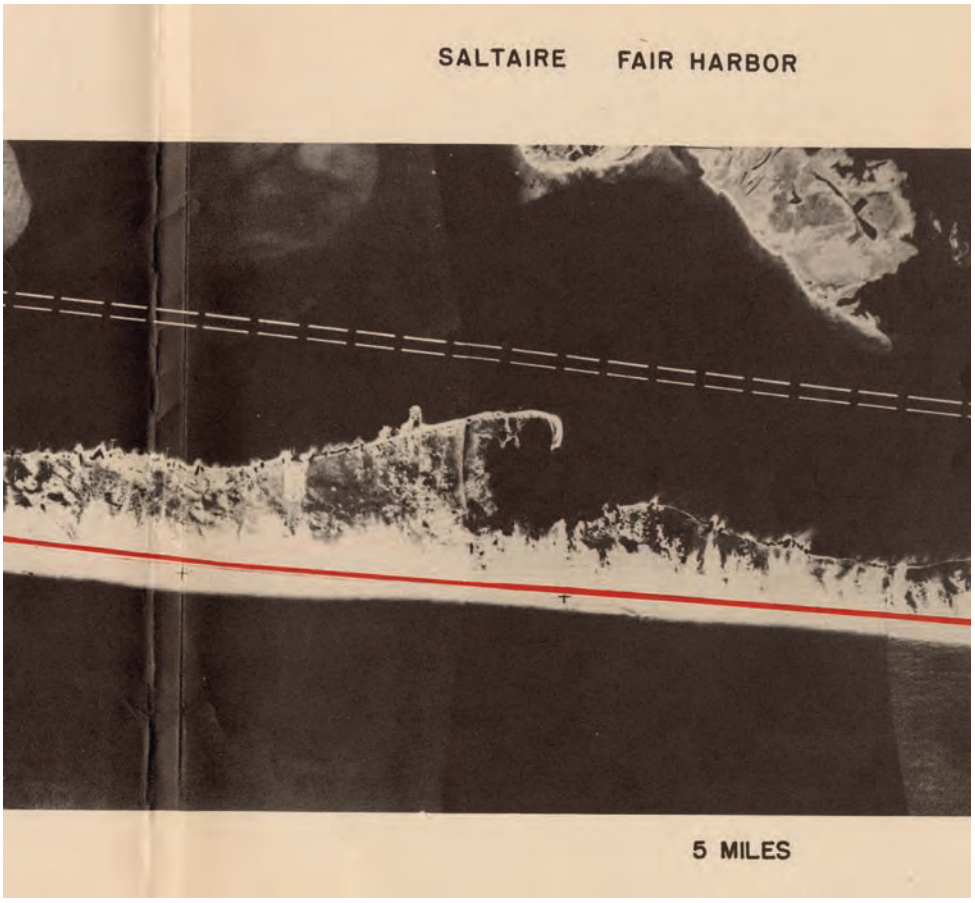
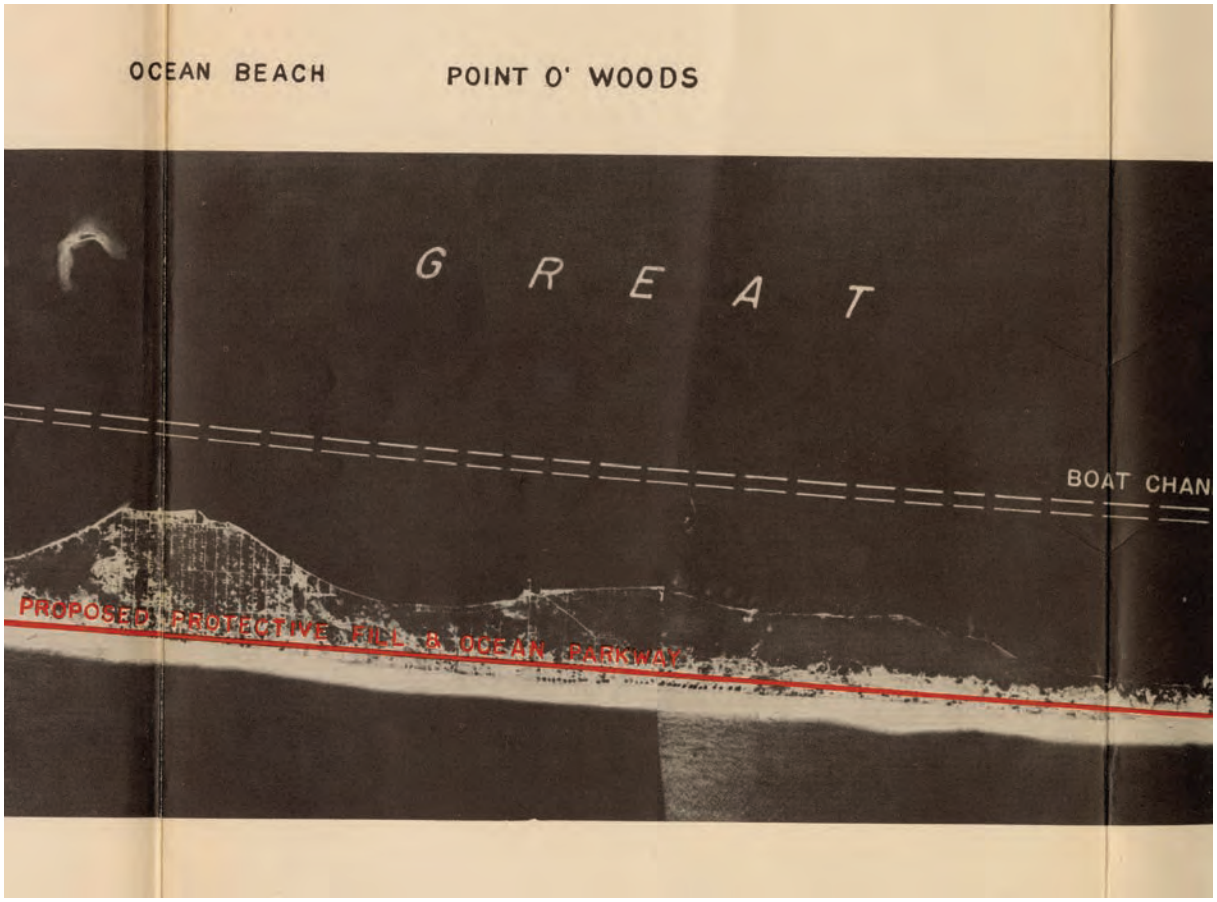


Figure 3-7. Aerial image of Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Ocean Beach, and Point O'Woods after the 1938 hurricane depicting the placement of the proposed ocean parkway. The only structures remaining in Saltaire appear to be a few on the bayside. The parkway as proposed would demolish houses in Ocean Beach and Point O'Woods, as seen here (FIIS Archives).



LEGISLATIVE ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL SEASHORE AND EARLY PLANNING INITIATIVES

Figure 3-9. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall strongly opposed Robert Moses' highway plan, stating that Fire Island required a different kind of planning. He especially opposed any building on the dunes (Weaver, *NYT,* 1962) (below).

Figure 3-10. Numerous groups came together to protest Robert Moses' parkway plan. These protests were at their highest fervor in 1962 shortly after the damage caused by the Ash Wednesday Storm (Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society) (bottom).

FIRE ISLAND PLAN OPPOSED BY UDALL

He Rebuts Moses' Plan for Road and Boat Channel—Would Keep Open Space

With Moses out of power, the concept of a national seashore began to take shape. It was supported by numerous groups, and the idea of developing federal park land along the shorelines was promoted by a congressional commission. In 1962, the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (chaired by Laurence Rockefeller) provided a report to the President and to Congress urging the government to use its resources to protect the nation's shorelines. "The highest priority should be given to acquisition of areas located closest to major population centers and other areas that are immediately threatened. The need is critical—opportunity to place these areas in public ownership is fading each year as other uses encroach."[29]

The Secretary of the Interior officially identified Fire Island as a potential national seashore in the early 1960s, several years after the first Congressional bill proposing its designation as a national park. Secretary Udall's assistant, Walter Pozen, was quoted in the *Babylon Town Leader* in 1962 declaring the area was significant for its "extreme importance [is] because of its natural features and its close proximity to large centers of population," . . . and that it "represents one of the last great opportunities to preserve an invaluable natural resource."[30] Although the Moses plan for an ocean parkway had died by the end of 1962, residents still felt threatened by its potential return and generally supported national seashore designation. In 1963, the Fire Island Voters Association (originally the Fire Island Erosion Control Committee) sent out a newsletter encouraging residents to start letter-writing campaigns to the governor, senators, and local representatives, to express their



concerns about the potential highway, erosion control, and to support the national seashore idea (Figure 3-12).[31]

Between 1962 and 1963, nine bills were introduced in Congress proposing the establishment of a Fire Island National Seashore. The Secretary of the Interior also drafted a bill for the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs enlarging the proposed national seashore to include 52 miles of shoreline extending into the village of Southampton (Figure 3-13). The Secretary of the Interior took the stance that this vast stretch of shoreline beach land should be protected, and quickly, otherwise it would be developed for private use and the "opportunity lost forever."[32] Secretary Udall also claimed that "nowhere in the country is there a greater need by so many people for additional outdoor recreation opportunities that can be supplied in abundance and variety as in the proposed Fire Island National Seashore."[33]



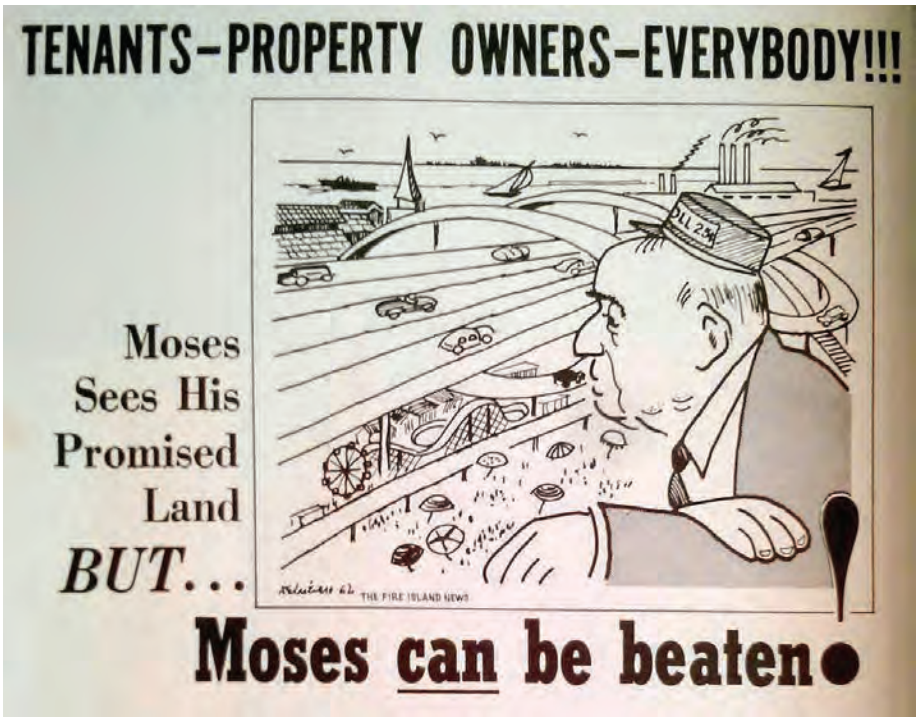
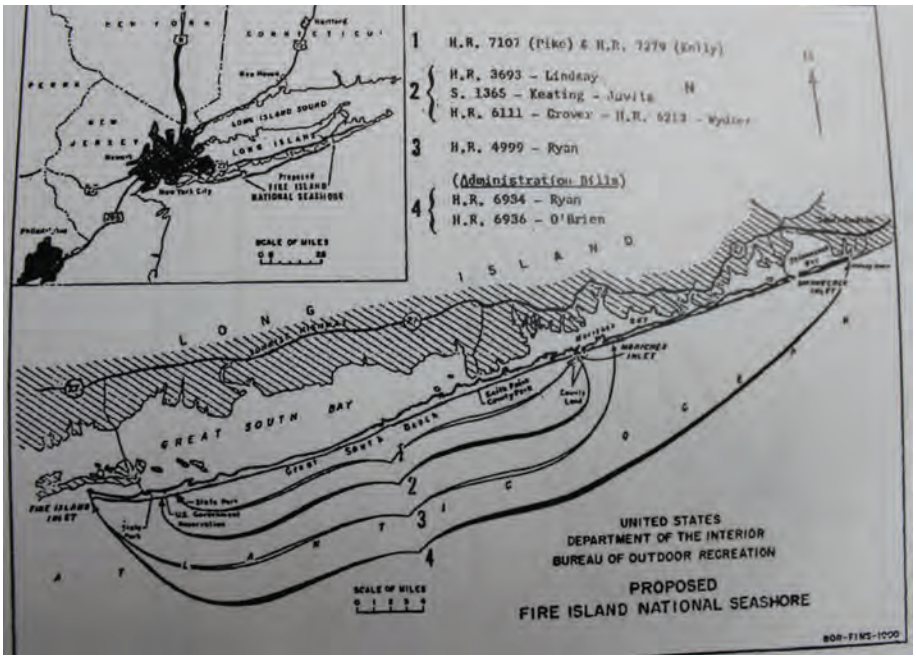


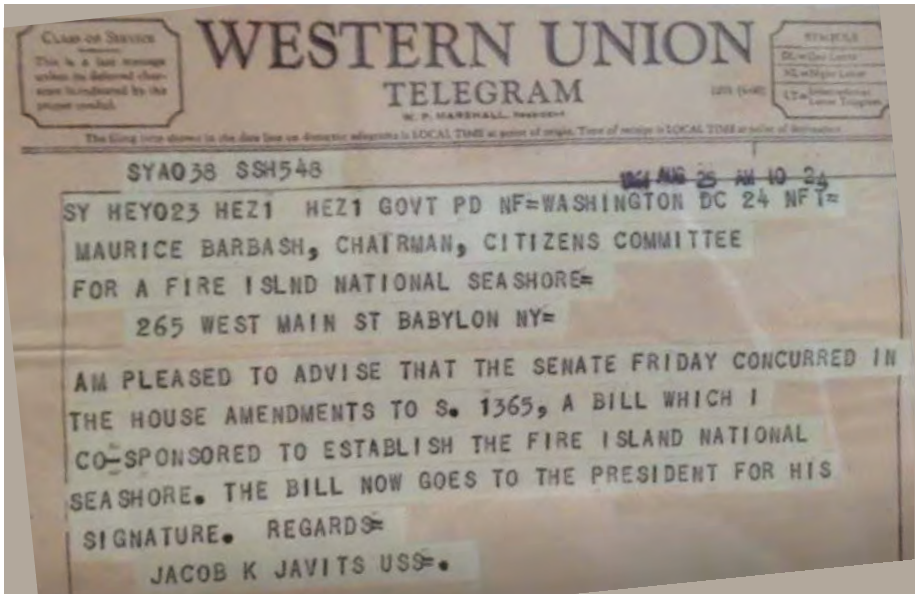
Figure 3-11. Plea by the Fire Island Voters Association to protest Robert Moses' highway across Fire Island (top right) (FIIS Archives – Rosenthal Collection).

Figure 3-12. Early 1960s advertisement placed in the Fire Island News for property owners and renters to fight Robert Moses and his proposed causeway through Fire Island (bottom right) (Kata).

Many of the provisions listed in the Department of the Interior's draft bill appeared in several other versions, such as 25-year tenancies for some of the acquired properties, proposed federal acquisition of the beaches, and permission for hunting and fishing within the seashore. Hearings to discuss these bills were held in September 1963 in Islip, New York, and April 1964 in Washington, D.C., and it was determined that the proposed 52-mile long seashore was too long.

The bill drafted by Congressman Otis G. Pike, Wainwright's successor in Congress, H.R. 7101, became the basic text for the bill that ultimately moved forward. The proposed seashore boundaries expanded approximately 26 miles from the easterly boundary of Robert Moses State Park to Moriches Inlet.[34] A revised version of Congressman Pike's bill passed the House of Representatives on August 24, 1964, and the Senate quickly approved the bill the following day (Figure3-14). Just over two weeks later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law on September 11, 1964.[35]




WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

SYA038 SSH548

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MAURICE BARBASH, CHAIRMAN, CITIZENS COMMITTEE
FOR A FIRE ISLND NATIONAL SEASHORE=
265 WEST MAIN ST BABYLON NY=

AM PLEASED TO ADVISE THAT THE SENATE FRIDAY CONCURRED IN
THE HOUSE AMENDMENTS TO S. 1365, A BILL WHICH I
CO-SPONSORED TO ESTABLISH THE FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL
SEASHORE. THE BILL NOW GOES TO THE PRESIDENT FOR HIS
SIGNATURE. REGARDS=
JACOB K JAVITS USS=.

Figure 3-13. In all, ten bills were discussed at Congressional hearings in 1964 to designate Fire Island as a national seashore. The total length varied in these bills, ranging from 26 miles to 52 miles in length. The National Park Service drafted their own bill, proposing making the national seashore 52 miles in length (FIIS Archives – FIIS 15884) (top right).

Figure 3-14. Senator Jacob Javits of New York, who worked closely with the Citizens Committee for a Fire Island National Seashore, sent this telegram to its chairman, Maurice Barbash, on August 25, 1964, informing him that the Senate passed the Congressional bill designating the Fire Island National Seashore (FIIS Archives) (bottom right).

ACT TO ESTABLISH THE FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

> *For the purpose of conserving and preserving for the use of future generations certain relatively unspoiled and undeveloped beaches, dunes, and other natural features... which possess high values to the Nation as examples of unspoiled areas of great natural beauty in close proximity to large concentrations of the urban population…*
> *Public Law* 88-587

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the Fire Island National Seashore encompassed the area from the easterly boundary of Robert Moses State Park eastward to Moriches Inlet and included all of Fire Island proper. The islands in the Great South Bay that were also included in the boundaries were Sexton Island, West Island, Hollins Island, Ridge Island, Pelican Island, Pattersquash Island, and Reeves Island along with other adjacent islands that "would lend themselves to the contiguity and reasonable administration within the national seashore."[36] The boundaries along the shorelines extended 1,000 feet into the Atlantic Ocean and 4,000 feet into the Great South Bay and Moriches Bay.[37] The island was split between the boundaries of two towns—the town of Islip and the town of Brookhaven—and within these towns on Fire Island there were 17 established communities. The 17 communities had thousands of developed lots, more than 2,500 houses, dozens of churches, commercial buildings, and other support structures and areas, including theaters, community halls, marinas, parks, recreational facilities, and at least one school. The areas outside of the communities included hundreds of acres of uninhabited natural zones composed of beaches, marshland, forests, dunes, swales, and wetlands. Scattered throughout these areas were also numerous illegal squatters that had constructed their own cabins and fishing shacks. Additionally, there was a large county park and large areas of county-owned beach already established on the island in 1964.

1964 LEGISLATIVE OBJECTIVES

The enabling legislation that created Fire Island National Seashore had two main objectives that were to serve as the backbone of its future management. First, to protect and conserve the seashore's natural resources, and second, to make the seashore available for public use.[38] There were several areas specifically listed in the legislation that were identified as priorities for natural resources protection. One was the Sunken Forest, which was to be preserved in its current condition without the addition of roads. Access was by the existing trails, and trails were to be added only where necessary to provide access. The second area highlighted for

protection was the eight-mile stretch of seashore on the western end of the island from the easterly boundary of the Brookhaven town park at Davis Park, in the town of Brookhaven, to the westerly boundary of the Smith Point County Park. Similarly, no roads were to be added to this stretch of seashore except what was necessary for park maintenance vehicles. No development was to occur in this section that was incompatible with the preservation of the flora and fauna.[39] Both the Sunken Forest and the eight-mile stretch of wilderness area on the western end of the island were to be preserved, in as natural a state as possible, for the enjoyment and use by the public.

To achieve these legislative objectives, the legislation authorized the Secretary of the Interior to acquire property within the boundaries of the national seashore, either by purchase, exchange, or donation. The Secretary would pay no more than fair market value (as determined by the Secretary) for lands acquired. Properties within the communities that had been built upon prior to July 1, 1963, otherwise considered as "improved," were exempt from acquisition. Properties that had buildings constructed after this date were defined as unimproved.

To carry out the purposes of the *act* the land within an eight-mile stretch on the western end of the island between Davis Park and Smith Point County Park was to be condemned and subsequently acquired by the National Park Service. This land was mostly uninhabited and essentially a wilderness zone. All property owners with structures in place would be allowed to retain tenancy to their property for a period of 25 years.

The Secretary of the Interior was directed to adopt zoning standards for use of the lands within the Fire Island National Seashore. The objectives of the standards were to prohibit new commercial and industrial uses, other than those consistent with the purpose of the Act; and promote the protection and development of land regulated by acreage, frontage, and setback requirements.[40] According to the 1964 Act, the Secretary of the Interior was further directed to approve zoning ordinances enacted by the local authorities (specifically, the towns of Islip and Brookhaven and the villages of Ocean Beach and Saltaire) as long as they conformed to the federal standards.[41]

Properties improved prior to July 1963 in the communities were exempt from condemnation by the federal government if the local zoning ordinance had been approved by the Secretary of the Interior. If the local authority did not maintain an ordinance that conformed with the federal regulations, the federal government could take by condemnation properties within the communities under the authority of the 1964 law.

"PROTECTION THROUGH DEVELOPMENT"—MASTER PLAN, 1965

While the Department of the Interior was drafting the federal zoning regulations, the National Park Service introduced their Master Plan for the new national seashore.[42] This plan was to guide the development of local ordinances and it included planning objectives, suggested uses for the area, proposed management practices, and protection guidelines for the resources on the island. The National Park Service focused on recreational use and preservation of the natural environment through a blending of the two, which is outlined in objectives for the area and for visitors use provided in the Master Plan.[43] A few of these objectives focused on limiting automobile use, add facilities for pedestrians, bicycles, and boat transportation, erosion control, protect natural resources, and protect the landscape from misuse.

1965 MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES

Visitor Use Objectives

- Develop the park to complement the natural environment.
- Limit vehicle access only for parking at the Smith Point areas.
- Make ferry service the main method of access.
- Use bicycles for recreation and as a means of travel through Fire Island.
- Provide facilities for private boats.
- Restrict vehicles on the island behind the dunes except for official use.
- Restrict vehicles on the beach during heavy visitor use.
- Provide facilities for hiking and concessioners.
- Develop facilities for the protection of the visitor.
- Permit hunting.
- Possibly establish visitor use capacity restrictions.
- Work with south shore communities in assuring the provision of facilities to and from the island.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle access across the length of Fire Island.[44]

Objectives for the Area

- Protection through development: resources would be planned to be consistent with natural resources protection.
- Design excellence: to optimize visitor use; to protect natural resources; plan for visitor circulation via bicycle or by foot; design to complement varied character of the natural scene.
- Maintenance and protection to ensure longevity of facilities.
- Varied maintenance techniques for the roadless environment.
- Research to support management programs.
- Shore erosion control.
- Management of bay waters to increase the productive capacity of the fish and wildlife resources for both commercial and recreational uses.
- Protect the bay resources from adverse uses.
- Protect and preserve the natural areas for optimum recreational use.
- Make Fire Island part of the total recreational environment of Long Island.
- Eliminate vehicle use in the back dune area except for official use.
- Work with authorities to protect property and residents of Fire Island.
- Cooperate with communities and stakeholders.
- Maintain collections for interpretation.
- Restore the landscape by eliminating misuse by man.
- Adhere to land acquisition priorities as an aid to logical development and resource protection.[45]

The 1964 legislation required that no roads be built in the Sunken Forest or within the eight-mile length of seashore east of Davis Park, as one of the core planning objectives was to maintain the roadless character of the island. The impetus for protecting the roadless character of Fire Island may have stemmed in part from the principle of roadlessness found in the Wilderness Act, which had passed on September 8, 1964, one week before the Fire Island legislation was passed. The Wilderness Act was "*To establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the permanent good of the whole people, and for other purposes.*" Wilderness was defined as an area of undeveloped Federal land. . .without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions."[46] Permanent roads were prohibited uses in designated wilderness areas (except for minimum requirements to administer an area). The Wilderness Act required that "there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area." Within ten years of its passing, the Secretary of the Interior was to review every roadless area of 5,000 contiguous acres or more in the national parks and other units of the national park system and every roadless island within the parks, and report to the President his recommendation as to the suitability of each area or island for preservation as wilderness.[47]

One of these roadless areas within the national park system with 5,000 contiguous acres was found within the Fire Island National Seashore. The National Park Service sought to administer the land they now had authority over as a potential wilderness area. Maintaining the roadless character within the eight-mile stretch east of Davis Park corresponded to both the Fire Island National Seashore Act and the Wilderness Act.

Soon after the national seashore was established, permits were required to travel by vehicle within the town of Brookhaven, the villages of Saltaire and Ocean Beach, and across federal property. With separate permits required for the differing authorities, travel through the island from one town to the next and across federal land was nearly impossible by vehicle. Circulation between the communities was limited to bicycles, water taxis, and pedestrians. The 1965 Master Plan for the seashore strictly stated that no roads would be built along the length of the island.[48]

One of the top priorities of the National Park Service was the acquisition of the Sunken Forest, and the eight-mile long wilderness area, which extended from Davis Park to Smith Point County Park.[49] The National Park Service identified additional properties outside the communities that were suitable for development for recreational uses, but they were of much lower priority than the wilderness.[50] Land acquisition throughout the barrier island was to protect against encroachment, referred to as protection through development. When the Master Plan was adopted, the National Park Service had already begun acquisition within the eight-mile

wilderness area on the eastern end of the island but had purchased only five acres. The first land purchase by the National Park Service occurred on March 10, 1965, with the acquisition of 0.183 acres near Whalehouse Point, from owner Albert Brower (Figure 3-15).[51]

The Master Plan promoted a highly conscious use and careful design of the park landscape. The National Park Service determined it was important to blend new facilities and improvements with the environment instead of dominating it. The plan called for small structures to conform to the surrounding vegetation and for larger structures to avoid symmetry (Figure 3-16). New resources were "to love the land rather than to lord the land, to invite the visitor rather than to impress him," and they should "maintain a spirit of lively enjoyment."[52]

This concept of blending in with the environment was proposed for the development of 12 areas for visitor use and recreational development (Figure 3-16).

Proposed construction at most of the 12 proposed visitor use locations was for ferry terminals, boat docks, beach areas, interpretative trails, camping areas, orientation facilities, bathhouses, ranger offices, and maintenance spaces (Figure 3-17). The following year, in

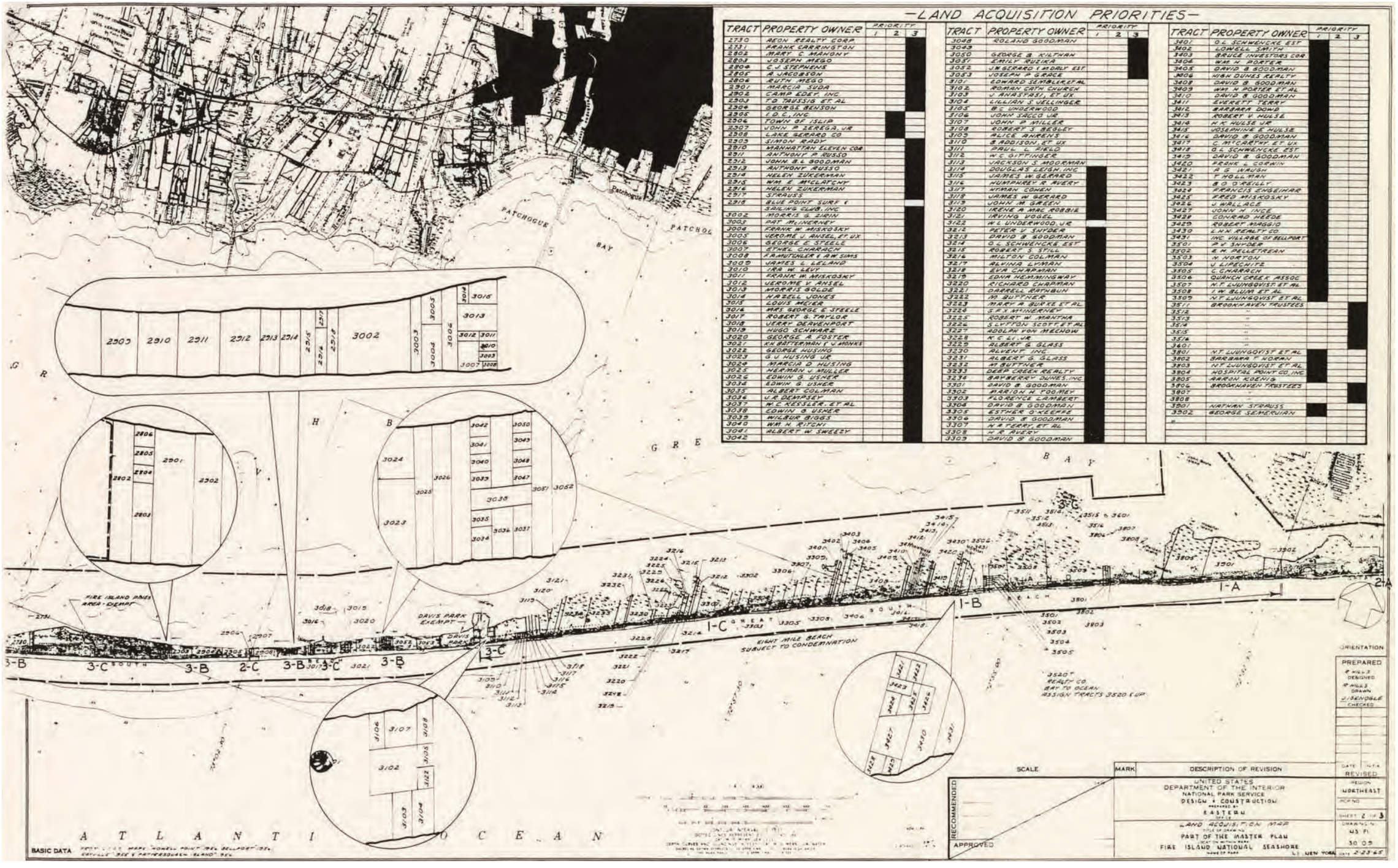
Proposed Visitor Areas for Fire Island National Seashore in 1965

- Moriches Inlet
- East Lead
- Pattersquash
- Smith Point East
- Smith Point West
- Pelican Island
- Whalehouse Point
- Long Cove
- Watch Hill
- Talisman
- Sailors Haven
- West Beach



Figure 3-16. Photograph of Watch Hill visitor center exhibiting the asymmetry required of large buildings planned by the National Park Service in the 1960s, specified in the Master Plan of 1965 (NPS).

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—LAND ACQUISITION PRIORITIES—

TRACT	PROPERTY OWNER	PRIORITY 1	2	3
2730	AEON REALTY CORP			■
2731	FRANK CARRINGTON			■
2802	MARY C MAHONY			■
2803	JOSEPH MEGO			■
2804	C J STEPHENS			■
2805	E MAGNUSSON			■
2806	RUTH MEGO			■
2901	MARCIA SUDA			■
2902	CAMP EDEY INC			■
2903	F D TAUSSIG ET AL			■
2904	GEORGE BENSON			■
2905	L.D.C. INC		■	
2906	TOWN OF ISLIP		■	
2907	JOHN P ZEREGA, JR			■
2908	LAKE GERARD CO			■
2909	SIMON GRADY			■
2910	MANHATTAN ELEVEN COR			■
2911	ANTHONY P RUSSO			■
2912	JOHN B & GOODMAN			■
2913	ANTHONY RUSSO			■
2914	HELEN ZUKERMAN			■
2915	WM. E MCLATCHY			■
2916	HELEN ZUKERMAN			■
2917	STRAUSS			■
2918	BLUE POINT SURF & SAILING CLUB, INC			■
3002	MORRIS G. ZIRIN			■
3003	PAT. MCINERNEY			■
3004	FRANK W MISKOSKY			■
3005	JEROME V. ANSEL, ET UX			■
3006	GEORGE E. STEELE			■
3007	ETHEL CHARACH			■
3008	F.MUTCHLER & A.M. SIMS			■
3009	JAMES C. LELAND			■
3010	IRA W. LEVY			■
3011	FRANK W. MISKOSKY			■
3012	JEROME V. ANSEL			■
3013	MORRIS GOLDE			■
3014	H.ASELL JONES			■
3015	LOUIS MEIER			■
3016	MRS. GEORGE E. STEELE			■
3017	ROBERT G. TAYLOR			■
3018	UTERT DERHENPORT			■
3019	HUGO SCHWARZ			■
3020	GEORGE A. FOSTER			■
3021	K.H BATTERMAN & V.MONKS			■
3022	GEORGE HUSING			■
3023	G.U. HUSING, JR.			■
3024	MARCIA D. HUSING			■
3025	HERMAN J. MULLER			■
3026	EDWIN G. USHER			■
3034	EDWIN G. USHER			■
3035	ALBERT COLMAN			■
3036	J.R. DEMPSEY			■
3037	W.C. KESSLER, ET AL			■
3038	EDWIN G. USHER			■
3039	MAJOR BIGGS			■
3040	WM. H. RITCHI			■
3041	ALBERT W. SWEELY			■
3042				■

TRACT	PROPERTY OWNER	PRIORITY 1	2	3
3048	ROLAND GOODMAN			■
3049				■
3050	GEORGE G. KILTHAN			■
3051	EMILY RUZIKA			■
3052	J.W.GERARD & M.DALY EST.			■
3053	JOSEPH P GRACE			■
3101	EDWARD SEMBLER, ET AL			
3102	ROMAN CATH CHURCH			
3103	J. ANASTASI, ET UX			
3104	GILLIAN S. SELLINGER			
3105	R.C. UNDERWOOD			
3106	JOHN SACCO UX			
3107	JOHN P MILLER			
3108	ROBERT S. BEGLEY			
3109	ALICE AHRENS			
3110	G ADDISON, ET UX			
3111	PAUL L. FIELD			
3112	W.C. GITTINGER			
3113	JACKSON S. MOORMAN			
3114	DOUGLAS LEIGH, INC			■
3115	JAMES W. GERARD			■
3116	HUMPHREY R AVERY			■
3117	NYMAN COHEN			■
3118	JAMES W GERARD			■
3119	JOHN M GREEN			■
3120	IRENE A MAC ROBBIE			■
3121	IRVING VOGEL			■
3122	W.L UNDERWOOD, JR.			■
3213	PETER V. SNYDER			■
3213	DAVID & GOODMAN			■
3214	O.L SCHWENCKE EST			■
3215	ROBERT S. STILL			■
3216	MILTON COLMAN			■
3217	ALVINA LYMAN			■
3218	ETA CHARMAN			■
3219	EDNA HEMMINGWAY			■
3220	RICHARD CHAPMAN			■
3221	DARRELL BATHBUN			■
3222	JAMES RUTTNER			■
3223	MARY A BURKE ET AL			■
3224	S.F.X MINERNEY			■
3225	ROBERT W MANTHA			■
3226	SLY TTON SCOTT ET AL			■
3227	ADOLPH VON MECHOW			■
3228	K.C.L.I. JR.			■
3229	ALBERT G GLASS			■
3230	ALVENT INC			■
3231	ALBERT G GLASS			■
3232	M.GUTTNER			■
3233	DEEP CREEK REALTY			■
3234	BAYBERRY DUNES, INC			■
3301	DAVID & GOODMAN			■
3302	MARION H. FOLMEY			■
3303	FLORENCE LAMBERT			■
3304	DAVID & GOODMAN			■
3305	ESTHER O'KEEFFE			■
3306	DAVID & GOODMAN			■
3307	H.A PEARY, ET AL			■
3308	H.R. AVERY			■
3309	DAVID & GOODMAN			■

TRACT	PROPERTY OWNER	PRIORITY 1	2	3
3401	O.L. SCHWENCKE EST	■		
3402	LOWELL SMITH	■		
3403	BRUCE INVESTORS COR	■		
3404	WM H PORTER	■		
3405	DAVID & GOODMAN	■		
3406	HIGH DUNES REALTY	■		
3408	DAVID & GOODMAN	■		
3409	WM. H PORTER ET AL	■		
3410	DAVID & GOODMAN	■		
3411	EVERETT TERRY	■		
3412	BARBARA DONO	■		
3413	ROBERT V. HULSE	■		
3414	H K HULSE JR	■		
3415	JOSEPHINE E HULSE	■		
3416	DAVID & GOODMAN	■		
3417	C. MCCARTHY ET UX	■		
3418	O.L SCHWENCKE EST	■		
3419	DAVID & GOODMAN	■		
3420	FRANK L CORWIN	■		
3421	A C WALSH	■		
3422	T HOLLMAN	■		
3423	B.O O'REILLY	■		
3424	FRANCIS ENGEIHAR	■		
3425	FRED WISKOSKY	■		
3426	J WALLACE	■		
3427	JOHN H INCE	■		
3428	CONRAD HEEDE	■		
3429	ROBERT MAGGIO	■		
3430	L.N.N. REALTY CO	■		
3431	INC. VILLAGE OF BELLPORT	■		
3501	P.V SNYDER	■		
3502	E.M. PELLETREAN	■		
3503	N NORTON	■		
3504	J. LIPSCHITZ	■		
3505	G CHARACH	■		
3506	QUANCH CREEK ASSOC	■		
3507	N.T LJUNGQVIST ET AL	■		
3508	I.W BLUM ET AL	■		
3509	N.T LJUNGQVIST ET AL	■		
3511	BROOKHAVEN TRUSTEES			■
3512	"			■
3513	"			■
3514	"			■
3515	"			■
3516	"			■
3601	"			■
3801	N.T LJUNGQVIST ET AL	■		
3802	BARBARA T NORAN	■		
3803	N.T LJUNGQVIST ET AL	■		
3804	HOSPITAL POINT CO. INC	■		
3805	AARON KOENIG	■		
3806	BROOKHAVEN TRUSTEES			■
3807	"			■
3808	"			■
3501	NATHAN STRAUSS	■		
3502	GEORGE SEMERJIAN	■		

Figure 3-15. Plan of the eastern half of Fire Island showing all of the tracts and their listed owners. The three columns next to the owner names are priority level—1, 2, or 3. Most of the properties shown as priority 1 were in the proposed wilderness area east of Davis Park (FIIS Archives – FIIS 16037).

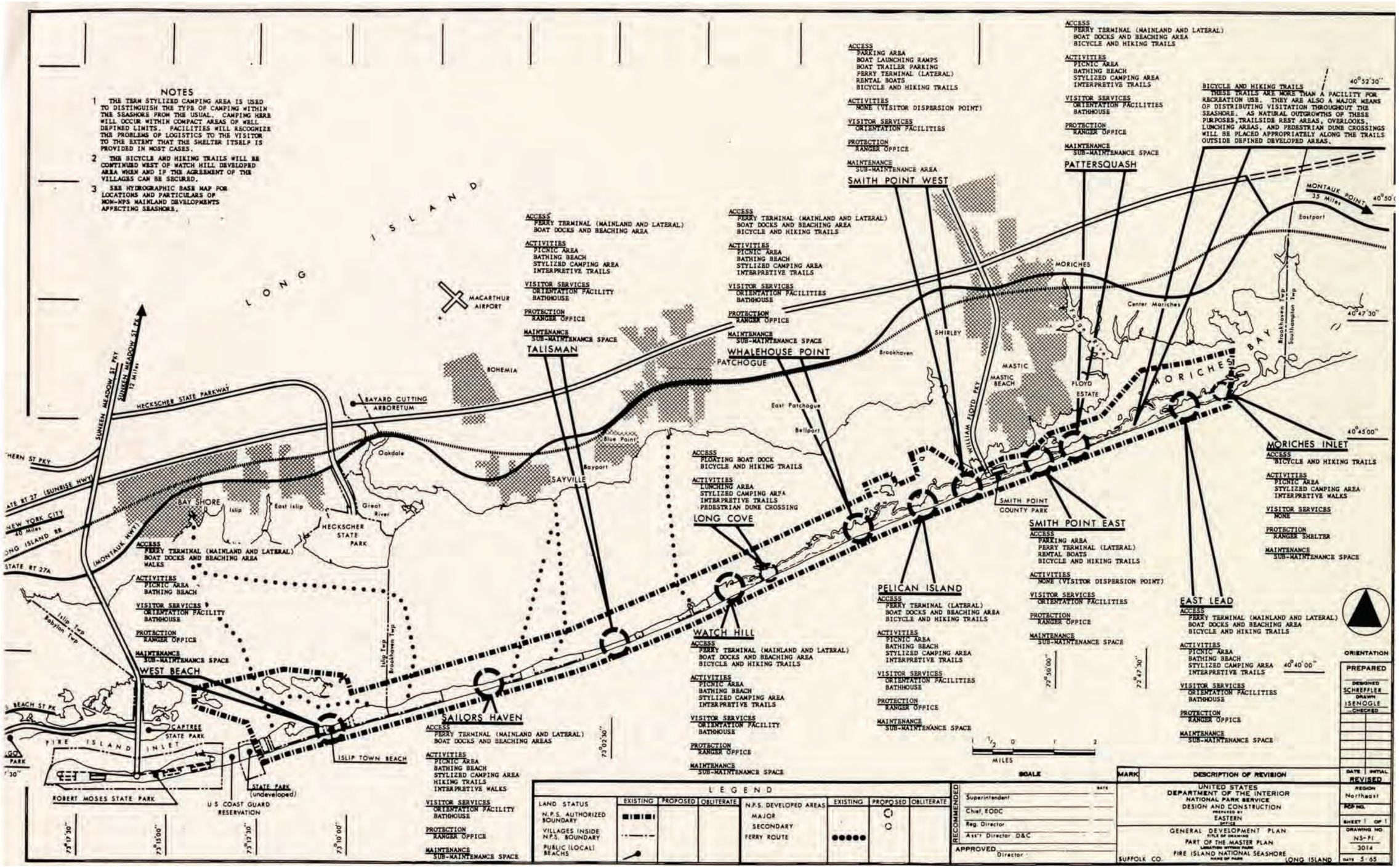


Figure 3-17. Dated May 1965, this drawing depicts the locations of the 12 proposed visitor centers across Fire Island National Seashore. The map also displays access, including ferry routes, proposed activities, and visitor services (FIIS Archives – FIIS 16037).

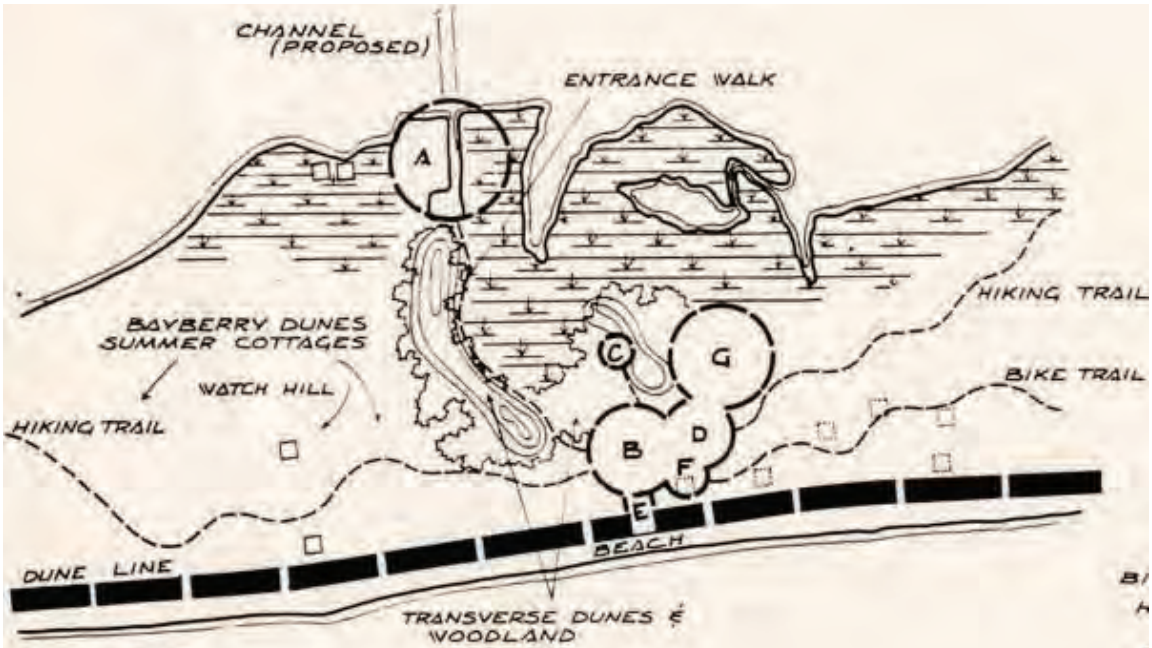
the Spring of 1966, after the Master Plan was developed, Secretary Udall broke ground at Watch Hill in a location adjacent to the wilderness area, to mark the beginning of National Park Service construction on Fire Island within the new Fire Island National Seashore (Figure 3-18).[53]

Around the time that construction of National Park Service facilities started at Watch Hill, plans began forming for a second visitor area, at Sailors Haven.[54] This area was one of the more important donations to the National Park Service, which was made by the Sunken Forest Preserve, Inc., on April 14, 1966.[55] At the time, Sailors Haven had served as a yacht club and covered 36 acres, surrounded by the Sunken Forest (Figure 3-19). The rest of the Sunken Forest was donated to the National Park Service a few weeks later.[56]

FEDERAL ZONING STANDARDS OF 1966

While the National Park Service was working on developing the lands it had acquired to date, the federal zoning standards for Fire Island National Seashore were being drafted. This zoning document was finalized in April 1966, at the same time that construction started for Watch Hill. The most controversial action of the zoning regulations were the rules regarding condemnation. The regulations allowed the National Park Service to condemn property within the wilderness area between Davis Park and Smith Point County Park; any building constructed after July 1, 1963; any improved properties within the communities if the local zoning authority did not have an applicable zoning ordinance satisfactory to the Secretary; or any property for which the owner did not comply with federal zoning requirements and local zoning ordinance, regardless date of construction.[57]

The regulations defined two districts within the national seashore to help apply the zoning appropriately to different geographic zones: a Seashore District and a Developed Areas District. The Seashore District included all areas outside of the communities' boundaries and the Developed Areas District included the areas within the bounds of the communities. Properties within the Seashore District could not be utilized for the expansion of commercial areas, and the establishment or expansion of apartment or multiunit dwellings was not permitted. Existing structures within the Seashore District could not be improved upon, altered, or moved unless they complied with the acreage, frontage, setback requirements, height limitations, and maximum lot occupancy requirements contained in a local zoning ordinance approved by the Secretary. Finally, if a local zoning authority provided a variance (or exception) to a property owner which allowed the owner to modify their buildings, the National Park Service had to be notified of the variance. These properties could be subject to condemnation if they failed to conform to the zoning regulations.[58]



WATCH HILL

BASIC INFORMATION

Salt marsh and major transverse dune area; wooded area. Shallow channel and basin partly dredged and fill partially made on side of basin. Large pile of sand remains to be disposed of.

Item A:

Water access facility.
- Lateral ferry dock
- Mainland ferry dock
- Boat docks
- Boat beaching area

Item B:

Bathhouse facility
Ranger office-visitor contact station

Item C:

Interpretive facility and walks

Item D:

Picnic area

Item E:

Dune crossing (pedestrian and vehicular)

Item F:

Bike rentals and racks

Item G:

Overnight shelters
Plaza for evening programs

Utilities

Water System
Sewage Disposal System
Radio
Telephone (future)
Electric Generator

CHARACTER OF DEVELOPMENT

Woodland and well-developed transverse dunes, circumscribed by marsh, increase the potential interest of this area to the visitor.

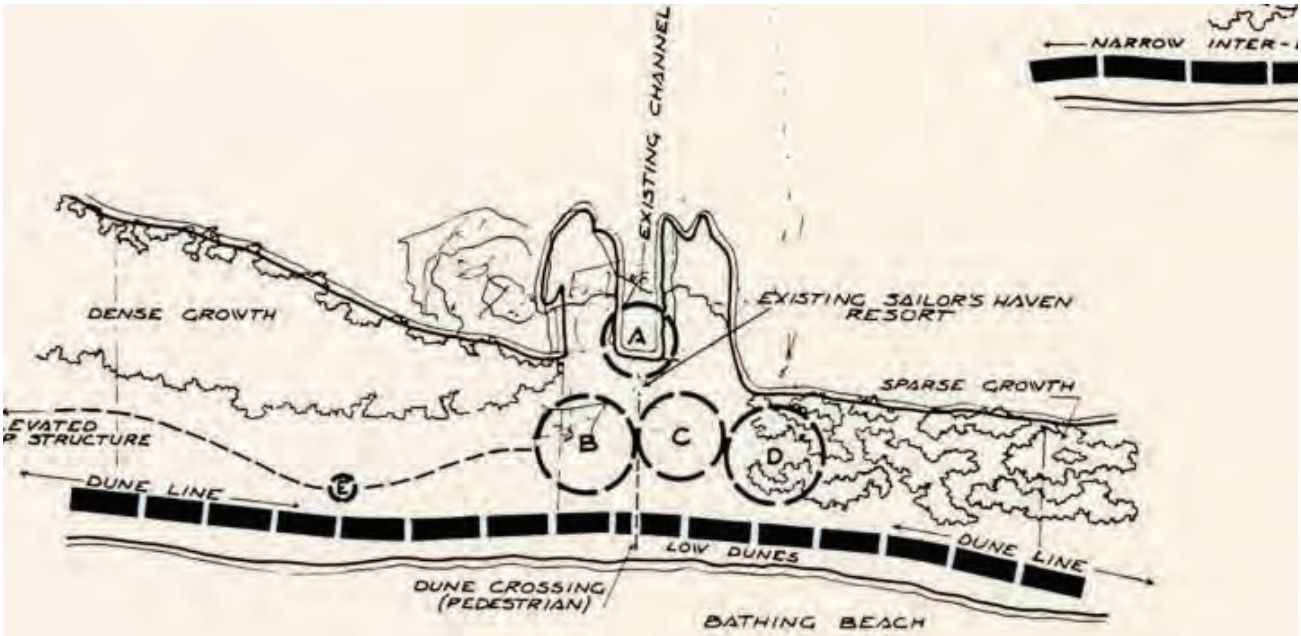
The entrance walks from the water access facility will set the mood of the area. Dense woodland on the steep dune slope on one side and marshland on the other with the walk separating the two, here and there penetrating a protruding finger of woodland and sometimes completely in marsh. Contrast in land forms and plant materials is extreme. Little contrast is required between structures and the natural scene. Harmony with the natural features should be sought without trying to achieve a transition between structure and landscape.

DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

The existing partially completed boat basin is ideally situated to serve as the water access facility. Since this is the westernmost developed area in the Seashore's eight mile natural area the possible need for larger capacities, as compared to similar developed areas in the facilities, will be considered.

The intensive use facilities will be completely situated in the interdune swale.

Figure 3-18. 1965 Master Plan--Watch Hill Character of Development: "The entrance walks from the water access facility will set the mood of the area. Dense woodland on the steep dune slope on one side and marshland on the other with the walk separating the two here and there penetrating a protruding finger of woodland and sometimes completely in marsh. Contrast in land forms and plant materials is extreme" (FIIS Archives).



SAILOR'S HAVEN

BASIC INFORMATION

Site badly disturbed by existing development which includes docks, dock building, apartment building and boardwalk with pedestrian dune crossing. These appear substandard for national seashore purposes, especially the apartment house, and should be replaced by new construction.

DEVELOPMENT ITEMS

Item A:

Water access facility.
Ferry terminal - mainland
Ferry terminal - lateral
Boat docks
Boat beaching area

Item B:

Bathhouse

Item C:

Picnic area

Item D:

Overnight shelters

Item E:

Interpretive facility

Item F:

Dune crossing-pedestrian

Item G:

Ranger office-visitor contact station

CHARACTER OF DEVELOPMENT

Essence of development should be one of welcome. Visitor's route of approach will be on axis of development, presenting an almost immediate view of the facilities. The view presented should not act as a stop, but as an invitation to entry and exploration.

DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS

Comparatively narrow site and relatively concentrated development will demand ingenious siting and arrangement of elements.

Design should exploit the following physical characteristics of the site:

1. Extensive area already disturbed.
2. Existing vegetation, dense on one side of the axis; sparse on the other.
3. Dune systems, foredune and secondary.

Greater bulk of Item "B" might be screened by dense growth from Sunken Forest side.

Modular grid complex of Item "D" can be woven into and through sparser growth on the east grove side.

Development will serve function of receiving visitors almost immediately upon landing from ferry and then directing them any of three ways:

1. To the beach
2. To the overnight shelters
3. To the Sunken Forest

The picnic area is sited to serve visitors using any of the other facilities or activities.

The development provides direct access to the Sunken Forest Preserve. This primary function should not be overshadowed by the other functions of the development.

Utilities

Water Supply
Sewage Disposal
Radio
Telephone
Electric Generator

SUPERINTENDENT
CHIEF E.O.D.C
REGIONAL DIRECTO
ASSISTANT DI

Figure 3-19. 1965 Master Plan, Character of Development for Sailors Haven: "Essence of development should be one of welcome. Visitor's route of approach will be on axis of development, presenting an almost immediate view of the facilities. The view presented should not act as a stop, but as an invitation to entry and exploration" (FIIS Archives).

The towns and villages on Fire Island did permit a high number of variances on Fire Island following the creation of federal zoning standards in 1966. One of the major problems in the zoning regulations was that they required properties to be built on a minimum size lot; however, many lots had already been subdivided to the point where the lots were of substandard size. Shortly after these zoning standards were published, Suffolk County had determined that 90 percent of the lots on Fire Island were smaller than the minimum standard. Preventing property owners from exercising the right to build on their lots would have been considered a taking, which would have required both legal action and compensation. The local authorities were not inclined to take on those battles, especially as the federal government was not enforcing the standards.[59]

1966–1975: PROPOSED PLANS, MODIFICATIONS, AND ACQUISITIONS BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The first few years following the legislation creating the Fire Island National Seashore were focused on acquiring land for the national seashore, and on developing and designing the improvements and visitor facilities that had been proposed in the 1965 Master Plan. These improvements included transportation changes to allow more visitor access. The changes included new vehicle regulations (such as days and times for permitted travel) and additional ferry routes. Examples of these proposed improvements can be seen at Smith Point County Park, including the addition of a ferry terminal (Figure 3-20), the Watch Hill area (Figure 3-21), and the Talisman area, which is approximately three miles west of Watch Hill. The National Park Service also prepared plans to improve island-wide access through foot trails and bicycle trails, and construction of additional amenities such as bathing and camping facilities. Most of the construction projects were not executed.

The National Park Service was able to implement some of these improvements in the first years of the operation of Fire Island National Seashore because it was able to obtain large sections of land across the entire island. However, many people expressed frustration with what they saw as the lack of accomplishment by the National Park Service during these early years, seeing how little land had been acquired overall. Threats of continued encroachment and further private development of the island remained, regardless of the presence of the National Park Service. In 1972, 14 property owners sued the Department of the Interior because they felt the National Park Service was not controlling development as it should. The court determined that it was not the responsibility of the federal government to control development within the communities, but rather, it was the responsibility of the towns and villages. This court ruling forced the National Park Service to look more closely at ways this agency could acquire additional undeveloped lands in order to prevent future construction and development.

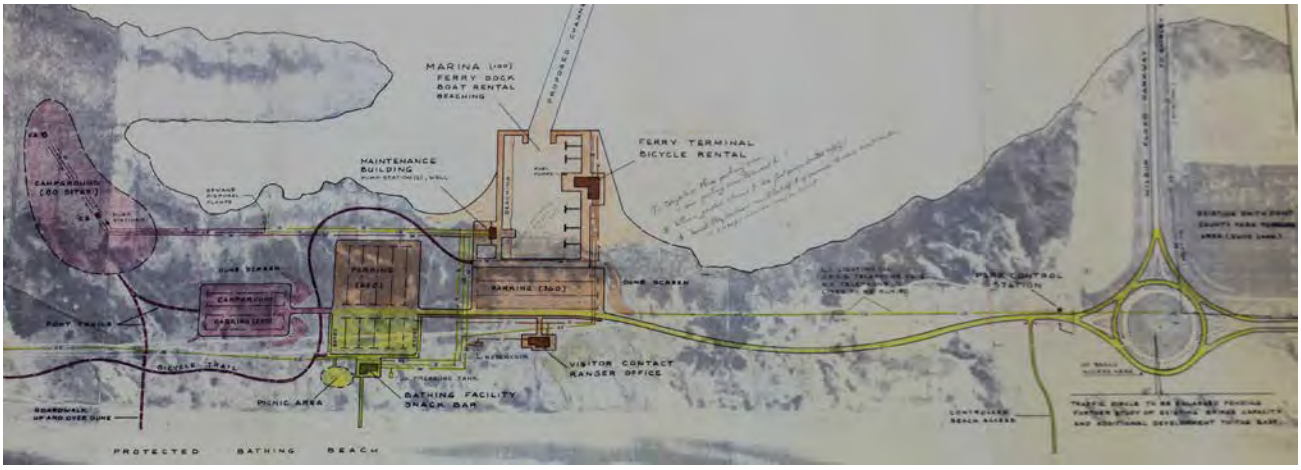


Figure 3-20. This schematic drawing for the Smith Point area on the east end of the island shows the addition of the ferry terminal and marina, parking for over 800 cars, a visitor contact station, a campground with 80 sites and associated parking for 200, bicycle, and foot trails, a picnic area, a bathing facility, and a snack bar (FIIS Archives – FIIS 15066).

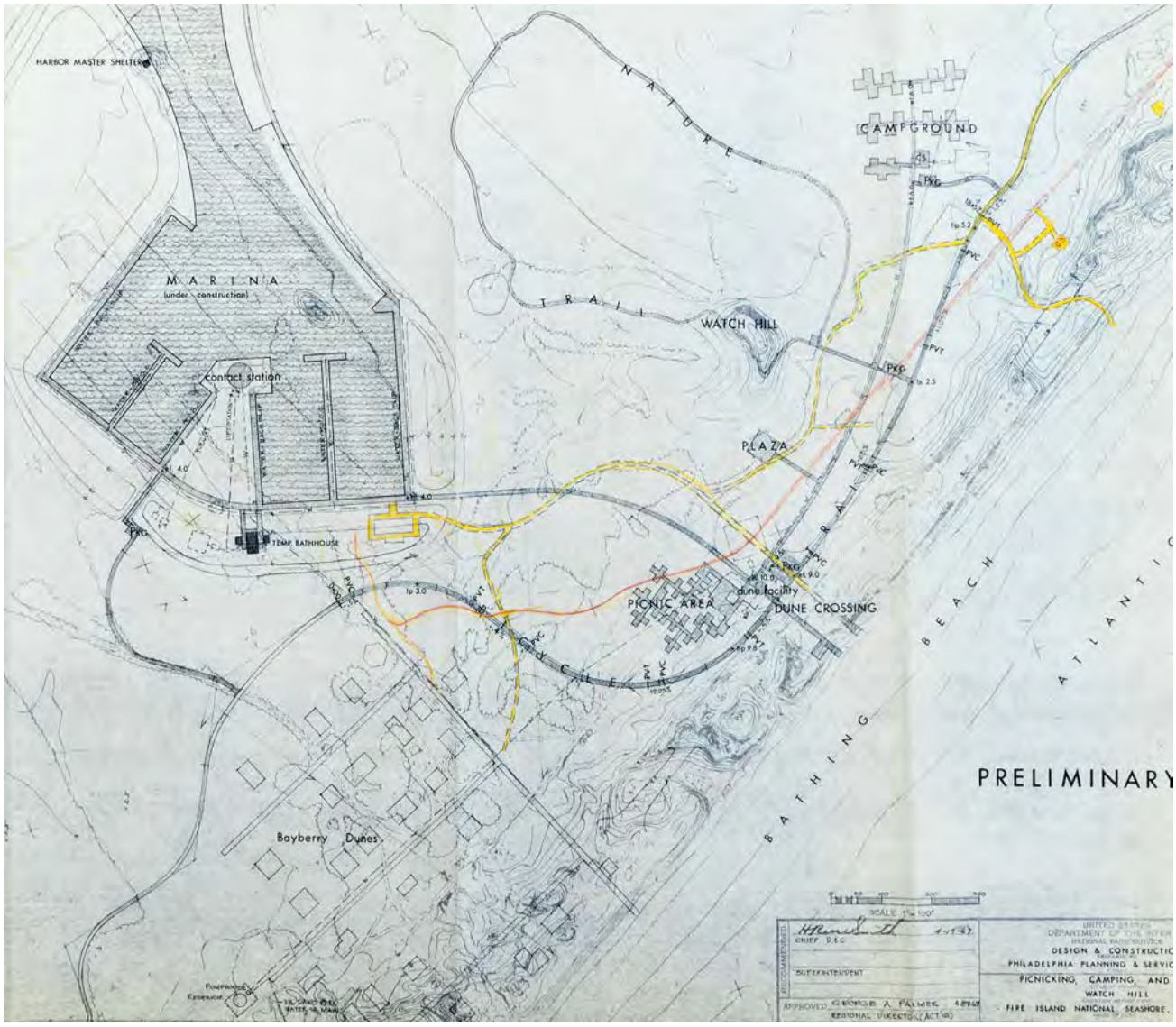


Figure 3-21. Designs for camping, trails, and picnic area for Watch Hill in April 1967. The existing cottages in Bayberry Dunes are depicted on this plan (FIIS Archives – FIIS 15081_001).

Between 1964 and 1974, the Fire Island National Seashore consisted of only 2,733 acres of federal land. Nearly 67 percent of this land had been acquired prior to 1970 and most of it lay within the eight-mile stretch between Davis Park and Smith Point County Park.[60] The National Park Service had also acquired a tract between Atlantique and Robbins Rest, land between Robbins Rest and Ocean Beach, the Sunken Forest, Sailors Haven, the Carrington Tract, Talisman/Barrett Beach, and the Watch Hill area (Figure 3-22).[61] By the early 1970s the National Park Service managed approximately 31 percent of all lands within the Fire Island National Seashore boundaries. The rest was privately owned and was managed by the towns and villages. Of this 31 percent, the federal government had purchased, or received through donation, 2,792 acres. In addition to these donations and others, the National Park Service managed 3,151 acres in an easement from New York State that included lands from the mean high tide seaward 1,000 feet, which included lands underwater.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN, 1975–1978

During the 1960s and most of the 1970s, Fire Island National Seashore did not have an approved General Management Plan, although the National Park Service had been completing various improvements and construction projects across the island without such a plan. One reason for the delay was the need to complete the research that the National Park Service felt was required before having an appropriate management strategy in place. This research included studies of both the natural and the cultural environments. Studies were conducted of the geology, landforms, and geomorphology of the Fire Island National Seashore, and descriptions and surveys to identify and catalog the existing flora and fauna. Descriptions of the cultural, economic, and social environments were also compiled and analyzed to develop suitable management practices.[62] Some of this work was still in the planning stages and other studies were still in progress while the General Management Plan was being drafted.

In 1975, with some of the research completed, the National Park Service prepared the draft general management plan. This initial version of the plan removed the western communities from the plan boundaries and focused on recreational development rather than natural resource protection. As such, it included a plan to provide a paved bicycle path between Point O'Woods and Moriches Inlet.[63] This first draft of the plan was widely opposed.[64] A second draft was produced in 1976. This version of the plan introduced a dune district, which was also not well received. It was thought that a dune district was imposing on the residents' private property rights. A third version was prepared in 1977, which became the final General Management Plan approved in 1978. The final plan reduced private property regulation, and instead, enhanced the protection of natural resources on federal property. With this final version of the plan the National Park Service

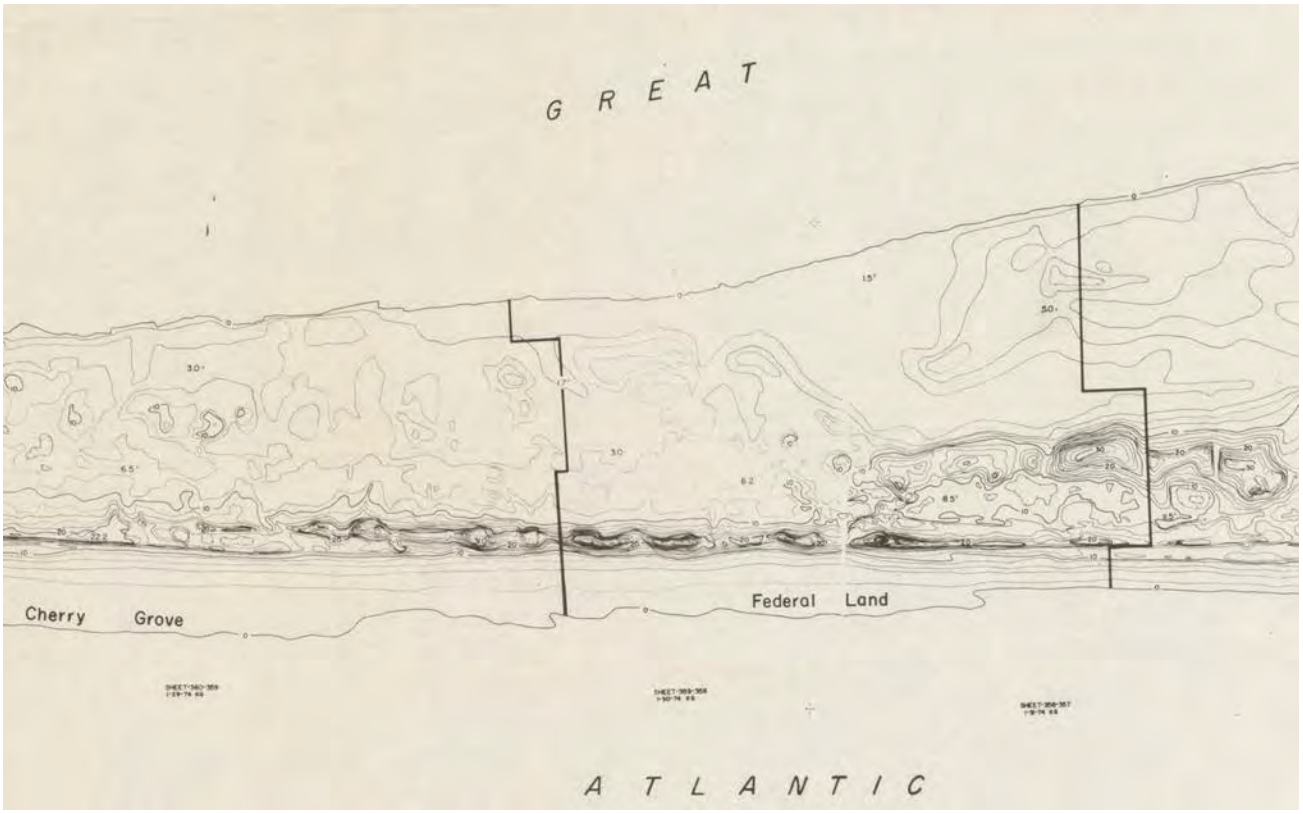


Figure 3-22. 1974 topographic map depicting federal property east of Cherry Grove and west of Fire Island Pines. Frank Carrington sold his 6-acre tract to the National Park Service in 1969 (FIIS Archives – FIIS 15202B).

realigned its objectives with the original 1964 legislation more closely, especially for the wilderness area between Watch Hill and Smith Point County Park:

> No development or plan for the convenience of visitors shall be undertaken therein which would be incompatible with the preservation of the flora and fauna or the physiographic conditions now prevailing, and every effort shall be exerted to maintain and preserve this section of the seashore . . . in as nearly their present state and condition as possible.[65]

As part of this realignment of the plan, the National Park Service reduced the number of visitor areas from 12 proposed in 1965 to two in 1978.

The managing framework of the 1978 plan divided Fire Island National Seashore into five individual management units; provided land use maps for the entire national seashore; and prepared land classifications of the national seashore. These actions were to guide the National Park Service to best determine levels of protection, development, and interpretation of the island. The plan provided model zoning regulations for the zoning authorities of the towns of Islip and Brookhaven and the villages of Ocean Beach and Saltaire to use in developing their own ordinances, which required the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. The plan also addressed proposed vehicle regulation updates for the national seashore. Finally, the plan included land acquisition maps listing priority levels for lands the National Park Service intended to acquire and from whom they would be acquired. The management plan is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections, beginning with management units.

MANAGEMENT UNITS

Fire Island National Seashore's five management units, which were centered on specific visitor uses, were: the Lighthouse unit, the Sunken Forest unit, the Watch Hill unit, the High Dune Management unit, and the Moriches area unit (Figure 3-23).[66] Each of the five units had its own distinct objectives, goals, proposed uses, and proposed facilities (both new and modifications to existing facilities). By the time this draft management plan was written, the National Park Service had obtained more than 6,000 acres within the national seashore, more than double its holdings from 1975.[67] Federal land was disbursed within the boundary, but it was more concentrated within the Sunken Forest unit, the Watch Hill unit, and the High Dune Management unit.

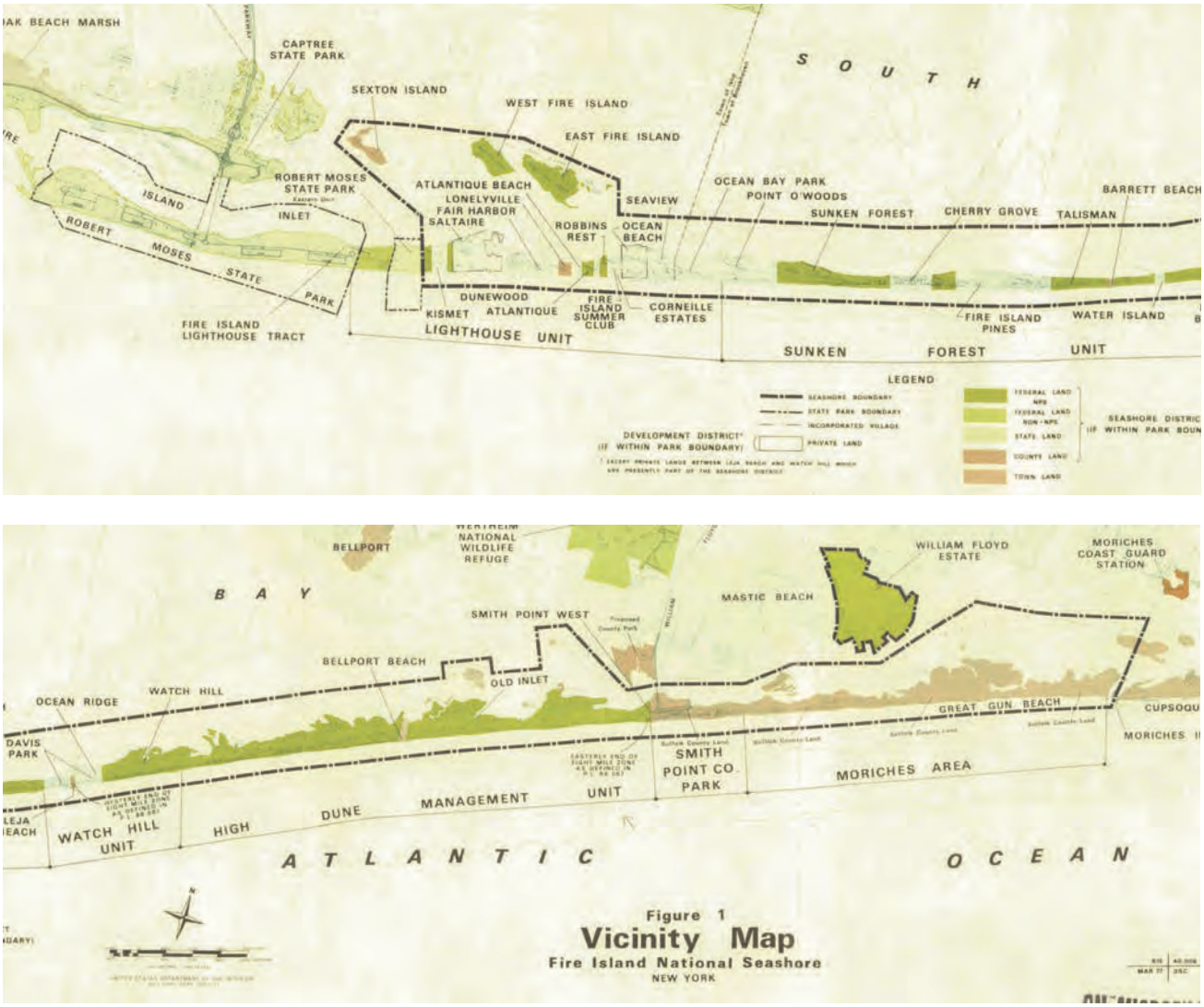


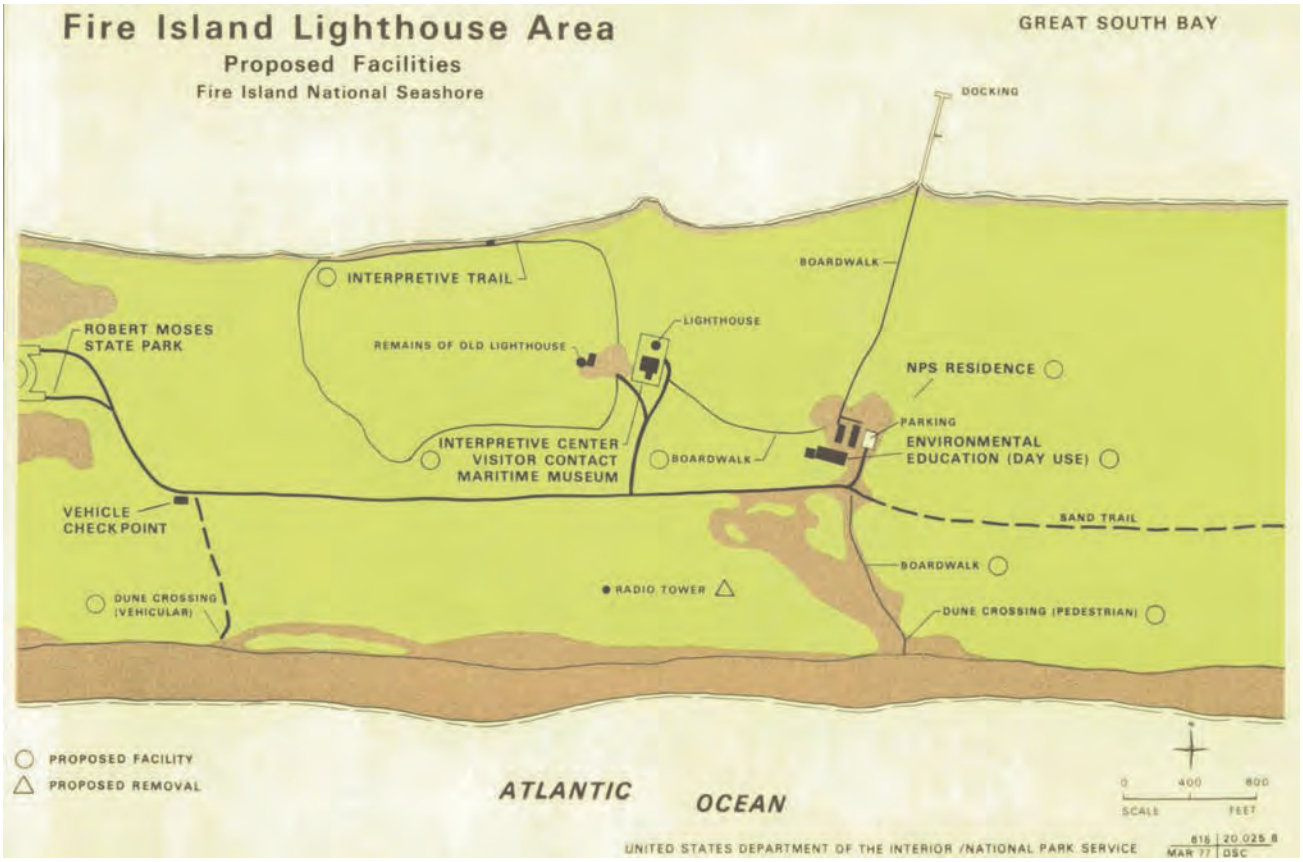
Figure 3-23. The 1977 General Management Plan divided Fire Island National Seashore into five management units, the Lighthouse unit, the Sunken Forest unit, the Watch Hill unit, the High Dune Management unit, and the Moriches area unit. Each unit had its own objectives, goals, proposed uses, and proposed facilities. Top: west section of map. Bottom: east section of map (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

Lighthouse unit: This westernmost area was to be a place of historical interpretation and the plan proposed the addition of a residence/ranger station, maintenance building, and interpretative trail (Figures 2-24 and 3-25).[68]

Sunken Forest unit: Objectives for this unit were the protection of the maritime holly forests; to manage as a center for natural resource education; decrease overnight use by boaters; and to work with the Point O'Woods Association for preservation of the forest in that community. It was determined that the Sunken Forest did not have the capacity to accommodate the potential number of visitors as projected so the plan recommended modifying existing facilities versus building new structures as seen in other units (Figure 3-26).[69] The exception to this was the proposed environmental education center in the Talisman area. The center was to replace the hotel and recreational hall with a building suitable for year-round overnight lodging. New residences, boardwalks, and dune crossings were proposed for National Park Service staff in the Talisman area (Figures 3-27 and 3-28).[70]

Watch Hill unit: This area had undergone several improvements between 1964 and 1978, including the addition of resources for recreation, food, and other marina and visitor services (Figure 3-27). Objectives for the Watch Hill area in 1978 were to protect the undeveloped lands east of Watch Hill; close the dune crossings; remove dwellings; maintain proper water depth for ferry access at the marina; and provide camping facilities compatible with the

Figure 3-24. The 1977 site plan for the lighthouse area proposed a National Park Service residence, an environmental education building, a maritime museum, boardwalks, dune crossings, and an interpretative trail (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).



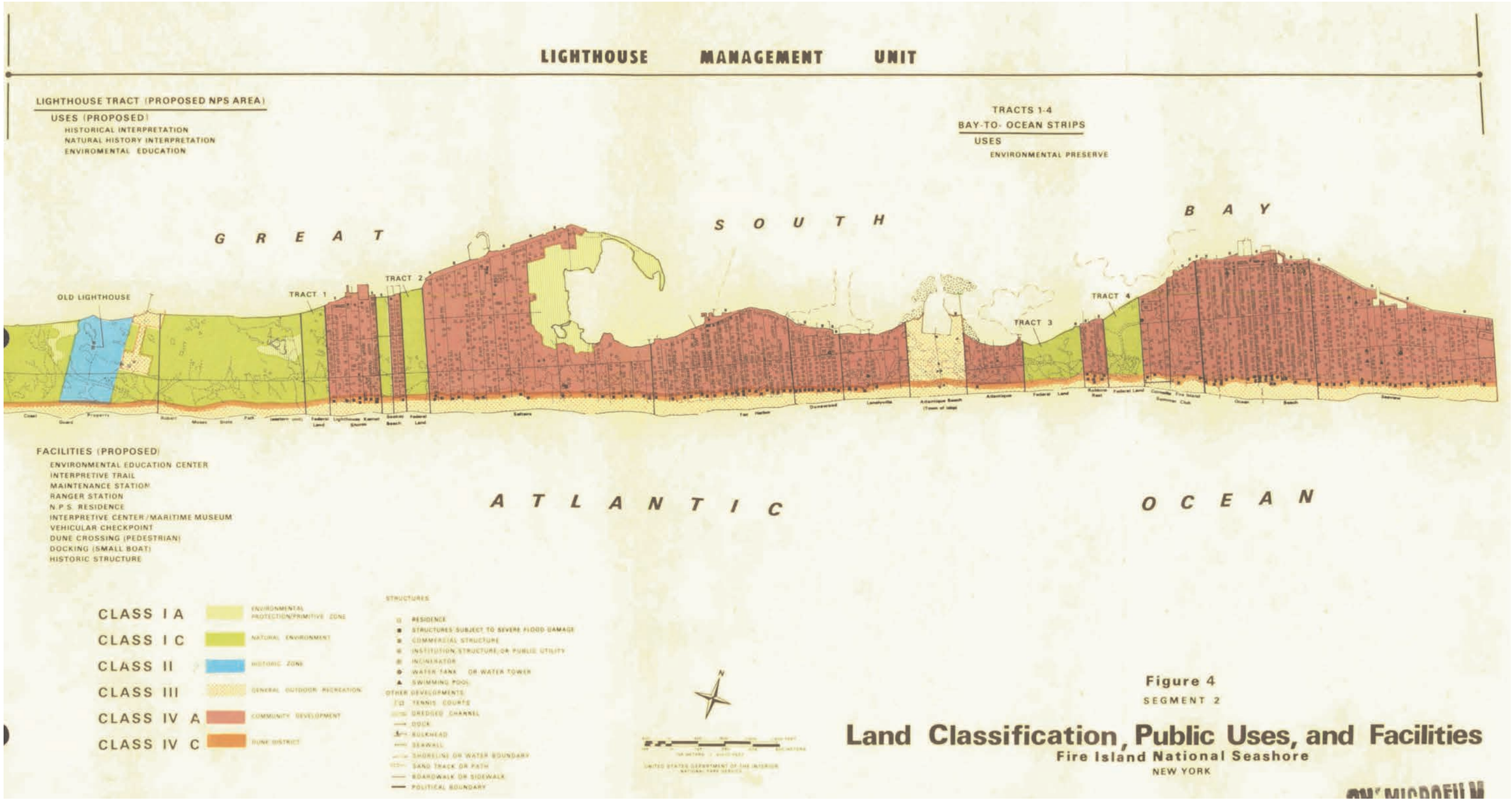


Figure 3-25. The Lighthouse management unit planned in the 1977 General Management Plan included the lighthouse area and the westernmost ten communities from Kismet to Seaview. This unit included all four different land classes: natural, historic, general outdoor recreation, and special zones—both community development and dune district (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

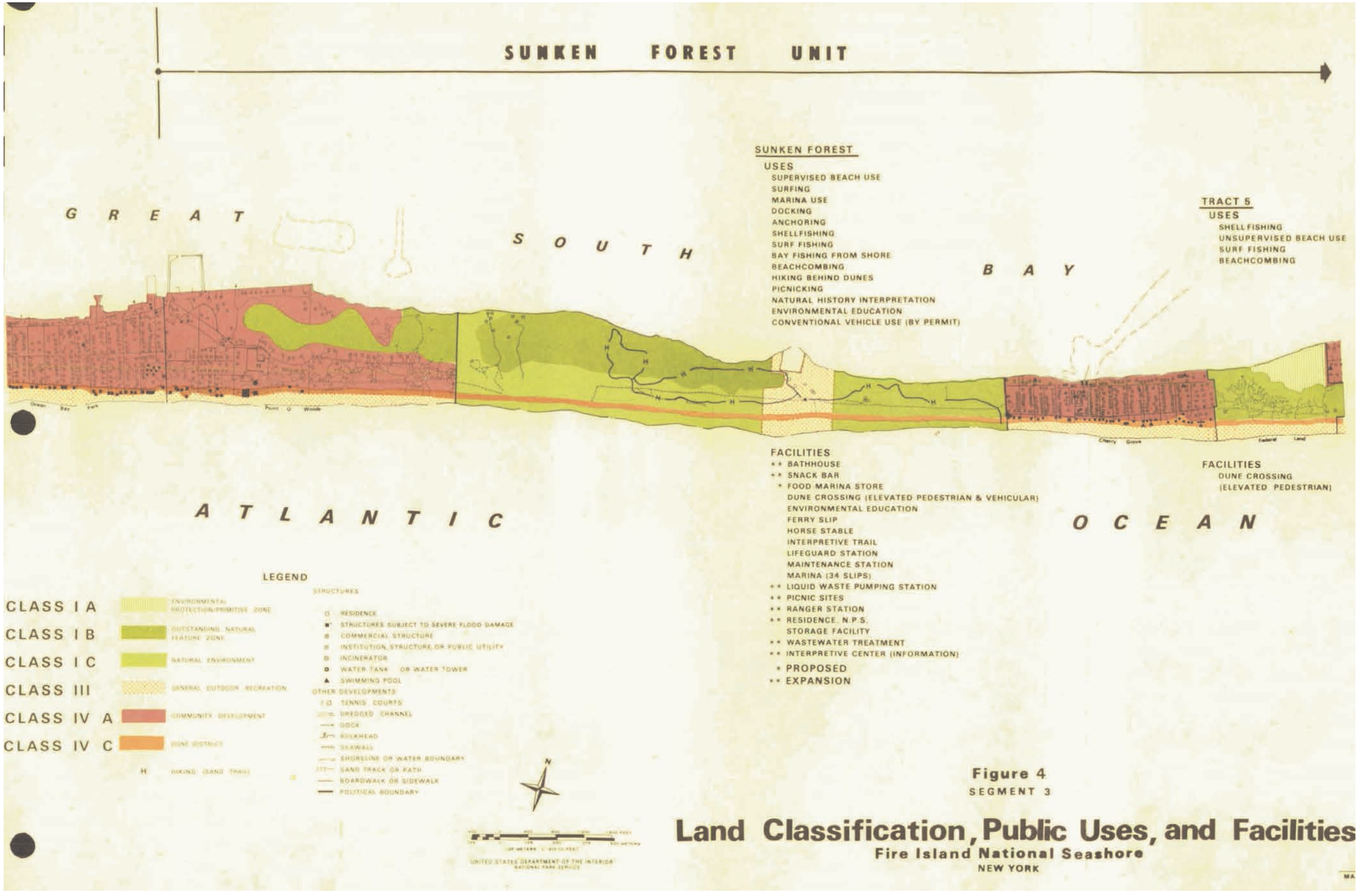


Figure 3-26. The Sunken Forest management unit included two communities, Point O'Woods and Cherry Grove, as well as the Sunken Forest itself, and the Carrington tract. In 1977, there were 51 houses within the dune district in this management unit (FIIS Archives – FIIS29800).

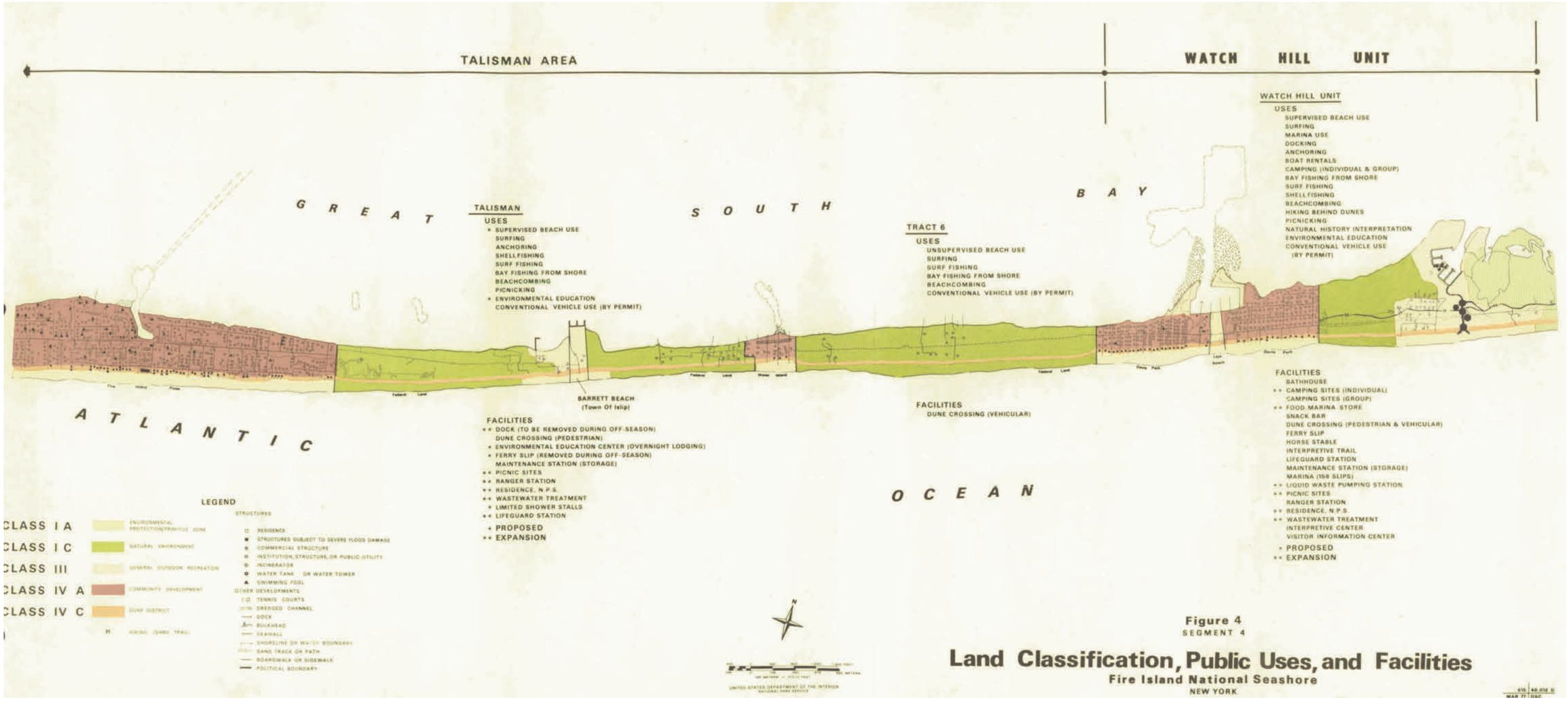


Figure 3-27. This land classification map for the Watch Hill management unit and the Talisman area depicts mostly federal land. Interestingly, due to its late date development, Fire Island Pines has a significantly higher number of swimming pools (triangle symbol on the map) than any other community (FIIS Archives – FIIS29800).

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environment.[71] Changes proposed in the 1978 plan included the relocation of the horse stable west of Bayberry Dunes, the relocation of utility lines underground, and the demolition of residences after the expiration of their tenancy agreements (Figure 3-29).[72]

High Dune Management unit: The plan proposed that the dune management unit be preserved for its natural qualities so it could be classified as a wilderness area (Figure 3-30).[73] Low density recreational uses were proposed for the area and inconsistent uses were to be eliminated, including existing residential structures.[74]

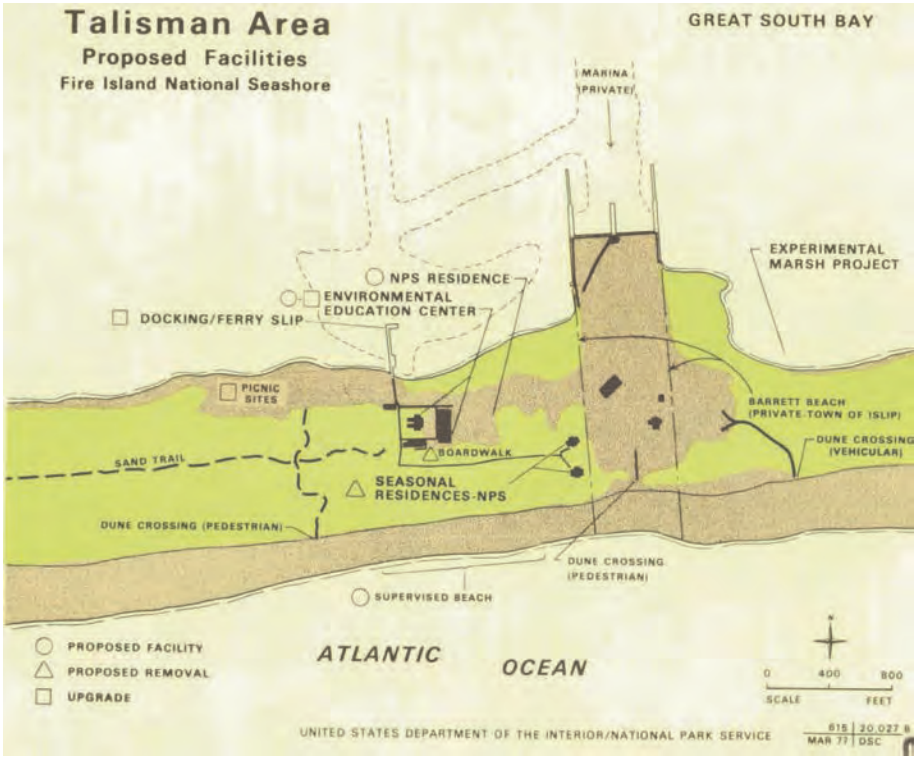




Figure 3-28. An environmental education center was proposed for the Talisman area in 1977, as well as upgrades to the dock and removal of the residences (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800) (top right).

Figure 3-29. By 1977, Watch Hill had a ranger station, snack bar, maintenance facility, bathhouse, boardwalks, an interpretative trail, and a marina store. Additional proposed modifications were for camping sites, relocating the horse stable, and removing all buildings associated with Bayberry Dunes (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800) (bottom right).

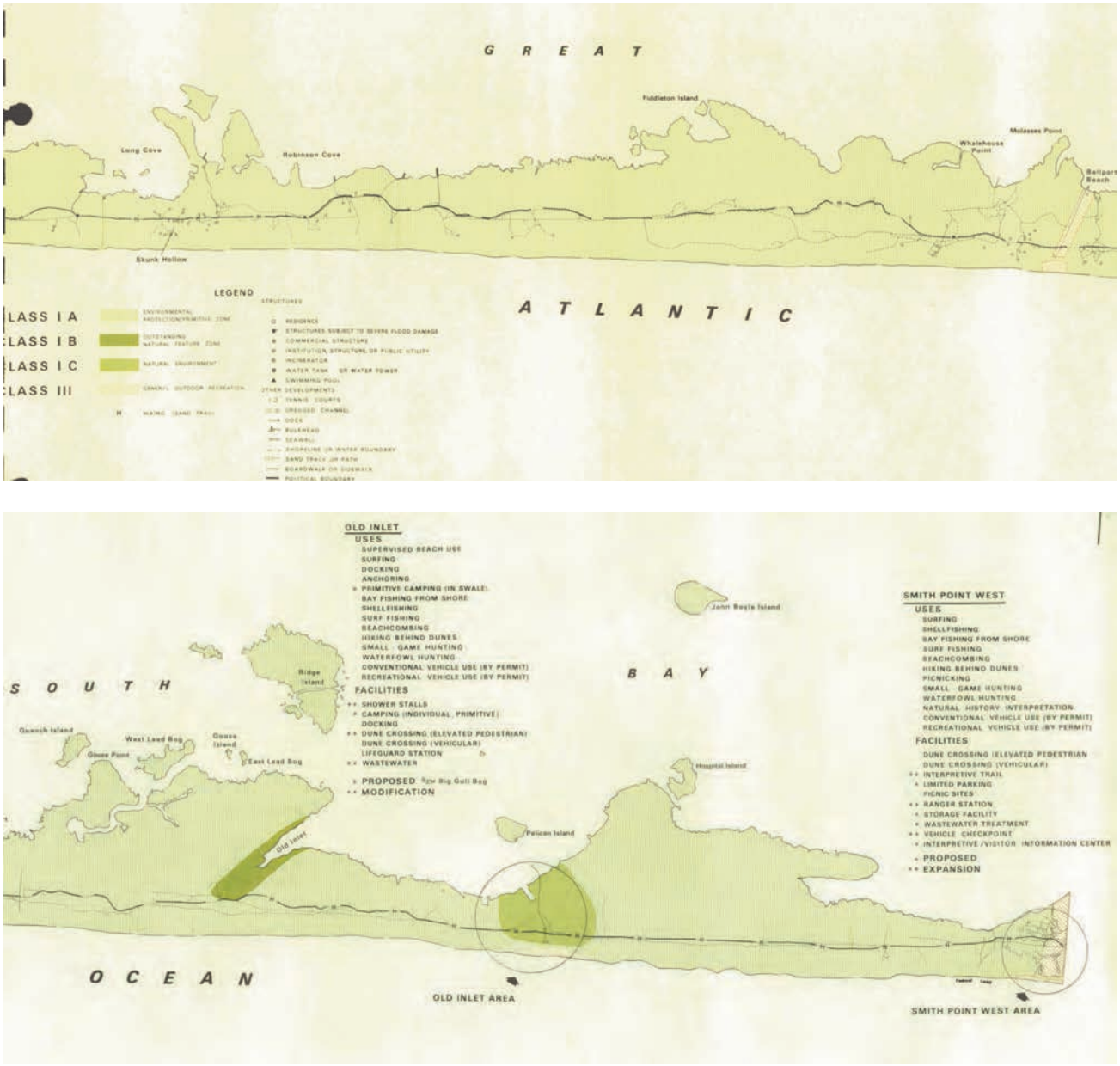


Figure 3-30. The High Dune Management unit from the 1977 General Management Plan is the wilderness area east of Watch Hill extending to Smith Point County Park. Top: west section of map. Bottom: east section of map (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

The Old Inlet area was located within this unit and it was proposed for limited beach use and camping (Figure 3-31). Ferry access was not planned for the Old Inlet area, but the boardwalk and the docking facilities were to be upgraded and the snack bar was to be removed.

Moriches unit: This area extends from the eastern end of Smith Point County Park to Moriches Inlet and was entirely owned by Suffolk County (Figure 3-32). The objective for this unit was to consult with Suffolk County regarding management and to manage the lands as part of the Fire Island National Seashore if the county decided to donate the property to the federal government.[75] Improvements to the Smith Point West area were planned to include boardwalks, bicycle parking, a ranger station, and an interpretative center (Figure 3-33).

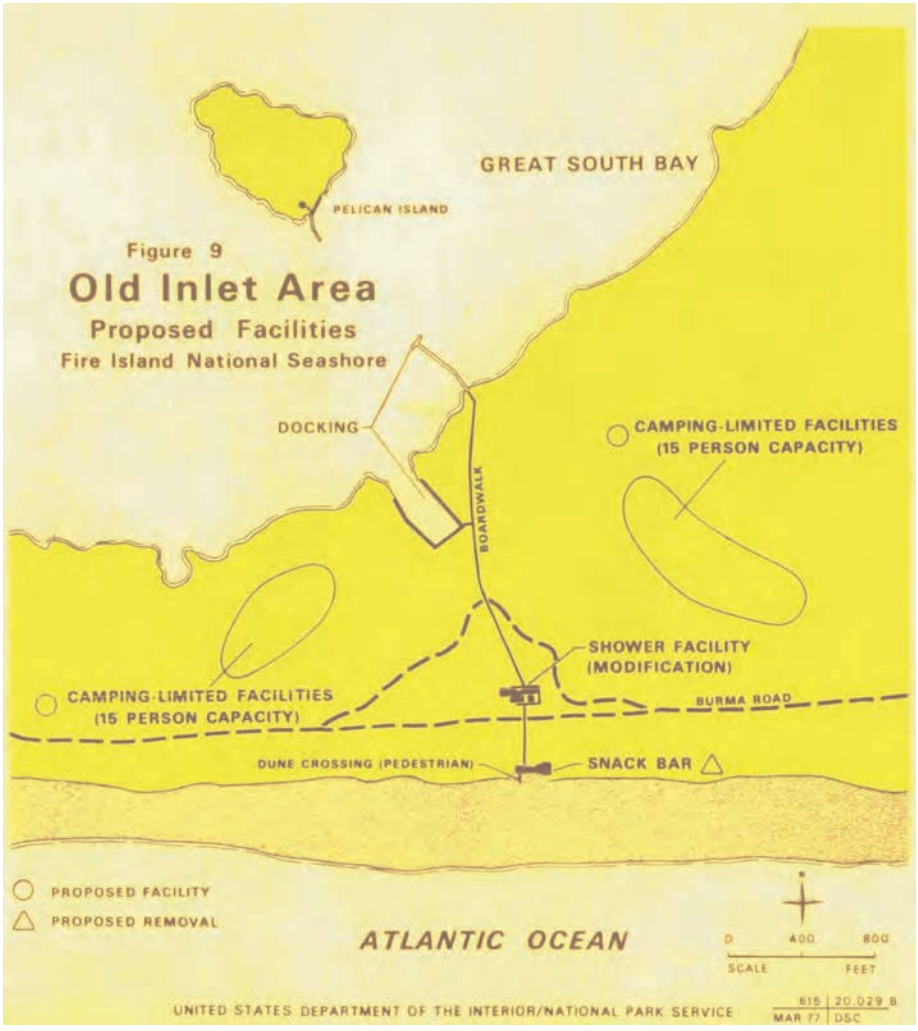


Figure 3-31. Two camping sites were the only proposed changes for the proposed changes for the Old Inlet area within the High Dune Management Unit in 1977 (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

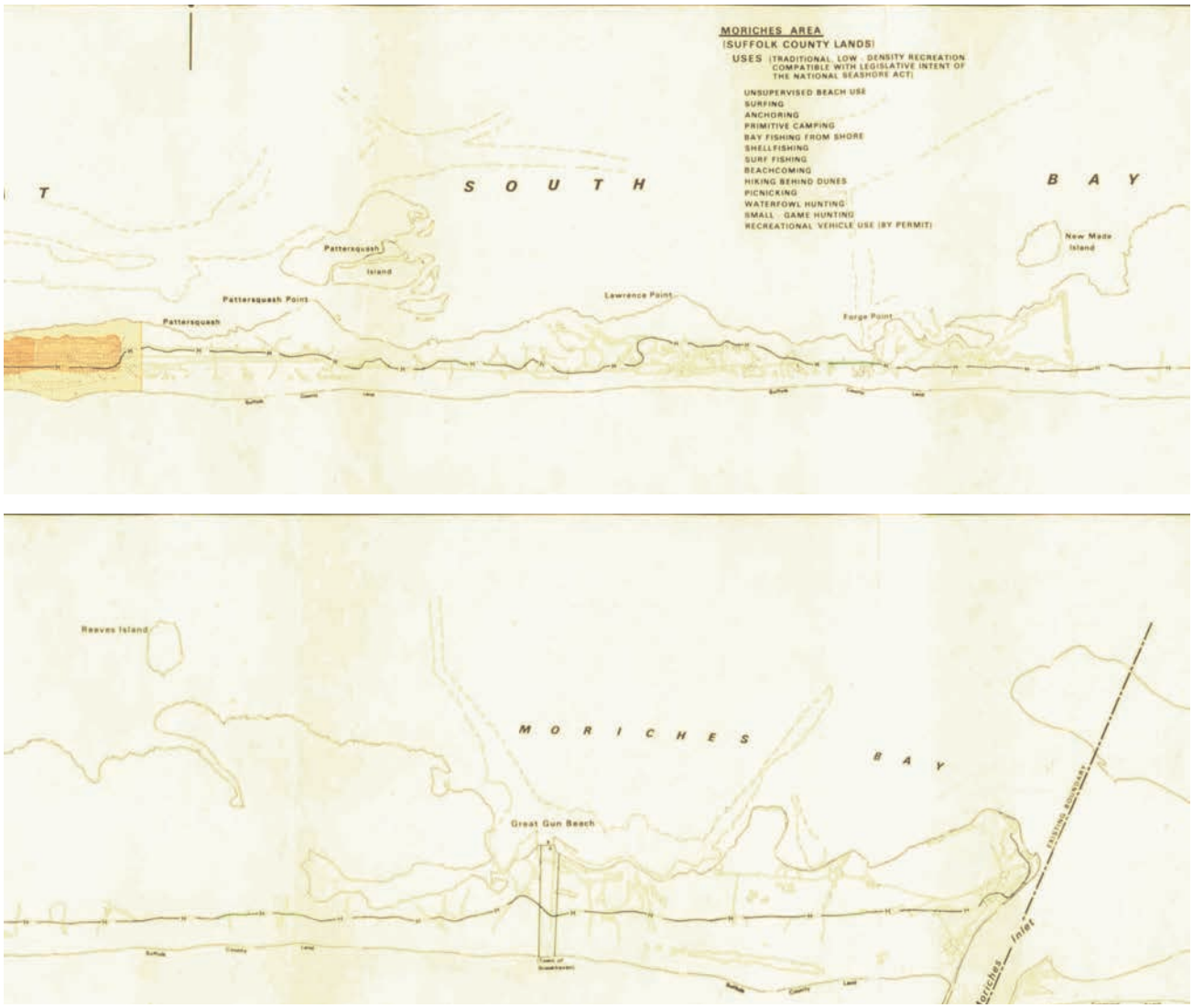


Figure 3-32. The eastern end of Fire Island consisted of the Moriches management unit, which was entirely owned by Suffolk County. Top: west section of map. Bottom: east section of map (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800) (above).

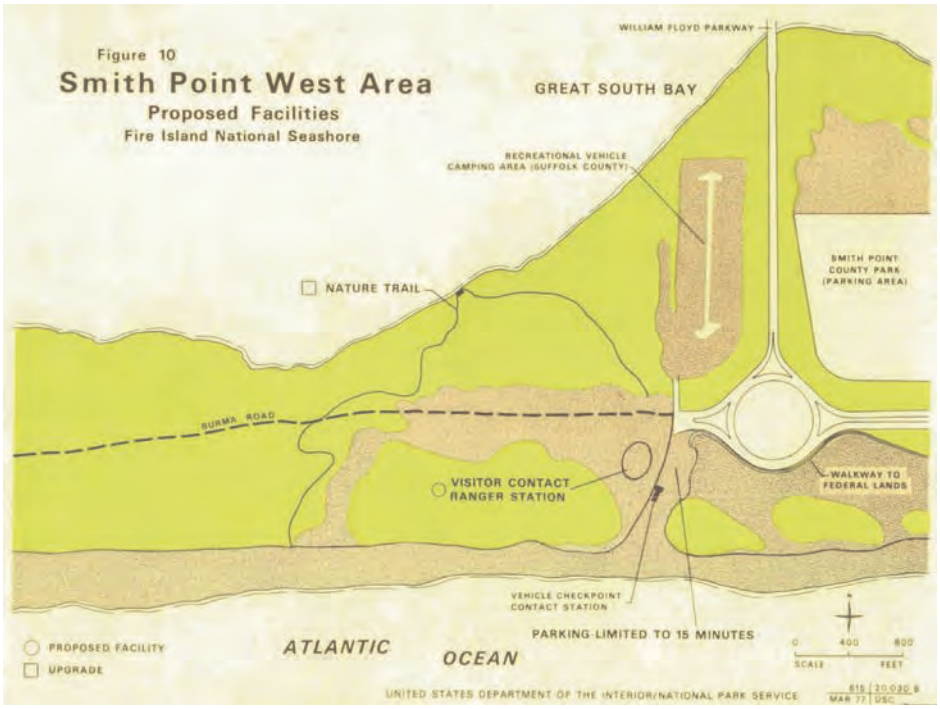


Figure 3-33. The 1977 General Management Plan revealed that since 1965 the National Park Service had made major alterations to their proposed plans for the Smith Point area. The only proposed facility was the addition of a visitor contact station (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800) (right).

LAND USE AND LAND CLASSIFICATIONS

The land use maps for the entire island included in the General Management Plan laid out which lands were appropriate for interpretation, which lands were to be preserved in their natural state, which lands were to be protected, and which lands were to be for recreational use.

Lands for protection and interpretation included areas with natural and cultural resources that required the highest levels of protection. This list included: Fire Island Lighthouse, skirted pine at the Lighthouse tract (due to its rare manifestation of salt-spray effects on plant life), Sunken Forest, Maritime Forest in Point O'Woods, Old Inlet, the area south of Hospital Island, and the Watch Hill interpretative area.[76]

Lands for environmental preservation were evaluated as potential environmental preserves. These included the marshes on East Island and Sexton Island, the wilderness area of Fire Island between Long Cove and Smith Point West, and segments of lands east of Smith Point County Park.[77]

Lands requiring protection for inherent values were determined as important areas but did not meet the threshold for outstanding significance or function as primitive areas. These included the dune line, bog habitats, clam pond in Saltaire, maritime forest habitats, John Boyle Island, and tidal marshes.[78]

Lands suitable for low- to moderate-intensity recreation and support facilities were identified through several parameters. This category excluded all lands in the previous three categories. Plus, these lands had to feature a substantial primary dune and preferably a secondary dune; natural deep water channel or one that would require limited dredging; utilities; and existing development or areas that previously hosted structures.[79]

In addition to the land use categories outlined in the General Management Plan, the National Park Service also created a land classification system. The descriptions of the land use categories and the land classifications overlap, but it appears that the latter is more specific and detailed. The entire national seashore was divided into four classification zones, and maps of those zones are provided in the plan. These were: Class 1 – Natural Zone; Class 2 – Historic Zone; Class 3 – General Outdoor Recreation Zone; and Class 4 – Special Use Zones. The special use zone was divided into three categories: community development zone (Class 4a); major park development zone (Class 4b); and dune district (Class 4c).[80] The community development zone included all the private land within the 17 communities. The major park development zone were the lands associated with Smith Point County Park. The dune district consisted of the dune line within the entire national seashore. The plan specifically restricted all activities and improvements from the dune district except for a small number of vehicular and pedestrian crossings.[81]

MODEL ZONING REGULATIONS

An important section of the management plan was the definition of "model zoning" for the communities on Fire Island National Seashore. The management plan explained that "model zoning" was to be developed in coordination with the towns of Brookhaven and Islip, and the villages of Saltaire and Ocean Beach, and included in their zoning ordinances. The most important aspect of the model zoning was the basic land use as single-family residences. Multiunit houses, group-rental units, and townhouse apartments would no longer be allowed. Lots in new subdivisions were to be a minimum of one-and-one-half-acres in size, and there was a maximum lot coverage limit. New buildings had height restrictions, a maximum number of bathrooms permitted, and in some zoning ordinances design requirements could be added. Lastly, construction was prohibited in any wetland areas.[82]

VEHICLE REGULATIONS

The General Management Plan further stipulated that the vehicle regulations would be updated to further limit vehicle use. These vehicle regulation updates were completed at the end of 1977 and published in the Federal Register.[83] The updated regulations limited vehicle use to certain areas and certain times of the day. No additional permits were to be granted beyond the number of permits that existed when the Plan went into effect. [84] Unnecessary dune crossings would be closed, and during periods of high water, vehicles would not be permitted on the beach.[85] In 1977, there were 1,077 total permits issued: property owners held 288 permits, 53 permits were held by renters, and 556 of the permits were for recreational vehicles.[86]

PROPOSED LAND ACQUISITIONS

The proposed acquisitions listed in the 1978 plan totaled just over 233 acres throughout Fire Island, but were predominantly lands in the dune district and the proposed wilderness area east of Davis Park. In 1977, the dune district, stretching the length of Fire Island National Seashore, contained 257 structures, 48 of which were on the dune crest or seaward of the dune. The National Park Service planned to acquire these 48 buildings unless it was determined their removal would be detrimental to the dune. The management plan allowed no improvements to the remaining 209 structures except for general maintenance. The improved properties outside of the dune crest could remain indefinitely unless they were damaged by storms in excess of 50 percent of their fair market value, at which point, the National Park Service would condemn the property.[87] The National Park Service also planned to acquire all of the unimproved properties within the dune district, a total of 250 parcels in 1977.

Two substantial proposed acquisitions in the plan, approximately 180 acres in total, were thought to require legislative boundary changes. These properties all either surrounded, or were adjacent to, the lighthouse. The National Park Service also wanted to purchase nearly 30 acres of inholdings (private property within the Seashore District). This land was not subject to condemnation.

Another acquisition specifically called out in the 1978 plan was for Tract 2203, at the western end of the island near Kismet and Saltaire. This tract totaled 8.5 acres of bay-to-ocean land in Ivy Beach, which was proposed for acquisition to prevent imminent development. Tract 2203 had previously been condemned by the National Park Service, but in 1970, the National Park Service returned it to its previous owners, who planned to build 60 houses on it. George Biederman, former Chairman of the Fire Island National Seashore Advisory Commission; Charles Lowry, current chair of the Advisory Commission; and the Natural Resources Defense Council sued the Secretary of the Interior. They claimed that Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton and the National Park Service were causing serious harm to the "scenic, environmental, and ecological resources" that Congress had directed them to preserve and protect. The lawsuit argued that there had been a 40 percent increase in house construction, a rise in the use of motor vehicles, "continued construction on the ocean dunes, and a stream of zoning variances for swimming pools, new construction, and fill on wetlands."[88]

The court sided with the federal government and opined that although the Department of the Interior had failed to protect the island's natural resources, the Act did not specifically require the department to take any action that it had failed to take. The Department had not violated the Seashore Act, nor had it violated the National Environmental Policy Act. Preventing community development was not a major governmental action as the National Environmental Policy Act defined it. Interestingly, although the government had originally condemned the property in the 1960s, returned it to the private owners in 1970, and then went to trial to justify their actions in allowing the owners the opportunity to develop it, the National Park Service placed it on their acquisition list in the 1978 plan.

In addition to the acquisitions described above, the National Park Service planned management agreements with Suffolk County for several small islands in the Great South Bay, and a cooperative agreement with the town of Islip, so that Sexton Island would become an environmental preserve (Figure 3-34).[89]



Figure 3-34. Proposed acquisitions for the National Park Service in 1977 totaled 233 acres, including several inholdings along the island, the islands in the Great South Bay, and the lighthouse tract and neighboring area to the east. Top: west section of map. Bottom: east section of map (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

FIRE ISLAND BOUNDARY EXPANSION, 1978

The 1977 draft of the Fire Island General Management Plan provided a brief list of proposed boundary changes and acquisitions that could only be accomplished through legislation. The draft plan identified the acquisitions of four separate areas. One was of four parcels in Patchogue, ten acres total, for the construction of a mainland ferry terminal, a headquarters office, a visitor information center, and parking lots. The second was the acquisition of the 90-acre lighthouse tract declared as surplus by the United States Coast Guard. The third proposed acquisition was the transfer of a 21-acre parcel adjacent to the Heckscher State Park, from New York State. Finally, the fourth tract was immediately east of the lighthouse tract and was owned by the Long Island State Parks and Recreation Commission.[90]

Subsequent to the approval of the General Management Plan in 1978, Congress passed the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978, which enlarged the boundaries of Fire Island National Seashore.[91] The national seashore was enlarged to include up to 12 acres in Patchogue for a headquarters and a ferry terminal.[92] This Act did not include the other acquisitions that were identified in the General Management Plan: the United States Coast Guard lighthouse tract, the tract east of the lighthouse owned by New York State, and the tract adjacent to the Heckscher State Park.

There is one important difference between the General Management Plan and the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978.[93] The former made it clear that the National Park Service would work to acquire all undeveloped land in the dune district, totaling 250 properties. The 1978 legislation suspended condemnation of any undeveloped property within the dune district provided that the owners maintained their property in its natural state. This legislation was passed on November 10, 1978.[94]

EROSION CONTROL

Battles fought over the Fire Island landscape during this period between 1941 and 1978 largely stemmed from the need for erosion control. The dynamic between Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, and Robert Moses, who was then chairman of the New York State Council of Parks, in large part created the Fire Island National Seashore. Before this, however, there was an immediate need across the United States for the federal government to help communities control shoreline erosion. The River and Harbor Act of 1960 provided funds to the United States Army Corps of Engineers to institute projects for this purpose; however, it took years for significant action to be seen on Fire Island. In the meantime, the federal government constructed beachfront groins in several of the reaches along the barrier islands, including Fire Island. The United States Army Corps of

Engineers attempted to work with other agencies, including New York State, to do this erosion control work, including sand nourishment and groin construction. A lack of local support caused this work to be suspended.

In 1978, the United States Army Corps of Engineers prepared an Environmental Impact Statement for the beach nourishment work, proposing alternative solutions and analyzing environmental impacts from them; however, the Department of the Interior and other agencies found the proposed plan unacceptable.[95] The Council on Environmental Quality determined that insufficient alternatives were evaluated, nor had the entire area been analyzed as a unified system. The Council on Environmental Quality recommended that the project be reformulated. Unfortunately, prior strained relationships between the various agencies ultimately caused the project to be suspended.

CONCLUSION—1941 TO 1978

The examination of the period from 1941 to 1978 reveals a broad spectrum of events directly related to the preservation of this Fire Island landscape, both its natural environment and its cultural lifestyle. The consequences of these events are evident on the cultural landscape of Fire Island National Seashore. The plan for an ocean parkway along Fire Island was promoted by Robert Moses as a way to preserve the dunes and prevent further erosion. The negative impacts of this parkway plan opened discussions for a more expansive preservation effort, which culminated in federal designation in 1964 as the Fire Island National Seashore.

The National Park Service prepared numerous development plans during this period to create visitor experiences throughout much of the natural areas as well as increase visitor accessibility throughout the island as well as to the island. Over time, the National Park Service reduced this proposed development and embraced its core mission to protect and preserve the environment. Property owners and local stakeholders found at odds with the National Park Service regarding zoning regulations and condemnation authority. The model zoning regulations for Fire Island National Seashore were developed late in this period and the National Park Service also pursued the acquisition of thousands of acres within the boundaries. Acquisitions were predominantly targeted within the wilderness area east of Davis Park to Smith Point. The zoning regulations (building heights, lot coverage, etc.), the vehicle regulations (where and when one could drive), condemnation along the dunes, and the acquisition of houses within the wilderness, all played a role in the cultural landscape as it was in 1978.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF FIRE ISLAND – 1970 CENSUS

Census and other demographic records also help describe the cultural landscape. Despite an increased need for accuracy, the nationwide 1970 census results were skewed, with the Census Bureau citing distrust in government and resistance to taking the census as a reason, despite an increased need for accuracy. The census records from 1950 and 1960 show that the nationwide population was being underrepresented, so the 1970 census was carefully crafted for more accurate results. Comprehensive results of the 1970 census will not be readily available to the public until 2042; however, general statistics of total population numbers are available for several Fire Island communities. A variety of online sources were researched including the National Archives, the United States Census Bureau, the New York State Data Center, the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, and the Suffolk County government were searched for more detailed data for the 1970 census; however, only limited information is available.

In 1970, the population of Ocean Beach was 109 residents, and the population of Saltaire was 37.[96] The combined communities in the town of Brookhaven, including Point O'Woods, Cherry Grove, and Fire Island Pines had a population of 24 year-round residents, and Davis Park is noted to have had 18 residents in 1970. The communities of Kismet, Atlantique, Fair Harbor, and Seaview in the town of Islip combined had a total of 36 residents.

To provide a more comprehensive look of the Ocean Beach population the 1980 census is available. At this time there were 82 households with 193 people residing year-round, all of which were white. Ocean Beach acquired 68 new residents between 1975 and 1980. A small percentage of the population were of retirement age, with only 19 listed as 65 or over. The majority of Ocean Beach residents had graduated from high school (46 people) with approximately half that amount completed four years of college (24 people). Interestingly, there were significant numbers that had more than five years of education following high school, 16 total. Nearly 38 percent of the Ocean Beach population were employed in management or a technical field and the median household income was $12,333.[97] Census records alone thus demonstrate community growth during the mid-20th century.

FIRE ISLAND COMMUNITIES BETWEEN 1941–1978

The close of World War II ushered in a new era of development and redevelopment within many Fire Island communities. In addition to rebuilding areas lost in the 1938 hurricane, the new communities of Fire Island Summer Club, Fire Island Pines, and Davis Park were established. This era also saw the growth of the gay and lesbian community on Fire Island, particularly within Oakleyville, Cherry Grove, and Fire Island Pines due to their relative seclusion. These areas became early refuges for gay and lesbian residents and vacationers from New York City. In other communities, occasional discord between residents and business/commercial interests, including catering to day-trippers and group rentals, affected subsequent land use and zoning. This section describes such issues within each individual community on Fire Island during this time period.

KISMET

At the start of this period, Kismet (combined with adjacent Seabay Beach) had only eight buildings in its community. Kismet had been decimated by the 1938 hurricane. Redevelopment following the hurricane did not begin in earnest until a small post-war construction boom occurred between 1947 and 1955. By 1955, there were 35 buildings. This growth was followed by a much larger phase of development between 1955 and 1973. During this time Kismet grew to include 188 buildings.[97] The community became heavily populated during the summer by group rentals—typically single people residing together in large numbers in a single-family house (Figure 3-35).

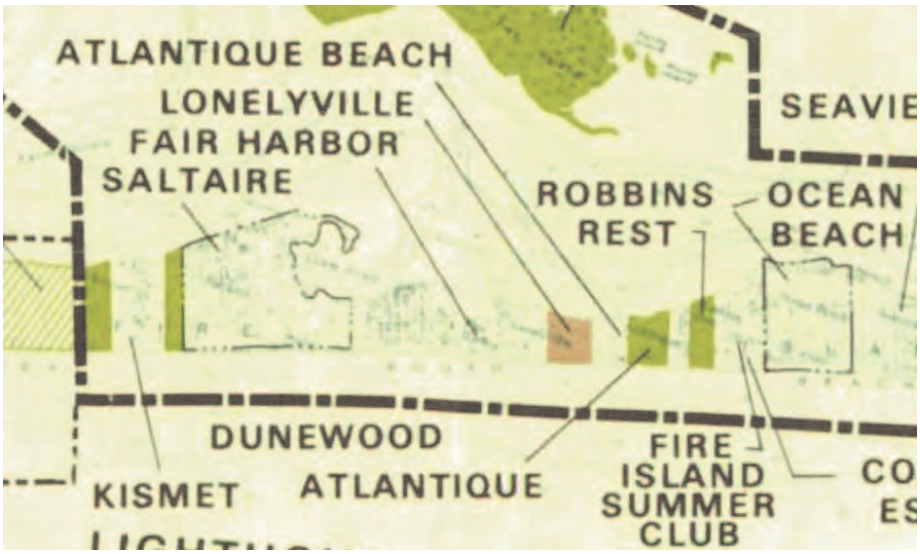


Figure 3-35. 1978 map showing Kismet, Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Dunewood, Lonelyville, Atlantique, Robbins Rest, Fire Island Summer Club, Corneille Estates, and Ocean Beach (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

SALTAIRE

Some redevelopment after the 1938 hurricane occurred near the oceanfront in Saltaire during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1947, a group of residents formed Saltaire Associates, Incorporated to purchase lots abandoned after the 1938 hurricane. The group distributed the lots by selling some of them, donating one to the town for a new water supply system, and dividing the remaining land among themselves.[98] It was not until the 1960s that large-scale development occurred in southern Saltaire. In 1965, the village updated its zoning ordinance, doubling the amount of land required to build a house, from three to six lots. This change limited the maximum residential density to 470 houses. The new zoning also restricted the commercial center to Broadway, a north–south walk.[99] At the beginning of this period, there were approximately 100 buildings in Saltaire. The number increased to 311 by 1973 (Figure 3-35).[100]

Generally, the landscape of Saltaire included a variety of architectural styles. Early bungalows, pre-dating the 1938 hurricane, are concentrated along Atlantic, Marine, Broadway, Neptune, and Pacific Walks, all north of Lighthouse Promenade. Residences to the south, near the ocean, represent post-1938 architecture. A third distinct area, known as Clam Pond Cove, also exists in Saltaire. This area was highly exclusive, in large part due to the uninhibited water views from both the north and south.[101]

FAIR HARBOR

An uptick in construction did not occur in Fair Harbor until the close of World War II. Installation of a community well and watermains facilitated development. However, the largest construction boom occurred in the 1960s.[102] Like other places on Fire Island, the architecture can be divided between pre- and post-1938 hurricane. While the houses built during the boom of the 1950s and 1960s were still decidedly modest, they were much larger than the small bungalows that had first dotted the landscape of Fair Harbor (Figure 3-35).[103]

DUNEWOOD

Dunewood, composed of approximately 20 acres immediately east of Fair Harbor, was purchased by Murray Barbash in 1957. This was the last community on Fire Island to be developed. Barbash and his partner, Irwin Chess, were notable for being the only developers to construct an entire community themselves. They built approximately 40 houses in Dunewood the same year they purchased the land, and many were occupied only a year later.[104]

Like the other communities on Fire Island, Dunewood had its own vernacular architecture specific to the community. Barbash developed Dunewood in a grid pattern with one-story ranch style houses, contemporary to the prevailing 1950s aesthetic. These homes featured plate-glass windows and outdoor decks. As a devoted environmentalist, Barbash was dedicated to the preservation of Fire Island and did not believe in grandiose construction.[105] Although he understood that the development of the Moses parkway would bring him financial success, he felt the preservation of the beach prioritized any financial advantages. Following the establishment of the Fire Island National Seashore in 1964, Barbash successfully moved to have the local bay front zoned noncommercial, making Dunewood a solely residential area.[106] In 1978, Dunewood was distinguishable from Fair Harbor for its lack of street lights (Figure 3-35).[107] By this time, all walks in this community were constructed of concrete.[108]

LONELYVILLE

Redevelopment of Lonelyville following the 1938 hurricane resulted in a concentration of two-story homes on the western half that were similar to the original structures.[109] Following World War II, a community water system was installed to replace individual wells. Other amenities were constructed during this time period, such as ocean-to-bay thoroughfares and an east–west crossing for the community. Only 23 homes had existed in Lonelyville in the 1950s.[110]

By the 1970s, Lonelyville still had no commercial area and remained one of the island's smaller communities.[111] Development of the eastern side of Lonelyville began after 1975. Forty-two homes were present during the mid-1970s along with approximately 73 vacant lots (Figure 3-35).[112]

ATLANTIQUE

Construction was sparse in Atlantique until the mid-1960s.[113] By 1973, there were 36 structures, all of which were noncommercial.[114] Many of the walks were also concrete, but in need of repairs, by the end of the 1970s (Figure 3-35).[115]

ROBBINS REST

At the beginning of this period, an undeveloped beach bordered either side of Robbins Rest. A single north–south concrete walk transecting the community was installed after a community petition in 1960.[116] Robbins Rest remained a small community in the 1970s with 37 residential structures, 26 vacant lots, and one commercial building—a restaurant/motel present in 1975 (Figure 3-35).[117]

FIRE ISLAND SUMMER CLUB AND CORNEILLE ESTATES

Fire Island Summer Club was founded in the mid-1940s as a private summer resort. Located east of Robbins Rest and an undeveloped beach and west of Corneille Estates, it was originally called the Fire Island Beach Club, and was owned by the Dune Realty Company.[118] The realty company leased plots on a long-term basis for construction of housing. In 1947, the Blue Point Life Saving Station was moved by barge from east of Water Island to Summer Club and became the community center.[119]

Fire Island's Woodhull School serving elementary-aged students was constructed in Corneille Estates in 1954.[120] Similar to other communities on the west end of Fire Island, Corneille Estates had numerous group rental properties that were densely populated during the summers.[121]

In 1978, there were 24 buildings at the Fire Island Summer Club (Figure 3-35).[122] There were two concrete walks, both leading to the ocean. The Fire Island Summer Club did not have its own ferry service. Instead, access by boat was by ferry service at neighboring Ocean Beach.[123]

OCEAN BEACH

This period in Ocean Beach was marked by rapid growth and commercialization (Figure 3-36).[124] With this came strict ordinances to maintain control. The commercial center in Ocean Beach continued to grow during this period and became the largest commercial center on Fire Island.[125] Day-trippers and summer groupers frequented the commercial establishments, such as the Sea Turtle Inn, a popular Ocean Beach nightclub in the 1960s and 1970s.[126] Meanwhile, residents and residential interests favoring family-centric pursuits were often at odds with commercial interests during this time.

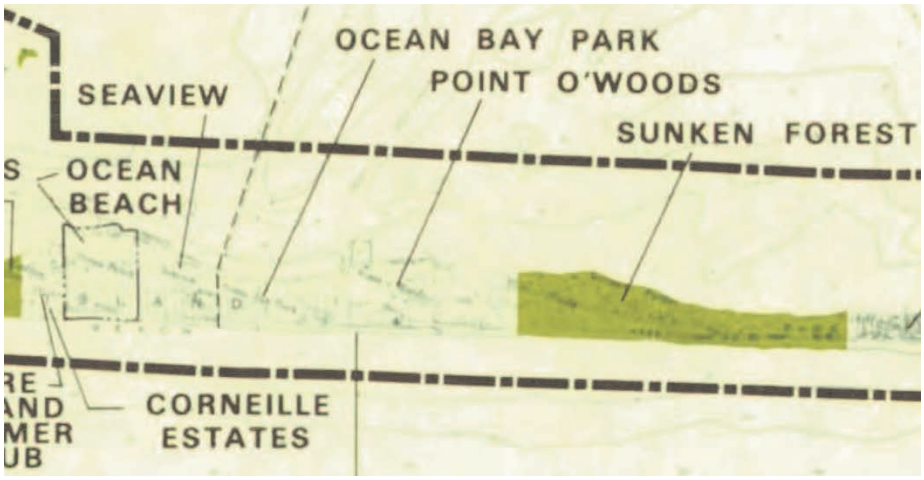


Figure 3-36. 1978 map depicting Ocean Beach, Ocean Bay Park, Point O'Woods, and Sunken Forest (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

SEAVIEW

Within Seaview, the eastern portion of the community developed after World War II. By the 1950s, the Seaview Association had bought the streets and walks from the town of Islip to control vehicles and discourage commercialization. By the late 1970s, the only commercial structures in Seaview were a grocery store and liquor store.[127] Between 1947 and 1975, Seaview had grown from 87 buildings to 313 buildings (Figure 3-36).[128]

OCEAN BAY PARK

Ocean Bay Park saw similar growth trends during this period as were found on the rest of the island. After World War II the Flynn family invested heavily in the community, establishing a restaurant and hotel. The hotel—the Fire Island Hotel—was fashioned from the former Point O'Woods Life Saving Station, which was within the bounds of Ocean Bay Park.[129] The former Forge River Life Saving Station and a Coast Guard barrack structure were added to the hotel. Both buildings were floated to their new location, expanding the hotel. Flynn also operated the Snack Bar, a snacks and light refreshments establishment with a big deck built on top of the primary ocean-facing dune. The Snack Bar was damaged in a storm and then ultimately removed shortly after 1964, in keeping with the National Park Service's policy against oceanfront commercial establishments.[130]

Ocean Bay Park redeveloped slowly following the 1938 hurricane, with only 61 buildings existing in 1947 compared to the 50 that had been present in 1938. However, development began to rise steadily during the 1950s and 1960s, with a boom in construction taking place in 1972.[131] By 1973, there were 297 buildings and 57 vacant lots in the community (Figure 3-36).[132] Other commercial structures were constructed as well; in addition to Flynn's hotel and restaurant complex, this era saw the acceleration of commercial activity, including new hotels, motels, restaurants, and snack bars. The composition of this community was described as mixed, including both families and singles, with an active social scene of day-trippers and group renters on the weekends.[133]

POINT O'WOODS

The 1962 tropical storm reportedly destroyed ten houses in Point O'Woods.[134] Residents of Point O' Woods have said that the community consisted mostly of small, modest post-war cottages during the 1950s and 1960s, after which time the large homes seen today began to be built. The Point O'Woods Association maintained control over the land and leasing, and the community restricted membership. As a result of its policies community residents were predominantly upper-middle- and upper-class whites.[135] By the close of the 1970s, Point O'Woods featured some of the largest residences on all of Fire Island.[136] There was little growth during this period. In 1947, there were 130 buildings, and by 1973 the number of buildings had risen to 151 (Figure 3-36).[137]

OAKLEYVILLE

In the 1960s, the National Park Service took title to land just east of the Oakleyville right-of-way, where three houses stood; the residents were evicted, and it is said that their homes were burned with their belongings still inside.[138] By the end of the 1970s, Oakleyville remained very small—around nine structures—and secluded.[139] Its isolation attracted various artists as residents or houseguests, including Greta Garbo, Yoko Ono, and Robert Mapplethorpe.[140] Fletcher and Kintz described Oakleyville as representative of a small cluster of houses where many of the owners have familial ties. Many used to reside here year-round; however, these owners now have their principal residence on Long Island and only use their beach houses intermittently and typically only during the summer.[141]

CHERRY GROVE

The lesbian and gay community of Cherry Grove flourished during the 1940s.[142] In 1944, the Cherry Grove Community House was erected after being floated across the bay from Long Island. The Community House became a social hub for residents and vacationers. Three years later, in 1947, the Arts Project of Cherry Grove was formed, and the building evolved into a theater celebrating gay identity. The Arts Project would prove vital in establishing the community and influencing its demographics and development in the years to come.[143] In addition to the Community House and Theater, popular restaurant and bar establishments opened during this period include the Sea Shack (1952), the Belvedere (1957), and the Monster (1969).[144]

After being nearly destroyed by the 1938 hurricane, there were only eight buildings left standing in Cherry Grove. The community began rebuilding in the 1940s and by 1947, that number had increased substantially to 64 buildings. By 1973, there were 271 buildings in Cherry Grove (Figure 3-37).[145] The dunes were rebuilt and grasses added in the early 1940s and no houses were built on or in front of the dunes.

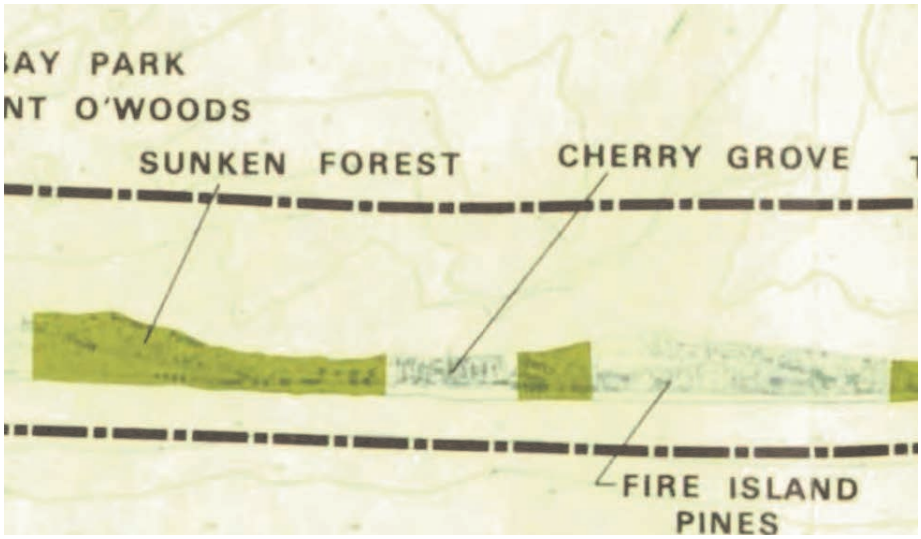


Figure 3-37. Cherry Grove and Fire Island Pines depicted on a 1978 map (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

FIRE ISLAND PINES

The area that would become Fire Island Pines was purchased in 1925 by the Home Guardian Company but was not developed until 1947.[146] There were only eight buildings in the area at this time. The Fire Island Pines Property Owners Association was established in 1953, and this organization initiated development in the community, so that by 1965, the number of buildings had jumped to 97.[147] These first homes were modest single-family houses geared toward families.[148] However, due to the prime location, the real estate market became competitive; raising house prices, often exceeded the price range that many young families could afford.[149] Fire Island Pines attracted a diverse rich, artistic, lesbian and gay community from New York City, including designers, models, photographers, and architects. Development dropped slightly between 1966 and 1972, before increasing again in 1973.[150] At this time, there were 509 buildings in Fire Island Pines, making it one of the largest communities on Fire Island (Figure 3-37).[151] According to Fletcher and Kintz, the houses of the 1960s and 1970s are much larger than those of the 1940s and 1950s. Fire Island Pines also accounted for nearly 75 percent of all pools on the island.[152]

WATER ISLAND

Real estate development in Water Island increased slightly after World War II, but it remained a quiet community for those who came to the island to enjoy their natural surroundings, rather than the nightlife of nearby Fire Island Pines. By the 1950s and 1960s, there were approximately 39 houses in Water Island.[153]

Blue Point Beach, east of Water Island, is often included with Water Island. Following World War II, Edwin Usher, a plumber, bought land here and built his house. He sold surrounding plots to tradesmen and, in contrast to many of the other communities, Water Island became a small community of carpenters, electricians, painters, and other blue-collar workers (Figure 3-38).[154]

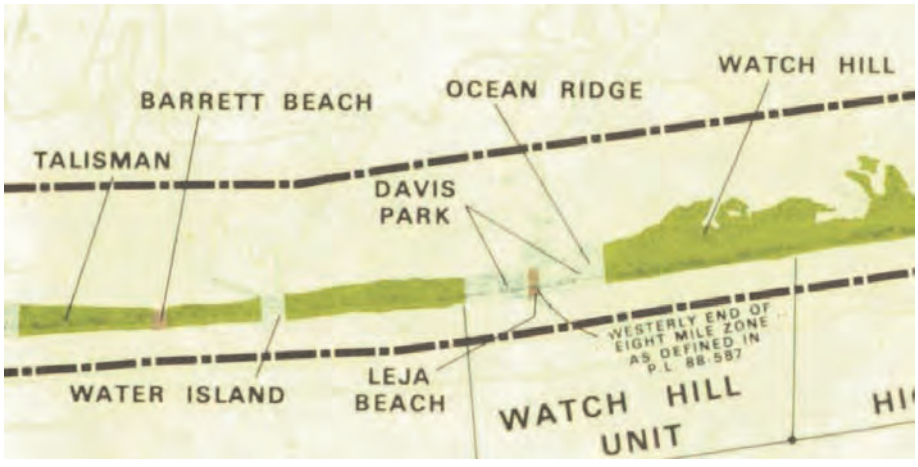


Figure 3-38. Water Island and Davis Park depicted on a 1978 map (FIIS Archives – FIIS 29800).

DAVIS PARK

Davis Park began as two different communities, Davis Park on the west and Ocean Ridge on the east. In 1945, developers barged over a large building from the mainland to be used as a casino at Leja Beach.[155] In 1949, the Blue Point Life-Saving Station in this community was relocated to Ocean Beach. Construction began in earnest in the 1950s and 1960s, when many Long Islanders built vacation homes in Davis Park. In 1965 there were 63 buildings in Davis Park, which by 1973 had grown substantially to 144 buildings (Figure 3-38).[156] According to Fletcher and Kintz, most of the residents of Davis Park in 1978 were single and their primary residence was Manhattan.[157]

END OF PERIOD LANDSCAPE (PERIOD PLAN)

The post-war years saw a resurgence of population and real estate development on Fire Island. The 17 communities each saw periods of growth. Because of the expansion of the residential areas, Fire Island began to significantly change in character. Developers continued to build on Fire Island to take advantage of rising home costs, which had substantially increased by the early 1960s.[158] By the mid-1960s, private development on the island was generally limited to the small communities on the western half of the island, where there were approximately 2,460 residential buildings and 64 commercial properties. While there were smaller developments scattered around the island, these typically consisted of those who did not have clear title to the land.[159] As more houses were built on the island and more people began arriving, owners began asking the federal and state governments for more help regarding beach erosion. As such, by 1978, the National Park Service controlled 5,944 acres of land, most of which were within the wilderness area to the east.[160]

The period plan maps, Figures 3-39 through 3-43 (located at the end of the chapter), depict conditions on Fire Island from 1978. These maps were produced from information taken from contemporary maps of the 1970s and early 1980s primarily the 1978 General Management Plan for Fire Island (NPS - FIIS 29800). Information from the The United States Geologic Survey maps from 1967 to 1969 and the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey of Shinnecock Bay to the Great South Bay from 1961 was also used to develop the 1978 period plans.

NATURAL SYSTEMS AND TOPOGRAPHY

Fire Island is composed of flat, level topography on the western end of the island, gradually becoming slightly undulating toward the eastern end of the island in the wilderness area, east of Watch Hill. With the ocean on the south side of the island and the Great South Bay on the north side, there are areas where storms have diminished and flattened the dunes, creating overwash areas. One example is found east of Fire Island Pines, where Barrett Beach is located. Some sand nourishment projects had begun during this period by the individual communities and property owners; however, it is not clear to what extent they occurred or succeeded.

Fire Island's topography and landform continued to change during this period. Littoral drift of sediment and sand was accreting on the western end of Fire Island. Such accretion gave the appearance that the Fire Island Lighthouse was moving further inland from the Fire Island Inlet than where it was originally built.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND USE

In 1978, there were seven distinct land use zones within Fire Island National Seashore. These were: 1) the Fire Island Lighthouse area; 2) the seashore areas, including the beach and dunes; 3) the 17 community areas, with residences and community support structures; 4) the forested areas that included the Sunken Forest; 5) the Watch Hill and Sailors Haven visitor's use areas that had been developed by the National Park Service; 6) the wilderness area east of Watch Hill that ran to the western boundary of Smith Point County Park; 7) the major park on the east end of the island, Smith Point County Park, which was entirely owned by the county and devoted to seashore recreational uses.

In 1978, the islands in Great South Bay within the legislative boundary of Fire Island National Seashore remained mostly uninhabited. Some residences remained on West Island and were occupied seasonally. Recreation was the only noted use for this group of islands.

CIRCULATION

Access to and from Fire Island was either by road or by water. In 1978, the island was accessed by car either by the Fire Island Inlet bridge on the western end of the island, or by the Smith Point Bridge on the eastern end of the island. There was a sidewalk by the current Smith Point Bridge for pedestrian use; however, bicycles were not permitted. Bicycles and pedestrians were also not permitted on the Fire Island Inlet Bridge. Ferries provided access from the mainland to the bay side of the island at various community terminals as well as at the National Park Service marinas at Sailors Haven and Watch Hill. Community ferry service was provided at Kismet, Saltaire, Ocean Bay Park, Point O'Woods, Cherry Grove, Fire Island Pines, and Davis Park. Personal watercraft also provided access to the community piers or to the two National Park Service marinas.

During this period vehicles were allowed on the island; however, one needed a Fire Island National Seashore permit to travel between the communities, and each town required its own permits, as well as permits for the incorporated villages of Ocean Beach and Saltaire. There were no paved roads on Fire Island in 1978, however, there was one main route that ran the length of the island, informally known as Burma Road. The beach road and inland route was given this name during the early 1960s for its environment, which may have been in reference to the Burma Road that was used as the main supply route into China from British Burma during World War II. Burma Road was the main circulation route through the island and ran lengthwise through many of the communities and along the seashore for others. The road ran along a beach trail outside of the Sunken Forest and the eight-mile zone on the eastern end of the national seashore; for the latter, Burma Road was used primarily by pedestrians. The route has been maintained by the National Park

Service within park lands though to a lesser-degree within the eight-mile wilderness zone. Burma Road throughout the communities was part of the boardwalks system and is maintained locally by those communities, villages, and towns. The route varied in material and width depending on location, consisting of either boardwalk, concrete, or sand. In some areas, Burma Road was not permitted to run through the communities, so instead it ran along the beach, with several vehicle dune crossings in place to provide access inland. The National Park Service maintained the roadless culture and restricted access across the island except by permit, which were limited. Not all residents could obtain a permit; for example, only one permit per household was allowed. So, for example, if one traveled to the island by car across Smith Point Bridge, they were required to park at the County Park and walk in via the trail at the western end of the park.

Many of the communities had grown between 1941 and 1978, adding additional walkways, piers, and sometimes a harbor or marina to the landscape. All 17 communities were well established by 1978. Travel within the communities was primarily by walking or riding bicycles. The original grid-pattern street plans within the communities had not changed, although by 1978 more of the walkways were covered with concrete. The majority of them, however, still remained as slatted boards on raised walkways. In addition, the communities had instituted designated dune crossings, areas where walkways had been built over the dunes.

VEGETATION

Seashore plant life, including beach grass, beach plum, bayberry, and shrubs that help stabilize the land grew along the upper beaches and beyond the tide lines. On the bayside there were tall stands of reeds.[161] The Sunken Forest, home to ancient holly trees, and the eight-mile zone farther to the east, were both recognized as important natural landscapes and environments on Fire Island.

The most comprehensive study of Fire Island vegetation was completed in 1975, which identified "343 species of vascular plants, 10 lichens, 9 mosses, and 11 species of marine algae."[162] Author of a 1985 report establishes that all of these were "probably established or native to Fire Island."[163] Although the Statler report conducted in 1985 dates after this period of consideration, it is relevant as it is unrealistic to assume that massive changes occurred between 1978 and 1985 to alter an inventory of vegetation. These reports do not list non-native vegetation specifically as such; however, it is noted that the man-made communities do exhibit an increase in plant diversity, specifically at access points to the island: within the Smith Point Bridge and the Robert Moses Causeway. The immediate area around the lighthouse exhibited a large amount of species as well as the area around the Fire Island Coast Guard Station, not seen anywhere else. Finally, grasses in lawns within the communities were introduced.[164]

BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

By 1978, thousands of buildings and structures had been built on Fire Island. The buildings fulfilled a wide variety of purposes: residential, commercial, ecclesiastical, educational, transportation related, recreational, and government support. Some of the 17 communities had a variety of these commercial or institutional building types, while others were strictly residential. Ocean Beach continued to remain the most densely built community on the island during this period; however, Seaview and Ocean Bay Park had also developed substantially.

The lighthouse area at this time consisted of the lighthouse, the keeper's dwelling, the Coast Guard annex, remains of the old lighthouse, a vehicle checkpoint on the western border with Robert Moses State Park, and one radio tower southeast of the lighthouse.[165]

The National Park Service areas of Sailors Haven and Watch Hill consisted of visitor support buildings, most of which were built within the previous decade. The buildings at Sailors Haven were: a marina, a bathhouse, a snack bar, a ranger station, National Park Service residences, an interpretative center, a horse barn, and wastewater treatment areas. By 1978, the Watch Hill area featured a 166-boat marina, ranger station/visitor contact center, a snack bar, a maintenance facility, a food store for boaters, interpretative trails, a bathhouse, camping sites, a horse stable, boardwalks, and over two dozen dwellings.[166]

The Talisman area, not within any of the communities, is located west of Water Island and east of Fire Island Pines, and included a hotel, recreational hall, and summer residences.

Several residences stood within the wilderness area east of Davis Park, with some of the owners still retaining tenancy. Bayberry Dunes, a short distance east of Davis Park, expanded during this period; however, following the establishment of the dune district, the National Park Service acquired these houses, purchasing the last one in 1978. Very little built fabric existed in 1978 between the Bellport Coast Guard Station and the Smith Point Coast Guard Station. At this time, the area around Old Inlet had shower facilities and a snack bar on the oceanfront.

Smith Point County Park had been in operation since circa 1956. Three prefabricated geodesic domes were constructed in Smith Point County Park in 1964: one for exhibits, one for picnicking, and one for visitor information. East of the Smith Point County Park to Moriches Inlet, no evidence exists of any structures, except for the extant Forge River Coast Guard Station.

At this time, buildings across the island, whether they were built by the National Park Service or private property owners, were commonly built using asbestos, clapboard, and aluminum siding rather than the ubiquitous cedar shingles of the earlier extant structures. The residences of 1978 also reflect a period of more affluent home owners and many were enlarged.[167]

VIEWS AND VISTAS

The primary views and vistas throughout Fire Island National Seashore were from the beach, either looking out to the Atlantic Ocean or along the length of the Fire Island coastline in either direction. Boardwalks were constructed in Sailors Haven during this period and there were important views from the interpretative trails within and near this area – to the Atlantic Ocean from along the beach or atop the dunes, and from the boardwalk looking out to the Great South Bay. Watch Hill also provided significant views toward Long Island across Great South Bay (Figure 3-44).

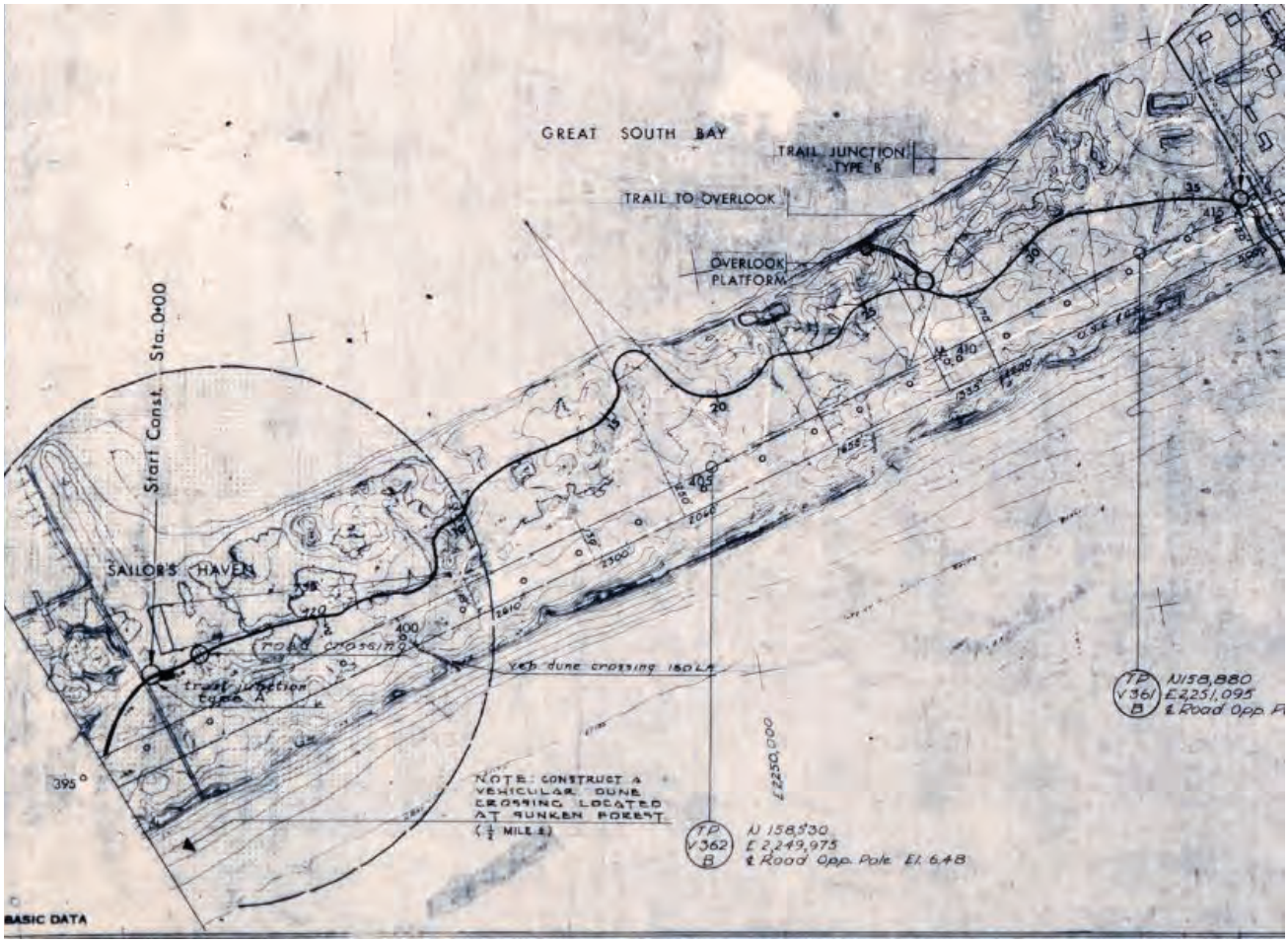
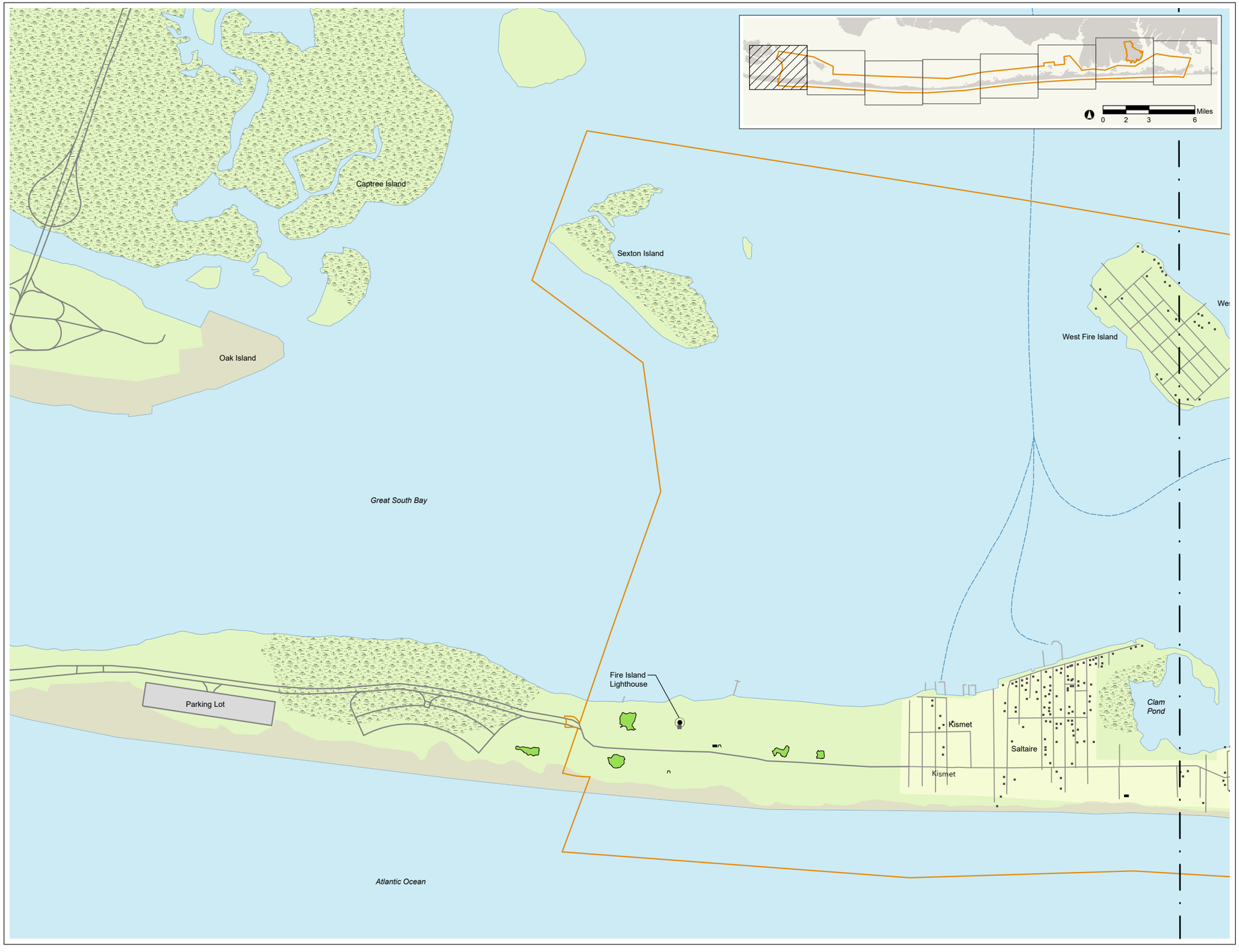


Figure 3-44. The National Park Service constructed two overlooks in the Sailors Haven area to provide views of the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean (FIIS Archives – FIIS 15637_002).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1978 Period Plan

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1967-1969
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1961
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Woods
- Dirt Roads/Paths Docks
- Paved Road
- Ferry Route
- Pier
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building
- Swimming Pool

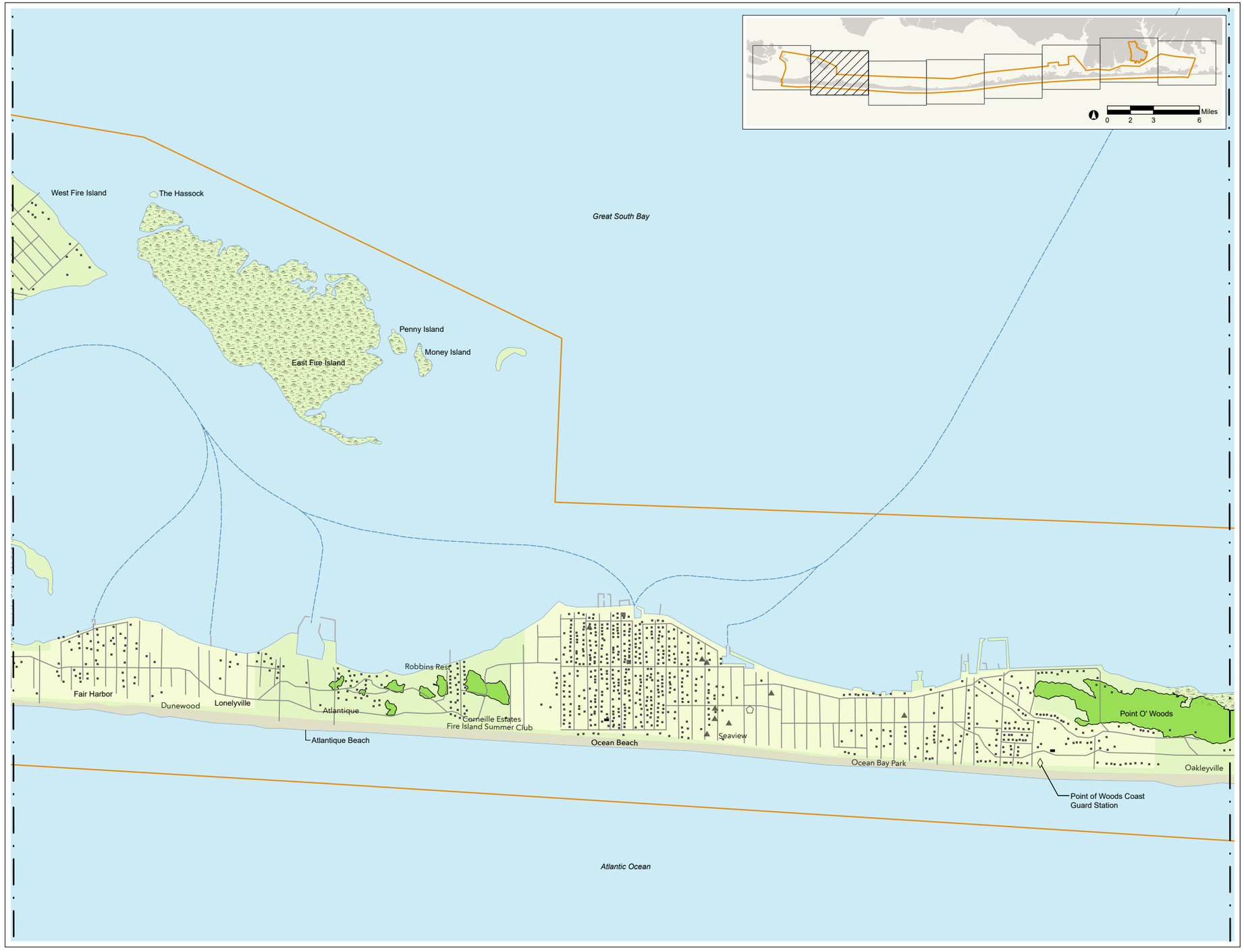
NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 4.1

Figure 3-39. 1978 Period Plan Map #1.



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1978 Period Plan

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

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3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

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- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
0 375 750 1,500

Drawing 4.2

Figure 3-40. 1978 Period Plan Map #2.

178



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1978 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1967-1969
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1961
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

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- Tank
- Building

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 4.4

Figure 3-41. 1978 Period Plan Map #3 (top) and #4 (bottom).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island
National Seashore
Fire Island, New York

Fire Island
1978 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

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SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1967-1969
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1961
3. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- Legislative Boundary
- Lawn
- Beach
- Wetland
- Hydrography
- Woods
- Dirt Roads/Paths
- Paved Road
- Ferry Route
- Pier
- Coast Guard Station
- Windmill
- Radio Tower
- Tank
- Building

NOTES

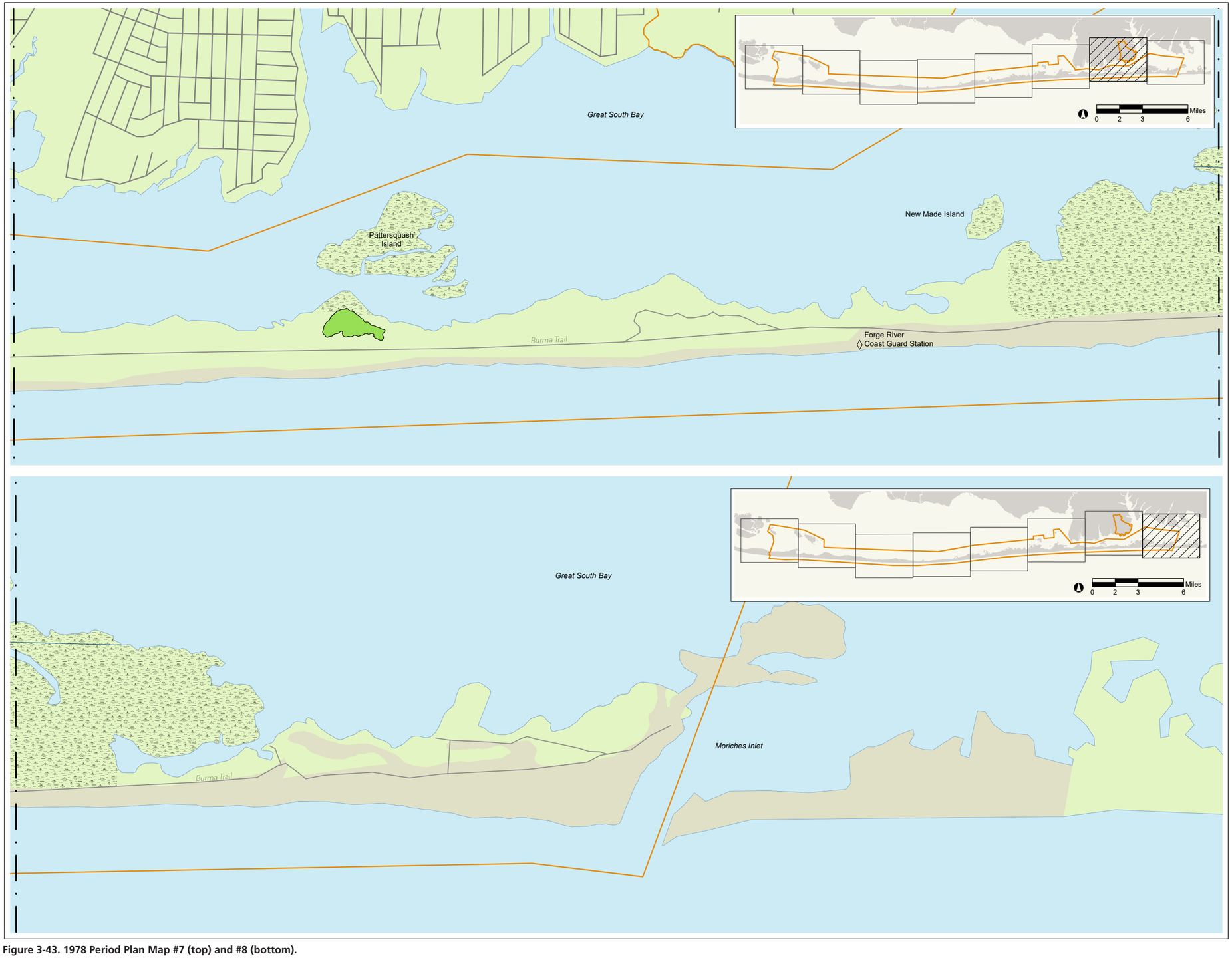
1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
0 375 750 1,500

Drawing 4.6

Figure 3-42. 1978 Period Plan Map #5 (top) and #6 (bottom).

180



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 1978 Period Plan

National Park Service

Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation

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SOURCES

1. U.S. Geological Surveys, 1967-1969
2. U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Shinnecock Bay to Great South Bay, 1961
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NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. All features shown in approximate scale and location
3. Contour lines pending

Feet
0 375 750 1,500

Drawing 4.8

Figure 3-43. 1978 Period Plan Map #7 (top) and #8 (bottom).

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ENDNOTES

1. Betty Thompson, *Administrative History of Fire Island National Seashore* (National Park Service, 1977), 4.
2. "Black Outs and Beach Patrols: Fire Island during World War II," The Life and Media of Gordon F. Sander, accessed May 12, 2022, https://www.gordonsander.com/fire-island-during-wwii.
3. "Black Outs and Beach Patrols: Fire Island during World War II," The Life and Media of Gordon F. Sander.
4. Ibid.
5. Carl Luss, *Cherry Grove Community House and Theater National Register Nomination* (New York, New York: 2013).
6. "Locate a Station Site," U.S. Life-Saving Serivce Heritage Association, accessed on May 12, 2002, https://uslife-savingservice.org/station-sites-search/?_sites_state=ny&_station_site_active=no.
7. Saltaire had a population of 22 people in 1940 and 21 people in 1950; Long Island Regional Planning Board, *Historical Population of Long Island Communities, 1790-1980, Decennial Census Data* (Hauppauge, New York: 1982), accessed April 10, 2022, 57, https://suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/0/formsdocs/planning/Research/Historical_pop.pdf.
8. Molly R. McDonald, *Carrington House National Register Nomination*, section 8, 3.
9. McDonald, *Carrington House National Register Nomination*, section 8, 3.
10. Ibid., section 8.
11. Luss, *Cherry Grove Community House and Theater National Register Nomination*, Section 8, 2.
12. Lee E. Koppelman and Seth Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 43 and 66.
13. Koppelman and Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History*, 66; "Fire Island National Park Wins Support," *Suffolk County News*, March 8, 1957, 1, accessed April 13, 2022, https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn84031477/1957-03-08/ed-1/seq-1.pdf.
14. Public Law 86-645, 86th Congress, approved July 14, 1960. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-74/pdf/STATUTE-74-Pg480.pdf
15. Public Law 86-646, 483.
16. Koppelman and Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History*, 66.
17. Jacqueline A. Mullen, thesis, *The Fire Island Road that Wasn't: Bob Moses, the Wilderness Movement, and a New National Seashore* (Albany, New York: University at Albany, State University of New York, 2012), 13.
18. The Fire Island Inlet bridge opened on June 13, 1964; "$10 Million Fire Island Bridge To Be Opened to Public June 13; Span and State Park Named for Robert Moses—Use of Beach Buggies Limited," *New York Times,* June 4, 1964, https://www.nytimes.com/1964/06/04/archives/10-million-fire-island-bridge-to-be-opened-to-public-june-13-span.html.
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21. W. Earle Andrews, *Report on Plan to Restore and Protect Fire Island* (New York, New York: 1938); Setha M. Low and Dana H. Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview and Assessment Fire Island National Seashore* (New York, New York: City University of New York and National Park Service, Northeast Region, 2006), 97.
22. Ned Kaufman and Charles Starks, *Land Regulation at Fire Island National Seashore: A History and Analysis, 1964-2004* (National Park Service, Northeast Region and University of Massachusetts, 2008), , 7.
23. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, 8.

24. Udall was referencing Moses' 1927 plan to add concession stands near the Fire Island bridge as part of a proposed park; Warren Weaver, Jr., "Fire Island Plan Opposed by Udall," *New York Times*, June 21, 1962.

25. Weaver, "Fire Island Plan Opposed by Udall," June 21, 1962.

26. Organizations that opposed the Robert Moses Parkway plan included: Water Island National Seashore Committee; Tenants Emergency Committee to Save Fire Island; Fire Island Voter's Association; Citizen's Committee for a Fire Island National Seashore; Fire Island Association; Fire Island Pines Property Owners Association; and Cherry Grove Property Owners Association; Jacqueline A. Mullen, Dissertation, *Coastal Parks for a Metropolitan Nation: How Postwar Politics and Urban Growth Shaped America's Shores* (Albany, New York: University at Albany, State University of New York, 2015), 222-225, accessed April 12, 2022, https://livinglandscapeobserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/JacquelineMMGonzales_Coastal-Parks.pdf.

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28. Ibid., 9.

29. Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall to Senator Henry M. Jackson, June 10, 1963, on file at Fire Island National Seashore archives.

30. Secretary Udall's assistant, Walter Pozen quoted in the *Babylon Town Leader* 1962; a small group of Fire Island National Seashore proponents visited Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, in 1962, to observe an established National Seashore. The group, including Dunewood developer Maurice Barbash, returned to Fire Island furthering their belief that Fire Island should similarly be designated a national seashore.

31. Christina Kata, "Regional Plan Association's 100-year History on Long Island," Regional Plan Association, accessed April 21, 2022, https://rpa.org/work/reports/rpa-history-in-long-island.

32. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall to Senator Henry M. Jackson, June 10, 1963, on file at Fire Island National Seashore archives.

33. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall to Senator Henry M. Jackson, June 10, 1963, on file at Fire Island National Seashore archives.

34. H.R. 7107 was first introduced on June 18, 1963.

35. Public Law 88-587 (16 USC 459e), 88th Congress, approved September 11, 1964. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg928-2.pdf#page=6

36. Ibid., Sect 1(b).

37. Ibid.

38. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, vii.

39. Public Law 88-587, Sect. 7(a, b).

40. Ibid., Sect. 3(b).

41. Ibid., Sect. 3(c).

42. The draft zoning regulations were published in October 1965; Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Zoning Standards, Proposed Rule, 30 Federal Register, No. 207, (October 26, 1965), 13578-13580.

43. Fire Island National Seashore's purpose was to "provide distinct and unique recreational, interpretative and education opportunities to residents of the heavily urbanized northeastern United States and elsewhere through the preservation and conservation of the natural scene, through access to it, and through a sensitive blending of recreational and other facilities with the scene;" Public Law 88-587.

44. National Park Service, *The Master Plan: Fire Island National Seashore* (1965), 3.

45. National Park Service, *The Master Plan: Fire Island National Seashore* (1965), 3.

46. Public Law 88-577 (16 USC 1131-1136), 88th Congress, approved September 8, 1964, 891. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg890.pdf.

47. Public Law 88-577, 892.

48. National Park Service, *Master Plan*, 4.

49. 57 acres were in Bayburry Dunes and 44 acres were undeveloped dunes. A map of the tracts the National Park Service planned to acquire as well as their owners and priority level are provided in the Master Plan (page 13).

50. National Park Service, *The Master Plan*, 13. The *Master Plan* lists all properties Fire Island National Seashore planned for acquisition and their level of priority.

51. Thompson, *Administrative History*, 5.

52. National Park Service, *Master Plan*, 10.

53. Thompson, *Administrative History*, 11.

54. The Sunken Forest lands were either previously donated or purchased by the Sunken Forest Preserve, Inc., an organization created for the sole purpose of making the entire 73-acre area a nature preserve that would halt Robert Moses's parkway plan.

55. Thompson, *Administrative History*, 13.

56. Ibid., 14.

57. Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Zoning Standards, Final Rule, 31 Federal Register, No. 64, (April 2, 1966), 5289.

58. Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Zoning Standards, 5290.

59. Koppelman and Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History*, 107 and 115; a taking is a course of action by a government authority taking private property without compensation. Between 1964 and 1974, the towns and villages issued numerous variances to property owners without informing the National Park Service. A total of 320 variances had been approved by the towns and villages, whereas, the National Park Service was only informed of 86.

60. Koppelman and Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History*, 104.

61. The Carrington tract was conveyed to the federal government in 1969 and has remained in its natural state since then; McDonald, *Carrington House National Register Nomination*.

62. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 43.

63. Shoshanna McCollum, *Images of America: Fire Island Beach Resort and National Seashore* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 94.

64. The 1965 Master Plan was the initial development plan of Fire Island and is not the same as the Management Plan.

65. Public Law 88-587 7(b).

66. The General Management Plan also included the William Floyd Estate as a sixth management unit; however, for the purposes of this report, it is not included in the site history of Fire Island. The William Floyd Estate unit was added to the Fire Island National Seashore in 1965; Public Law 89-244, 89th Congress, approved October 9, 1965.

67. Koppelman and Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History*, 105.

68. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 72–73.

69. Ibid., 26–27 and 74–75.

70. Ibid., 76–77.

71. Ibid., 27.

72. Watch Hill included a bath house, a campground, a food and marina store, a snack bar, an elevated dune crossing for pedestrians, a dune crossing for vehicles, ferry slips, a horse stable, an interpretive trail, a lifeguard station, a maintenance station, a marina and liquid waste pumping station, picnic sites, a ranger station and residence, a storage facility, a wastewater treatment facility, an interpretative center, and a visitor information center; National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 78.

73. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 28.

74. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 104. Old Inlet was home to the Old Inlet Club and the Fireplace Beach Club, which started in the 1950s. Threatened by the proposed Moses parkway and the possibility of a National Seashore, a small group of citizens formed a corporation with the sole purpose of selling stock and bonds in order to purchase five acres of bay-to-ocean land in the Old Inlet area. The Fireplace Beach Club and Old Inlet Club were purchased by the federal government in 1965 when the land became a National Seashore, and after a five-year lease, circa 1970, the buildings and boardwalks were removed.

75. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 28.

76. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix C; the land classification system in the General Management Plan lists these lands grouped under Class 1 – Natural Zone, IA – Environmental Protection/Primitive Zone.

77. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 44–45; these lands are classified in the General Management Plan as Class 1 – Natural Zone, IB - Outstanding Natural Features Zone.

78. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix C.

79. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 45; these lands are classified as Class III – General Outdoor Recreation Zone.

80. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 45–48.

81. The dune district would extend landward 40 feet from the natural high dune crest line and the seaward limit would be the mean highwater mark. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 48 and 104.

82. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 102–103.

83. Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Vehicle Use Regulations, Final Rule, 42 Federal Register, No. 239, (December 13, 1977), 62482-62485.

84. Vollmer Associates 1977, x; Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Vehicle Use Regulations, Final Rule, 42 Federal Register, No. 239, (December 13, 1977), 62482-62485.

85. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 39–40.

86. Thompson 1977, 9; Vollmer Associates, Fire *Island National Seashore: Final Transportation Study* (New York, New York: 1977), Appendix vi.

87. National Park Service, *General Management Plan: Fire Island National Seashore, New York* (1977, revision 1978), 105.

88. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, 86.

89. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 110.

90. Ibid., 109.

91. Public Law 95-625, 95th Congress, approved November 10, 1978.

92. Ibid.

93. United States Congress, "National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978," House Congressional Record (October 11, 1978), Section 322, 35681–35682.

94. Ibid.

95. "FACT SHEET – Fire Island to Montauk Point, NY," United States Army Corps of Engineers, New York District Website, accessed February 1, https://www.nan.usace.army.mil/Media/Fact-Sheets/Fact-Sheet-Article-View/Article/2407147/fact-sheet-fire-island-to-montauk-point-ny/.

96. 1970 population numbers were compiled by the Long Island Regional Planning Board from data purchased from the United States Census Bureau in 1980. The 1970 statistics were computed based on community development places created by the United States Census Bureau in 1980. Long Island Regional Planning Board, *Historical Population of Long Island Communities, 1790-1980, Decennial Census Data* (Hauppauge, New York: 1982), 16, accessed April 12, 2022, https://suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/0/formsdocs/planning/Research/Historical_pop.pdf; United States Bureau of the Census, Number of Inhabitants New York (1970), 34-6, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1970/population-volume-1/1970a_v1pas2-04.pdf.

97. Long Island Regional Planning Board, Postal Districts: 1980 Census Data Aggregated by Zip Codes, November 1983, accessed May 18, 2022. https://suffolkcountyny.gov/Portals/0/formsdocs/planning/Publications/Population%20-%201980%20-%20Postal%20Districts.pdf?ver=2019-03-26-124404-000

98. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

99. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 131; Laraine Fletcher and Ellen Kintz, *Historic Resource Study, Fire Island National Seashore, Long Island, N.Y.* (Division of Cultural Resources, North Atlantic Regional Office, National Park Service, 1979), 102.

100. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

101. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 131.

102. The general management plan does not provide individual building totals for Fair Harbor but instead groups it with Dunewood, Lonelyville, and Atlantique. In 1947 the total number of buildings within these four communities was 70, which then rose to 526 by 1973; National Park Service, General Management Plan (1977), Appendix D.

103. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 145.

104. Ibid., 153.

105. Koppelman and Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore: A History*, 16.

106. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 154; The General Management Plan of 1977 does not provide individual building totals for Dunewood but instead groups it with Fair Harbor, Lonelyville, and Atlantique. In 1947 the total number of buildings within these four communities was 70, which then rose to 526 by 1973; National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

107. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 106.

108. Ibid., 106.

109. Ibid., 112.

110. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 159.

111. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 112.

112. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 112; Koppelman and Foreman 2008, 10. The General Management Plan of 1977 does not provide individual building totals for Lonelyville but instead groups it with Fair Harbor, Dunewood, and Atlantique. In 1947, the total number of buildings within these four communities was 70, which then rose to 526 by 1973; National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

113. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 114.

114. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 114; Koppelman and Foreman, *Fire Island National Seashore: A History*, 14. The General Management Plan does not provide individual building totals for Atlantique but instead groups it with Fair Harbor, Dunewood, and Lonelyville. In 1947, the total number of buildings within these four communities was 70, which then rose to 526 by 1973; National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

115. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 114.

116. Ibid., 114.

117. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 114; Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 173.

118. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 117.

119. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 55; U.S. Life-Saving Service Heritage Association, Blue Point Station House, accessed April 12, 2022, https://uslife-savingservice.org/station-buildings/blue-point-station-house-3/.

120. Fire Island School District, Fire Island Union Free School District No. 14, https://www.fi.k12.ny.us/district/history, accessed April 12, 2021.

121. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 178.

122. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 117.

123. Ibid., 117.

124. The General Management Plan of 1977 does not provide individual building totals for Ocean Beach but instead groups it with Robbins Rest and Corneille Estates. In 1947, the total number of buildings within these three communities was 365, which then rose to 676 by 1973. Most of these buildings were in Ocean Beach. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

125. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 123.

126. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 125; "Fire Island During the Sixties," *Fire Island News,* August 8, 1987, available online at The Life and Media of Gordon F. Sander, accessed April 22, 2022, https://www.gordonsander.com/fire-island-during-the-sixties-fire-island-news-82087.

127. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 127.

128. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 126; Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 194–195. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

129. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 129.

130. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 131; Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 208.

131. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 131.

132. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

133. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 207–208.

134. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 137.

135. Ibid., 137.

136. Ibid., 137.

137. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 137; National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

138. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 240.

139. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 141.

140. Guy Trebay, "A Collector of People Along with Art," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/fashion/07GREEN.html.

141. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 143.

142. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 145; "The Carrington Chronicles- Chapter 1: The History of the Estate," Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society, accessed April 22, 2022, https://www.pineshistory.org/the-archives/the-carrington-chronicles-chapter-1.

143. "Fire Island's LGBTQ Heritage," National Park Service, accessed April 21, 2022, https://www.nps.gov/fiis/learn/historyculture/fire-island-s-lgbtq-heritage.htm.

144. "The Belvedere Cherry Grove Est. 1957," Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society, accessed April 22, 2022, https://www.pineshistory.org/the-archives/the-belvedere-cherry-grove-est-1957?rq=belvedere

145. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

146. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 148.

147. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

148. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 149.

149. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 261; Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 117.

150. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 261.

151. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

152. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 149.

153. Ibid., 155.

154. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 269–270.

155. Ibid., 279.

156. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, Appendix D.

157. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 154.

158. Mullen 2019, 13.

159. National Park Service, *Fire Island National Seashore: A Proposal*, 8.

160. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, 81; Thompson, *Administrative History*, 5.

161. National Park Service, *Fire Island National Seashore: A Proposal*, 10.

162. Jack McCormick and Associates, Inc., *Environmental Inventory of the Fire Island National Seashore and William Floyd Estate, Suffolk County, New York* (Devon, PA, 1975).

163. Richard Statler, Eric E. Lamont, and James Northrup, "Vegetation of Fire Island, New York," Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club 113, no. 3 (July-September 1986): 29.

164. Ibid., 301.

165. National Park Service, *General Management Plan* 1977, 72.

166. Ibid., 79.

167. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 85.

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Chapter 4: 1979–Present



Figure 4-1. Wilderness Nature Trail in 2009 (Wikipedia Commons).

POST-ESTABLISHMENT PARK PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The recent past is marked by a nearly continuous review and evaluation of the National Park Service's role, actions, and overall management practices on Fire Island National Seashore. Scrutiny of this is pursued by the National Park Service itself, the United States Congress, local town and county governments, residents and property owners and stakeholder groups and organizations including Native American tribes and nations. All have a role to play in the management of the national seashore. This ongoing evaluation has played a large part in shaping current administrative practices and deliberate management of Fire Island's landscape from 1979 to the present. This chapter discusses changes in regulations, laws and zoning that impact Fire Island National Seashore and the National Park Service response to those changes; initiatives and studies to update national seashore management; geomorphological changes to the island; and natural and cultural resources on Fire Island, including changing demographics and stakeholder involvement in the management of Fire Island National Seashore. Changes to the natural and cultural environment that resulted in the revised General Management Plan of 2016 will be discussed in this chapter along with conclusions about their impact on the landscape of Fire Island as a barrier island. The chapter will also describe the stakeholder groups involved and their role in developing the landscape. Finally, it will discuss how the National Park Service and the local communities are working together to develop a sustainable environment, one that attempts to balance the residential, the recreational, and the cultural activities and resources, with the natural environment in the face of changing environmental climates (Figure 4-1).

The Park was established in 1964, and planning initiatives from the first phase of park establishment, as laid out in the 1977 General Management Plan, were then completed during the last quarter of the twentieth century. These initiatives included continued land acquisition, designation of the wilderness area on the eastern end of Fire Island along with a management plan for it, and approval of all local zoning regulations. Other notable accomplishments in the last 40 years are the scientific studies prepared to assist with the management of the island. Example studies include research on the geomorphology of the island; research on deer, tick, and mosquito populations and disease and potential controls; and studies of cultural, archaeological, and ethnographic resources.

The acquisition of new information and revised land regulations during this period caused the earlier 1977 General Management Plan to be outdated. Current information, new and redeveloped working relationships, and new priorities by both the National Park Service and stakeholders necessitated a revised General Management Plan for Fire Island National Seashore, completed in 2016. Land acquisition, zoning, and regulation have been and continue to be paramount concerns.

ZONING STANDARDS AND LAND REGULATION

> *"It presents an opportunity to be in a resource that is perhaps unique in the world, to live on the oceanfront in such harmony."*
>
> *– Superintendent Richard Marks, 1979*[1]

Much of the debate during the last quarter of the twentieth century between local stakeholders and the National Park Service centered on property ownership rights and the federal government's ability to condemn private property for public use. Fire Island National Seashore eventually became a battleground between ecological management and private property rights. This debate was animated by the differing political agendas and political party platforms of the 1980s.

In 1979, the lack of support from other agencies, United States Congressional delegation, and local governments led the National Park Service to prepare a report titled *Draft Staff Report on Land Acquisition Review*. The purpose of the report was to determine whether National Park Service policies on condemnation and regulation were outside of its purview. The 1979 report concluded that the National Park Service was within its rights and had not been overly aggressive when it came to land regulation. The study, however, revealed that high levels of distrust and misperception existed among the public toward the federal government. For example, the public in general had assumed that the government intended to buy the entire island and return it to its natural state. Some groups of residents saw the development of the various districts in the General Management Plan, particularly the Dune District, and the promulgation of more limiting driving regulations, as personal infringements. Many residents interpreted this as the government's plan to crush the vitality of the communities. Property rights and distrust of the federal government continued to dominate discussions about the national seashore.

1980: PROPERTY RIGHTS AT THE FOREFRONT

In April 1980, a law authorizing new federal zoning regulations for Fire Island National Seashore were adopted to align with the 1977 General Management Plan and the 1978 boundary increase amendment, adding a new Dune District overlay zoning district to the existing zoning regulations. However, these updated zoning regulations did not alleviate the public's distrust of the federal government.

The 1980 law describes the federal zoning regulations within three different overlay districts: the Community Development District, the Seashore District, and the Dune District. The Community Development District is composed of the 17 communities on Fire Island. The Seashore District includes all lands and waters of the seashore that are not within the Community Development District. The Dune District is defined as the area from mean high tide to 40 feet landward of the primary natural high dune crest, as demarcated by the National Park Service. This definition of the dune crest became controversial because the dune crest is not a permanent location, but changes through time and due to significant weather events.

Additional definitions in the 1980 law state that a structure built before July 1963 is an *improved property,* and one built after this date is an *unimproved property*. The year 1963 was the threshold because it was the last year prior to the area becoming the Fire Island National Seashore. Accordingly, unimproved property could be maintained but not altered or moved, and it would *always* be subject to condemnation.

The regulations regarding the reconstruction of storm-damaged properties were based on the property's age and district location. An improved property (pre-1963) in the communities or within the Seashore District would be allowed to be rebuilt to its previous dimensions. Within the Dune District, pre-1963 houses could be reconstructed, but had to meet current applicable zoning standards.

Unimproved properties (post-1963) within the Dune District had to be built to current standards if they were within a community. A post-1963 house in the Seashore District that was damaged by a storm could not be reconstructed. Houses within the roughly eight-mile stretch west of Smith Point County Park, primarily an undeveloped area, were allowed to remain until the residency agreements expired in 1992. At that time, the National Park Service planned to remove these structures.

Other important rules approved in 1980 include limiting lot coverage to no greater than 25 percent by the main structures, buildings no higher than 28 feet above the ground and no more than two stories high, and no in-ground swimming pools. The construction of multifamily housing was restricted by limiting the structure to one kitchen and no more than two-and-a-half bathrooms. Acreage, frontage, and setbacks no longer needed to conform to federal standards. Instead, these restrictions were delegated to the local

authorities and their zoning standards, if desired. The Town of Islip requires the minimum required plot area for a single-family dwelling to be 6,000 square feet and a front yard to be 25 feet deep.[8] The Town of Brookhaven requires residential lots on Fire Island to be no less than 4,000 square feet and have a minimum frontage of 40 feet. Front and rear yards for lots in the Town of Brookhaven must be no less than 20 feet deep.[9]

The 1980 regulations also granted Fire Island National Seashore the authority to condemn all unimproved properties and properties located outside of the Community Development District, except for properties within the Dune District that were maintained in their natural state. Improved properties were subject to condemnation if they were approved for a variance or were not maintained in accordance with the federal zoning regulations.[10]

1980: DESIGNATION OF THE WILDERNESS AREA

> *Wilderness Act of 1964 sought to preserve areas "where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."*[11]

In addition to regulations about condemnation, creating a federally protected wilderness area on Fire Island was in part a continuation of the National Park Service's plans from the 1980 federal zoning changes, with the intent to create areas on the barrier island as natural, undeveloped zones (Figure 4-2). The wilderness area was considered a distinct zone on the eastern end of the barrier island, to be preserved in its natural state. It was defined geographically as the eight-mile area in the original 1964 legislation that established Fire Island National Seashore, and was defined in that law as running from the easterly boundary of Brookhaven town park at Davis Park to the westerly boundary of Smith Point County Park.[12]



Figure 4-2. At 1,381 acres, the Otis Pike High Dune Wilderness is the smallest wilderness area managed by the National Park Service. The area stretches from the toe of the primary dune, with its patches of seaside plants through areas of pine forests, to the sheltered marshes along the Great South Bay (NPS, *Wilderness Plan*, 2016).

In 1980, broad support for a high-level management action for the wilderness area led the way for the Congressional establishment of the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness (hereafter referred to as the High Dune Wilderness).[13] However, the area mapped as part of this High Dune Wilderness did not cover the full eight-mile area defined in the 1964 legislation. Instead, it stretched across six-and-a-half miles from Watch Hill on the west to Smith Point County Park on the east. It encompassed 1,363 acres with the potential to increase the boundaries with 18 additional acres at a later date (Figure 4-3).[14]

This designation provided extra protection by the federal government, and removed the debate as to what facilities the National Park Service could provide in this zone (Figure 4-4). Plans had already been put in place, prior to designation, to remove signs of human impacts, including all buildings, boardwalks, trails, and signs.[15] In 1980, there were 20 cottages within the boundaries of the High Dune Wilderness: seven of these were in Long Cove on the eastern end, 12 structures were located at Whalehouse Point, which is nearly two miles east of Long Cove, and one structure was located approximately a half mile west of Old Inlet.[16] The residents were allowed to remain under reserved rights permits, and minor repairs and improvements to their structures and grounds were allowed. The reserved



Figure 4-3. The High Dune Wilderness extends for approximately six-and-one-half miles, except for one break near its center, at Bellport Beach, which is owned by the village of Bellport. The eastern boundary is Smith Point County Park and the western boundary is adjacent to the Watch Hill visitor area (NPS, *Wilderness Plan*, 2016).

rights permits expired in 1992. At that time, the structures would be removed or relocated, and the area returned to its natural state.[17]

Other built resources found within the High Dune Wilderness included a horse stable and storage facilities maintained by the National Park Service at a location between the Watch Hill campground and Long Cove. These resources were moved outside of the wilderness area. The resources at Old Inlet include a dock, boardwalk, dune crossing, and bathhouse, were allowed to remain; however, improvements were not permitted.

A few trails existed within the High Dune Wilderness that were not compatible with the new designation. These were the Long Cove Natural Trail, the Otis Pike Wilderness Nature Trail, and the Burma Trail. The Long Cove Natural Trail stretched 3,600 feet from the western boundary of the High Dune Wilderness to Long Cove. A portion of that trail was removed by the National Park Service shortly after its designation. The Otis Pike Wilderness Nature Trail extended from the eastern boundary of the High Dune Wilderness at Smith West Visitor Center and extended west approximately 1,400 feet into the wilderness. This trail was designated a National Recreational Trail in 1981 and was planned to be relocated outside of the wilderness area when repairs exceeded 50 percent of its value.[18] A portion of the boardwalk remains, and it is still listed as a National Recreational Trail.[19]

The Burma Trail through the High Dune Wilderness was planned as a primary access trail and was authorized to remain (Figure 4-5). However, it was to be a minimally maintained trail with little to no maintenance. Natural revegetation of the Burma Trail itself would reduce its width significantly.[20] In addition, the National Park Service closed all vehicle cuts leading to the beach throughout the area. Trails were planned to be primitive footpaths, and hiking trails and trail spurs were not to be maintained, and instead the natural vegetation was to be allowed to overgrow and revert the landscape to its natural state (Figure 4-6).

Figure 4-4. An area of wilderness …. (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value (NPS, *Wilderness Plan*, 2016) (below left).

Figure 4-5. In accordance with the Wilderness Management Plan of 1983, the National Park Service provides minimal, or no, trail maintenance throughout the High Dune Wilderness. Instead, natural revegetation is allowed to occur. This strategy has reduced the width of many of trails (NPS, *Wilderness Plan*, 2016) (below right).





1981 General Accounting Office Report: "The NPS Should Improve its Land Acquisition and Management at Fire Island"

In response to the National Park Service's 1977 General Management Plan, the 1980 zoning regulations, and the National Park Service's intention to acquire land within the Dune District and the High Dune Wilderness, Congress sought a General Accounting Office review of Fire Island National Seashore's management and authority over land acquisition. Senators Daniel P. Moynihan and Jacob Javits were suspicious of the National Park Service's conclusions in the 1979 *Draft Staff Report on Land Acquisition Review* that Fire Island National Seashore policies on zoning and condemnation were within its purview and did not require modification. The General Accounting Office conducted an examination of the land regulation in 1980 and in 1981 presented its report, *The NPS Should Improve its Land Acquisition and Management at Fire Island*.[21]

The General Accounting Office had three recommendations for the National Park Service in their 1981 report: 1) justify its requests to Congress for condemnation actions; 2) have a fully developed plan for acquisition; and 3) decommission land not needed for management or conservation. The General Accounting Office found that the National Park Service was too restrictive to property owners in its management of the Fire Island National Seashore and was exceeding its condemnation authority.[22]

The 1981 General Accounting Office report reflected an important shift in policy. Could Fire Island National Seashore restrict property rights to achieve its purpose, as mandated in the 1964 law? In 1964, Congress had indicated that it could. However, less than two decades later, the General Accounting Office report fundamentally said it could not. It was clear that the General Accounting Office report favored the rights of the property owner, a strong reflection of the political environment of the early 1980s. The General Accounting Office advised the National Park Service to be more reasonable toward private property rights, and discouraged the federal government's use of land acquisition and regulation.[23] The National Park service soon addressed these concerns.



Figure 4-6. Burma Road is the main road through Fire Island, seen here in the High Dune Wilderness. Here the road has been reduced to the width of a walking trail (Lejabeach.com).

1984 LAND PROTECTION PLAN

The 1979 National Park Service staff report advising that a land acquisition plan be developed, coupled with the 1981 General Accounting Office report suggesting that the Fire Island National Seashore administration was overreaching its authority, convinced the National Park Service to finally develop such a plan. Theoretically, the plan began as an acquisition plan in 1979; however, by the time it was finalized in 1984, it became referred to as a *protection plan*. The title alone conveyed an alignment with great deference to private property rights. To ease the minds of property owners, the plan suggested that the National Park Service had nearly completed the acquisition of land for the seashore. The plan also assured that future acquisition would occur only when other methods of protecting the land proved inadequate.[24] For example, prior to this protection plan, the National Park Service had plans to acquire 45 houses located within the Seashore District outside any of the communities. The Land Protection Plan removed the proposed condemnation of these 45 houses from its goals.[25]

In a second departure from its original guidance, the new plan declared that owners could maintain, rebuild, or even enlarge pre-1963 houses. It became clear that the Fire Island National Seashore administration was no longer attempting to revert the entire Seashore district to a natural state.[26] Contrary to the 1977 General Management Plan, the 1984 Land Protection Plan asserted that the acquisition of properties along the dune crest was inappropriate for the National Park Service because of the unexpectedly high cost. In addition, the plan recommended that the National Park Service should rely instead on local zoning ordinances for the protection of the dunes.[27]

Of critical importance within the 1984 Land Protection Plan was the assertion that federal zoning standards should protect both natural *and* cultural resources.[28] This was the first time within any of the federal policies, management plans, legislation, and regulations that protecting social character, including existing community character, was identified as a primary National Park Service objective. The plan asserted that management within the communities was "to allow continued prosperity while seeking a balance between inevitable change and retention of an historic lifestyle."[29] Community social character now became a federal concern.[30]

This change was intended to balance the natural resources protection with the existing cultural communities. In the case of Fire Island, it had become a well-known place welcoming LBGTQ+ individuals, particularly at a time when their rights were not assured. As the National Park Service attempted to balance community needs on Fire Island, other federal officials took action.

FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE AMENDMENTS ACT OF 1984

Property that could not be condemned and then sold by the 1984 amendment excluded property within the Dune District; beach or waters and adjoining land within exempt communities; any property within the 'eight-mile area;' and any property acquired prior to October 1, 1982, that the Secretary determines must be retained to further the purpose of the Act. (P.L. 98-482)]

Only one month after the completion of the Land Protection Plan, an amendment to Fire Island National Seashore's enabling legislation was passed. This amendment was to answer the public's rising concerns over federal jurisdiction of the Fire Island communities. The Fire Island National Seashore Amendments Act of 1984 allowed the National Park Service to use a temporary restraining order, or injunction, either as an alternative to condemnation or prior to condemnation.[31] The act also prevented automatic condemnation for minor violations. A process to determine whether a nonconforming structure would harm island resources was also to be developed. Finally, the National Park Service was to sell condemned property on the open market, to the highest bidder. The sold properties would come with covenants that required the purchaser to follow the zoning standards.[32] The land that would be put back on the market were properties that had been acquired after 1982 and located outside the Dune District, the beach, or the wilderness area. This legislation significantly reduced the National Park Service's authority to condemn private property in support of public purposes.

Within the 1984 Act, Congress mandated that the Department of the Interior determine acceptable population densities to assist with the zoning regulations. Congress understood that it was too late to revert to the population densities of 1964, due to significant construction during the previous two decades. During that time, the number of buildings had doubled. Approximately 1,500 structures had been added, mostly infill to the existing 3,000 buildings. Nearly 500 of these buildings were constructed under zoning variances.[33] Unfortunately, no direction was provided in the 1984 law as to how to determine the island's appropriate population density. At a minimum, population densities and growth were calculated using statistics from 1984 as the baseline.[34] Limitations on new construction, prescribed in the 1984 Act, were then to be enforced according to the limits of the 1984 density level within each community.

Finally, one of the major results of the 1984 Act was that new zoning standards were to replace the ineffective 1964 standards, which had been based on acreage, frontage, and setback requirements. The new standards would be based on "limitations or restrictions on the size, location or use of any commercial, residential, and other structures."[35] Variances granted to properties that did not meet zoning standards would no longer threaten the property to condemnation,

as it had under the 1964 Act. Condemnations would be limited to those properties issued a variance that failed to "conform to any applicable standard."[36] The consequence of this was to place the burden of proof on the National Park Service that a property had not met any standard. Such a task could not be realistically accomplished by the agency with its limited resources. In some instances, the towns did not provide a complete list of variances to the National Park Service.[37]

In 1985, the Secretary of the Interior finally approved all zoning ordinances from the towns and incorporated villages with zoning authority on Fire Island. Unfortunately, the approval of these zoning ordinances was based on the 1980 federal regulations and not on those reflecting the Amendments Act of 1984. In 1991, the Department of the Interior issued new zoning regulations.[38]

NEW ZONING REGULATIONS – MORE FREEDOM FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

The goal of the new 1991 federal zoning regulations was "to promote the protection and development of the land within the Seashore . . . with the objective of controlling density and protecting the island's natural resources."[39] The new rules replaced the old 1980 rules on lot size, frontage, and setback with a single rule setting a minimum lot size. The limit on bathrooms within residences was removed and the limits on height and lot coverage were loosened. The 1991 rules lifted the ban on in-ground swimming pools, and removed all controls on commercial signs except for prohibiting self-illuminated signs.[40]

These changes gave the owner autonomy in building placement and design. The 1977 General Management Plan recommended a density cap of two units per acre; however, the new 1991 rule set it at 10 units per acre, allowing for fairly high density within the communities.[41] The new rule also increased lot coverage from 25 percent to 35 percent. This increased the lot development, allowing for greater density and an increased population. To offset this increase, multifamily homes were prohibited. Group homes, the conversion of single-family residences to hold large groups of people, had become a popular trend during the 1970s. This one rule would significantly reduce the housing capacity of the island.[42]

Opponents of the new regulations argued that the new lot size minimum, set at 4,000 square feet, would allow too much development. The Department of the Interior contended that:

> Lots of 4,000 square feet may not be consistent with contemporary criteria for development on barrier beaches, however Fire Island is not a "clean slate" on which new development is occurring. The 4,000 square foot lot is, for the most part, the minimum lot size which has existed on Fire Island since the island was originally platted. With regards to increased houses in the Seashore District, the change in minimum lot size does not allow new construction in the Seashore District. The requirement sets the minimum standard for lot size in all Districts thus setting a standard for lot density. No new development is permitted in the Seashore District.[43]

Especially critical at the time, local zoning and federal regulations allowed houses built within the Seashore District to remain. Similarly, private property within the Dune District would be allowed to remain as long as it was undeveloped (not altered). Improved property within the Seashore District that conformed to the standards and was not likely to cause significant harm to natural resources could not be condemned. Properties subject to condemnation included those that did not have a local zoning ordinance approved by Fire Island National Seashore; any property built or altered after October 17, 1984 that did not conform to the regulations; and any construction after October 17, 1984 that had been granted an exception or variance that did not conform to the regulations.

Impacts of the new rules meant that owners could build in-ground pools, add a deck, and add a second floor to their single-family house. The second floor could be taller than the first floor, resulting in substantial increase to the height of structures along the shoreline.[44] In short, Federal regulations were now much more lenient, relying on the localities' zoning standards to be stricter if desired by those local governments. Other regulations were also amended.

VEHICLE REGULATIONS OF THE LATE 1980S

Following Congress' mandate to maintain or control population density, the National Park Service worked to create regulations and standards that would potentially further the impact densities, such as limiting the number of vehicles on the island. One such regulation covered vehicle use and permits, which was amended in 1984. Over-sand vehicle regulations were completed in 1978; however, the Endangered Species Act required further amendments to expand protection of the Piping Plover (*C. melodus*) and several other shorebirds that nested on the beach and in the dunes.

The vehicle regulations were revised again in 1987 and some of the new rules would further impact the island's density. The regulations identified who can apply for a permit and the limits on the various permit categories. For example, only 145 permits were allowed for year-round residents and 100 permits were made available for part-time residents. The regulations also describe the type of recreational driving permitted, the types of vehicles allowed, the locations where driving is permitted, and the time of day during which driving is allowed, both in season and off season. Importantly, these restrictive vehicle regulations helped to maintain the roadless character of Fire Island and provided added protection to nesting habitat of local endangered species. Such species, as well as the island more generally, faced dramatic changes.

GEOMORPHOLOGICAL CHANGES AND THE PROCESSES AFFECTING SHORELINES

The beachfront and the bayside have continuously experienced long-term changes occurring primarily through natural physical processes. Major storms and hurricanes are responsible for shoreline changes but over a much quicker timeline, with more dramatic results. The long-term changes on Fire Island have been significant over the last three centuries: the Fire Island Inlet has moved approximately ten miles westward since 1690.[45]

Impacts of these natural processes affect the landscape visually as well as the natural and cultural environments. The erosion, breaches, and movement of the dune crest line affect the use of the beaches, driving, access along Fire Island, and community development. Effects of these cultural activities, which include the presence of homes along the beachfront, have increased the demand for action to protect the shoreline from erosion, sea level rise, and storm damage. Chief of Resources Michael Bilecki has explained that there is a difficult conflict between the management priority of leaving natural processes to themselves, and intervening when those processes are moving too quickly.[46]

In addition to natural processes effects on the cultural landscape, there are engineered modifications to the shoreline that impact the geomorphology of the island. Six types of modifications have been identified at Fire Island: foredune building and enhancement, beach scraping, beach nourishment, vehicle traffic, construction in the dune, and the installation of protective structures like sand fences or groins.[47] Erosion has been a paramount concern in recent decades.

1980s: Erosion Control

Beginning in the 1980s, the National Park Service began a concerted effort to examine and assess the effects of natural processes and engineered modifications on the Fire Island environment. Beach erosion is a process that occurs naturally and is part of the development of the barrier island system. Barrier islands migrate due to sediment transport, which occurs with breaching and overwash. Engineered modifications, along with rapid sea level rise and major storm events, cause erosion to take place more drastically.

To help identify causes and assist in developing planning strategies, the National Park Service has funded research to assess the effects of human impacts coupled with natural processes. A 1981 report titled *Final Report on Effects of Off-Road Vehicles on Beach and Dune Dynamics* was among the first of these studies completed for the National Park Service. This study looked at the impacts of beach driving and the displacement of sand on Fire Island's beach. The authors concluded that there were "no substantial yearly differences between natural and impacted beaches, except on and in front of the dunes."[48] Because of this research, the National Park Service noted that there should be strict regulations concerning the use of off-road vehicles in areas where dunes must be protected.[49] Current driving regulations do not allow vehicles to drive adjacent to the dunes.[50]

In addition to research on Fire Island itself, research was completed that was much broader in geographic scope, but did encompass the island and its environs. In conjunction with the Reformation Plan for erosion control along Long Island, the United States Army Corps of Engineers completed a study titled *Geomorphic Analysis: Fire Island Inlet to Montauk Point, Long Island, New York*.[51] One conclusion of this report is that the bay shoreline is eroding at a minimum of 0.3 meters per year and that the engineered bulkheads are a prime cause of this erosion. Between 1930 and 1980 the areas near the marinas and bulkheads were found to suffer the greatest increase in erosion. The bulkhead at Point O'Woods has caused the most noticeable erosion along the shoreline because it has been in existence since at least 1930 (Figure 4-7).[52]

A second study focused on the effects of houses on dune erosion, specifically on wind erosion. The 1985 report, *Effects of Houses and Sand Fences on Eolian Sediment Budget at Fire Island, New York*, determined that structures built on or near the dune crest caused a local increase in the height of the dune and reduced the inland migration of the dune. The report specifically states that "houses should not be categorically excluded from the dunes on the grounds that they interfere with natural wind processes to the point where the structural integrity or equilibrium conditions of the dune are threatened."[53] Houses on pilings, even with sand fences, allowed the natural processes to occur, albeit at a reduced rate. Houses directly on the dune reduced the rate of erosion much more significantly.

The report concluded that "most houses built behind the dune crest have been built too low to allow for migration of the crest beneath them. New buildings constructed behind the dune should be built higher on their pilings at an elevation which will be compatible with a location on the crest of the dunes."[54]

The research completed in the 1980s for Fire Island National Seashore under the aegis of the National Park Service has helped the agency to identify methods and the means to protect its fragile resources. Retention of the dunes, the beaches, and the shorelines, both on the oceanside and the bayside, has been a high priority for all of Fire Island's stakeholders. The evolving landscape documents episodes of both success and failure of the different management strategies. For example, research has determined that the use of bulkheads and groins, thought to prevent erosion, have proven to be detrimental to the shorelines downdrift from these structures. Such research in the 1980s led to plans in the 1990s.

1990S: UNITED STATES ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS BEACH EROSION CONTROL EFFORTS CONTINUE

The efforts by the United States Army Corps of Engineers to develop a plan for erosion control from Fire Island Inlet to Montauk Point were stalled during the early 1980s. In 1993, a new draft plan was developed. This new Reformulation Plan was accepted by the New York District, New York State, and county governments. Unfortunately, two major storms struck Fire Island in 1992 and 1993, causing extensive damage. As a result, the United States Army Corps of Engineers reassessed the level of effort needed for future protection. These storms also required the planning for interim projects to begin necessary protection efforts immediately. The Reformulation study resumed in 1994 with these interim projects in place and several in construction for critically damaged areas.[55]



Figure 4-7. 2019 aerial image of Sailors Haven marina shows the former shoreline (shown in purple), which has eroded due to presence of the marina bulkhead (NPS, GIS Database).

One of these interim projects was the Breach Contingency Plan, which was approved in February 1996. This contingency plan was in response to a breach that had occurred at West Hampton, New York in 1992. The plan was to close all barrier island breaches along 57 miles of shorelines from Fire Island to Southampton. Immediate closure was recommended as the best cost-effective measure to mitigate damages to the barrier island system including its geomorphology, hydrology, and biology. The Breach Contingency Plan excluded any future breaches in the High Dune Wilderness from closure but instead called for monitoring of breaches in this area to determine if they would close naturally or if an action should be taken to close them.[56]

SAND NOURISHMENT

As part of short-term storm protection and erosion control the National Park Service, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the local Fire Island communities worked to replenish the eroded shoreline (Appendix 1). Sand nourishment (both oceanside and bayside) on Fire Island did occur in the 1980s although it was not significant compared to replenishment efforts of the 1990s and 2000s. In 1980 and 1981, nearly 50,000 cubic meters of sand were placed as a replenishment effort. After these efforts, replenishment was halted and between





Figure 4-8 and 4-9. Sand nourishment in 2009 at Saltaire (NPS, M. Bilecki).

1983 and 1991, a nearly decade-long interval occurred with only 13,800 cubic meters of sand added during this time.

Following the major storms occurring in 1992 and 1993, a total of 83,600 cubic feet of sand were placed on Fire Island in the areas fronting Smith County Park, Fire Island Pines, Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Davis Park, Kismet, and Dunewood. Because of the severity of these two storms, sand nourishment was substantially increased the following year, with a total of 882,900 cubic meters added and nearly 760,000 cubic meters of sand placed in 1996 and 1997. Between 2003 and 2007, nourishment projects continued across Fire Island, with over 1.1 million cubic meters placed.[57]

In addition to these efforts, short-term storm protection actions were taken between 2008 and 2009 by the National Park Service. These efforts were to provide special use permits for beach nourishment to the communities between Watch Hill and Fire Island Lighthouse. This project covered six miles of beach across 11 communities. This phase of beach nourishment served as another interim project, while the Fire Island to Montauk Point Reformulation Plan was being finalized.[58]

FIRE ISLAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Fire Island National Seashore entered the 21st century facing significant environmental and cultural challenges. Many of these challenges had occurred earlier in Fire Island's history yet became more pressing as a result of both increased legislation and public interest. To help preserve the environment and face these challenges, the majority of the studies conducted on Fire Island National Seashore since its federal designation were completed during the 21st century. Topics that are the focus of Fire Island National Seashore management in the 21st century include increased beach and dune erosion; sediment loss on the bayside and bayside erosion; deer management – in the form of reducing the deer population; increased impacts on the Sunken Forest (deer browse, shoreline erosion, salinity increase and rising ground water levels); protection of federally-listed species; protection of tribal rights and tribal access; and addressing construction within the communities, including the use of variances and vehicle regulations.

Research studies to these ends include research and studies of the natural and cultural environment, National Environment Policy Act planning in advance of proposed projects, new or updated management plans, increase and changes in stakeholder and tribal coordination, preparation of National Register of Historic Places forms and listings, and public outreach and coordination. This section of the chapter provides a discussion of this work, introduces the present actions of the National Park Service, provides a description of coordination with the public, an account of the island's demographics (focused on year-round residents), and a narrative description of the landscape as it exists in 2022.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES ON FIRE ISLAND

CULTURAL RESOURCES PLANNING

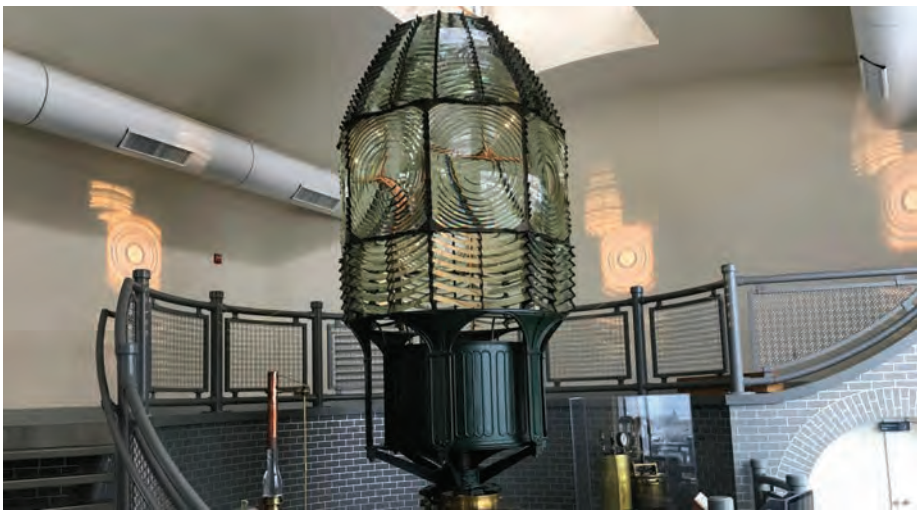
The National Park Service acknowledges its duty to protect cultural resources on Fire Island and continues to conduct work to describe their significance. Its first major undertaking to document historic resources within the Fire Island National Seashore was a cultural resource survey completed in 1978 and 1979. The resources documented individually were those resources the survey team thought would meet the criteria for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.[59] A few additional resources were surveyed within communities that did not meet the age requirement for eligibility, being 50 years old or more, but were those communities' oldest resources. A total of 168 properties were identified and recorded. Seventy of these were in Saltaire. Twelve other communities that were surveyed had anywhere from two to 19 resources recommended as eligible for the National Register, making a total of 98 resources. The report did not include any surveyed resources from Kismet, Dunewood, Atlantique, Robbins Rest, and Davis Park; one area that had three properties documented, Long Cove, is no longer extant.[60]

There are several thousand historic cultural resources within the bounds of the Fire Island Seashore National Park. These historic resources are mostly in the form of buildings, but also includes structures, objects, and man-made landscape features. Structures and landscape features include a variety of types such as the lighthouse, swimming pools, radio towers, boardwalks, the baggage railroad in Point O' Woods, and the numerous docks and piers found along the bayside. The most iconic cultural resource on Fire Island is the Fire Island Lighthouse (Figure 4-10). The Fire Island Lighthouse National Register listing of 1981 was expanded in 2009 to include the surrounding area and secondary resources as a Historic District. One of the major accomplishments of the National Park Service in the early 2000s was the return of the original Fresnel lens to the lighthouse site (Figure 4-11). This required significant planning, research, and mitigation to offset

Figure 4-10. The Fire Island Lighthouse property is a significant area for historic interpretation, while still serving as a navigational aid to those in the ocean (Marstel-Day, LLC) (below).



Figure 4-11. The Fresnel Lens on display in the museum was the original light installed in 1858 for the newly constructed Fire Island lighthouse. It is an original first order lens, which was the largest of four sizes, designed by Augustin Fresnel. This lens was used in the Fire Island lighthouse from 1858 to 1933 (NPS.gov) (bottom right).



potential effects, which ultimately involved the construction of a new building on site to house the large artifact. The new building was constructed atop the foundation of the original Power Generation Building. It was designed to replicate that building as closely as possible in order to rehabilitate the historic landscape. This acquisition and new building have had an immediate beneficial impact on the cultural landscape (Figure 4-12).

Other work by the National Park Service to protect the built environment on Fire Island has included the preservation and rehabilitation of the Carrington Tract (Figure 4-13). Purchased in 1969, the Carrington Tract was listed on the National Register in 2013 and New York State was consulted for its rehabilitation. The National Park Service plans to use the historic Carrington House for administrative purposes (Figure 4-14). In addition, the house and cottage may be used for an artist-in-residence program managed in partnership with local cultural institutions or other special events with a focus on the arts. National Park Service will continue to maintain the boardwalks and the dune crossing to the west of the house.

Figure 4-12. The Fresnel Lens building, completed in 2011, was designed to look like the steam power generation building that once stood at that location from 1894 to the 1940s (NPS.gov) (top right).

Figure 4-13. The Carrington House (white cottage on the left), built in 1912, is part of the early development of Fire Island; however, it became significant for its role in Fire Island's gay community. Frank Carrington, a renowned theatre director, bought the property in 1927 and hosted a number of prominent celebrities creating a social life centered around a gay lifestyle. Truman Capote rented the property from Carrington in 1955 to write Breakfast at Tiffany's here (Marstel-Day, LLC) (bottom left).

Figure 4-14. Rear view of the Carrington House shows the garage addition, unusual because of the restrictions on vehicles permitted on Fire Island. It is the only known residential garage on Fire Island (Marstel-Day, LLC) (bottom right).







The National Park Service has also conducted numerous archaeological surveys to identify potential resources below ground; however, this research is not complete. The most comprehensive assessment in the 21st century was completed in 2005. Large areas of Fire Island have yet to be surveyed and there remains a high potential for archaeological resources in these areas.[61] Twelve archaeological sites have been identified on Fire Island as of 2022. The 2005 assessment reviewed the history and recommendations of all archaeological investigations completed on Fire Island and inspected the conditions of each of the 12 sites.

In addition to above-ground and below-ground studies, Fire Island National Seashore has had a cultural ethnographic study completed of the entire barrier island.[62] The ethnographic study reviewed ecological, cultural, and historical associations of the people traditionally associated with the island and the communities. The study was funded to help the National Park Service with various aspects of natural and cultural resources management. Such management includes consultation with indigenous tribes in the area.

TRIBAL COORDINATION

Today, there are small pockets of the Indigenous community on Long Island, most notably the 1,200-acre Shinnecock Reservation located outside of Southampton, which is home to approximately 600 tribal members. The Unkechaug Tribe contains 450 members, about 250 of whom live at the Poospatuck reservation in the community of Mastick.

The National Park Service respects the interests of the Poospatuck Unkechaug tribe and the Shinnecock Indian Nation and consults them on all federal undertakings. In January 2022, the Fire Island National Seashore, National Park Service, and the Unkechaug and Shinnecock tribes signed an agreement stipulating the National Park Service will notify the two tribes when a sea mammal is stranded within the bounds of Fire Island. Currently, the Shinnecock tribe has permission to take parts from stranded marine animals through a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Regional Authorization letter.[63]

NATURAL RESOURCES PLANNING

In addition to cultural resource planning, natural resource planning has occurred in greater detail during the 21st century than in earlier periods of Fire Island's history. To support the revision of the General Management Plan, several scientific studies were completed during the 2000s. The subjects focused on the physical processes of the bay shoreline; geomorphology of beaches and dunes; habitat ecology and water quality of Great South Bay; conservation of living marine resources (habitats, finfish, and shellfish); vector-borne diseases (such as West Nile virus and Lyme disease); and white-tailed deer ecology and management.[64]

These topics continue to be at the forefront of management practice for Fire Island. The report titled *Bay Shoreline Physical Processes* asserted that the construction of bulkheads on the bayside prevents the naturally occurring littoral drift of sediment, which ends up starving areas downdrift. Because certain areas downdrift from the bulkheads are not receiving sediment naturally, the shoreline is retreating landward. This phenomenon has caused the loss of marsh habitat and has reduced accessibility to the shore via boardwalks that have crumbled under the receding shoreline (Figures 4-15 and 4-16).[65]



Figure 4-15. October 2021 photograph showing the boardwalk at Sailors Haven and its proximity to the waterline. This section will eventually fall due to erosion occurring along the bayside, a process similar to sections further west (Marstel-Day, LLC).

Figure 4-16. Photograph looking east of the Great South Bay toward Sailors Haven marina. Photo shows the bulkhead along the shoreline. The shoreline has eroded away due to the prevention of littoral drift by the bulkhead and adjacent marina (Marstel-Day, LLC).



The deer population on Fire Island has erupted since the 1980s (Figure 4-17). The result has been deer overbrowse, which is contributing to the decline of the maritime forests, especially the rare Holly maritime forest within the Sunken Forest. In addition, there has been an incursion of deer into the Fire Island communities. Research on ways to manage the population has helped the Fire Island National Seashore administration develop plans to reduce the overpopulation of deer (Figure 4-18). In response, Fire Island National Seashore staff developed the White-tailed Deer Management Plan (Figure 4-19). The management actions stated in the plan include public education, vegetation monitoring, deer population and behavior surveys, use of exclusion fencing in areas that need protecting, reduce and maintain deer density with lethal and non-lethal methods, and reduce undesirable human-deer interactions. Fence enclosures were put in place around 44 acres of the Sunken Forest to protect the 300-old holly trees.[66]



Figure 4-17. There were no deer on the island in the 1960s but by 2003 the population had increased to over 700. This high deer population has invaded the communities and the beaches, and is destroying the forests, indicative of the competition for food (NPS, *White-tailed Deer Management Plan*) (top right).



Figure 4-18. Scientists studying the Sunken Forest using surveying instruments to measure ground elevations. Deer browsing prevents survival of holly saplings, significantly reducing the understory (NPS, NPGallery.nps.gov) (bottom right).

Figure 4-19. A Deer Management Plan for Fire Island National Seashore identified several approaches to manage the deer population: 1) use enclosure fencing for approximately 44 acres of the Sunken Forest; 2) allow public hunting (within the Wilderness Area); and 3) capture and euthanasia. Once the population is reduced fertility control would be introduced (NPS, *White-tailed Deer Management Plan*) (below).



GEOMORPHOLOGICAL CHANGES FROM HURRICANE SANDY, 2012

In addition to the faunal changes described above, geomorphological changes have occurred recently. Hurricane Sandy swept over Long Island on October 29, 2012. The massive storm had a large impact on Fire Island in recent times, especially on the geomorphology of the barrier island creating a breach within the High Dune Wilderness and one in Smith Point County Park. Approximately 200 houses were destroyed by the hurricane and 54 percent of the island's volume of dunes was washed away (Figure 4-20 – 4-23). Studies completed during the winter months after Hurricane Sandy showed that the beach migrated 189 feet inland. The inland overwash deposits accounted for 14 percent of the volume lost from the beaches and dunes. This is significantly lower than the 54 percent total loss suggesting that most of the sand lost moved offshore. Erosion of the beaches and dunes from Hurricane Sandy drastically accelerated the migration processes so





Figure 4-20. Destruction of houses along the beaches of Fire Island caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 (USGS, "Damaged homes.") (top right).

Figure 4-21. Hurricane Sandy created a breach in the High Dune Wilderness at Old Inlet (NPS, nps.gov, 2017) (bottom right).

that between November 2012 and March 2013 the beach lost an additional 18.9 percent of its volume. However, in April 2013, the beaches had recovered, and the sand volume was similar to what it had been immediately after Hurricane Sandy.[67] Soon after Hurricane Sandy, the General Management Plan was updated to help address such geomorphological issues in the future.



Figure 4-22. The yellow arrows point to the same houses in the 2009 and 2012 post-Hurricane Sandy photo of Ocean Beach. The houses standing directly on the dune, as seen in 2009, sustained the worst damage from Hurricane Sandy, which struck on October 29, 2012. The dune, dune crossings, houses, and paths were essentially wiped out or damaged to the extent of ruin (USACE, *Final General Reformulation Report*, Appendix E) (top two, right).



Figure 4-23. Hurricane Sandy swept across Fire Island on October 29, 2012, causing insurmountable damage to both the natural and cultural environments. The biggest environmental impact was a breach that was created through the High Dune Wilderness (USGS, 2014.) (right).

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2016

> *Through a proactive and collaborative management approach, the National Park Service would seek an appropriate balance between continuing human use and protecting Fire Island's fragile environment.*
>
> General Management Plan 2016

One of the main features of the 2016 General Management Plan is the pursuit of cooperative stewardship of Fire Island. Per the General Management Plan, the National Park Service works with Fire Island communities, state and local agencies, and important stakeholders to ensure that property owners and managers understand the risks of owning and managing property on the island.[68] The primary objective of the National Park Service is to work with the Fire Island communities and other stakeholders to reform land use planning. The National Park Service will look to amend the enabling legislation to recognize the "…role of the Fire Island communities as partners in its management as they continue to play a substantial role in shaping Fire Island's natural and human environment."[69]

As part of the evolving cooperative stewardship to which the National Park Service is committed, there are substantive plans for collaborative action between Fire Island National Seashore and local stakeholders. These plans are to revise land use standards as well as shoreline protection, site planning and design standards, and post-storm response.[70] These plans also included the development of a Coastal Land Use and Shoreline Management Plan and the creation of a cooperative management body. The management body would consist of representatives from Fire Island National Seashore, Suffolk County Parks, New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (New York State Parks), the municipalities, and representation from island property owners. The management body would make recommendations to the Fire Island National Seashore superintendent on all issues related to the management of the seashore. These recommendations would include land use and development (including the review of applications for variances and permits), coastal zone management, transportation, marine resource management, and wildlife management."[71]

Progress has been made on some of the most prominent issues affecting Fire Island. These issues include having the Fire Island to Montauk Point Reformulation Plan complete and in place to begin the work of preserving and protecting the shorelines from single-event storm damage as well as from erosion occurring over time from both human impacts and natural forces. By the time the revised General Management Plan was approved in 2016, some work had already been completed on the stabilization of Fire Island as part of this process. This work included a one-time sand placement between Robert Moses State Park and

Smith Point County Park. The placement had been approved in 2014 and was completed between 2015 and 2020.[72]

Another prominent issue discussed in the General Management Plan is the proposed development of new driving regulations. Superintendent Alexcy Romero considers this one of his top priorities in 2022. The plan is to develop new driving regulations that would increase waterborne transportation between the communities and Long Island.[73] Before 2019, the number of year-round residents had been decreasing, but with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, more property owners moved into their Fire Island residences permanently. This change in year-round population increased the need for new regulations and additional reliable transportation.

Fire Island National Seashore continues to collaborate with the public to identify areas for improvement, and to build support for a more roadless environment and keep driving to a minimum. Superintendent Romero has initiated the development of updated vehicle regulations and is hopeful that collaboration with stakeholders will ensure that water-based transportation is the primary form of access to Fire Island. This approach should help limit the number of vehicles on the island. As part of this collaboration and data gathering, in 2020 the National Park Service created a webinar that was presented to the public. The webinar requested opinions on a variety of subjects, such as the recreational opportunities in which they participate, their relationship to Fire Island, and how they think the beach in front of the High Dune Wilderness should be used.[74] This information would be used to help formulate the new regulations.

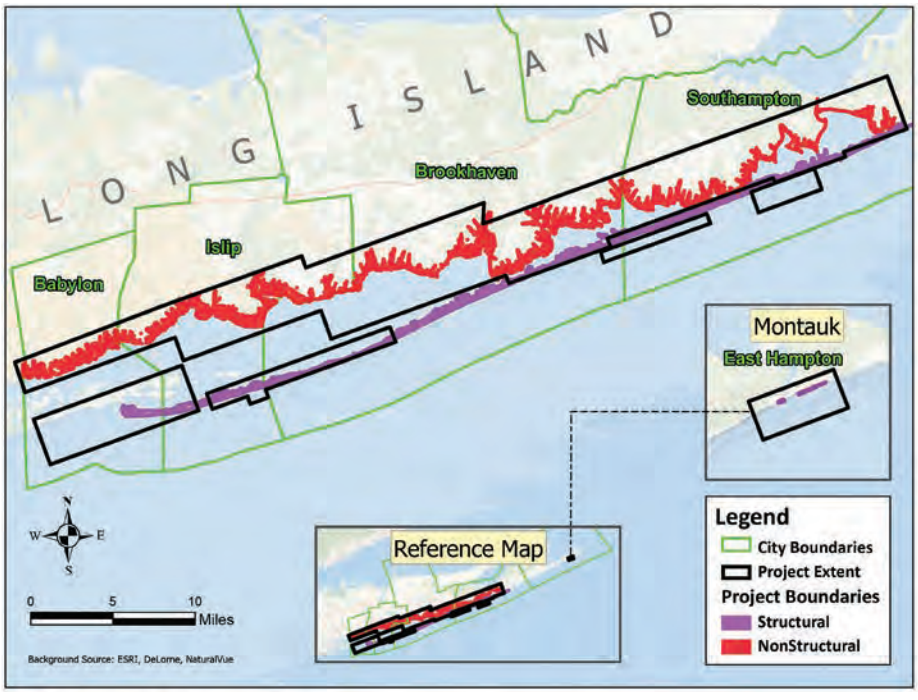


Figure 4-24. Fire Island to Montauk Point project map depicting the location of work, structural and non-structural, to be done on Long Island. Fire Island will undergo structural construction except at the Lighthouse tract and the six miles associated with the Wilderness Area (USACE, *Final General Reevaluation Report*, Appendix A6).

The National Park Service also desires cooperation with the local authorities to help manage the problem of deer overpopulation within the residential communities. To date, Fire Island National Seashore has only implemented deer management on federal lands.

Finally, in addition to the above-listed types of collaboration between the National Park Service, Fire Island communities, and others, Fire Island National Seashore plans to include a wide range of partners to help support the National Park Service and assist the residential communities with a variety of topics. These partners will provide their extensive knowledge and expertise to guide decisions and best management practices.[75] Such decisions and practices include wilderness area planning, discussed in the subsequent section.

WILDERNESS AREA PLANNING, 2016–2017

The final approval of the 2016 General Management Plan also approved the new Wilderness Stewardship Plan and Backcountry Camping Policy regarding the future use and protection of the High Dune Wilderness (Figure 4-25). The plan updated the 1983 Wilderness Plan and revised the 2011 Interim Backcountry Camping Policy.[76] Five characteristics important to wilderness areas that are to be preserved came directly from the Wilderness Act of 1964. These are: untrammeled quality, natural quality, undeveloped quality, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation quality, and other features of value.[77] The last quality may include cultural resources that either currently or formerly existed in the area. The National Park Service plan is to preserve and protect culturally significant resources and to work with native tribes to accommodate traditional uses. For example, as discussed earlier, working with the Shinnecock tribe to understand their use of remains from stranded marine animals, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Figure 4-25. The five "wilderness" characteristics that shall be preserved: untrammeled quality; natural quality; undeveloped quality; opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation quality; and other features of value (NPS, *Wilderness Stewardship Plan*).



The Wilderness Stewardship Plan stipulates ways in which the National Park Service will work toward removing improvements and facilities. Such work includes removing utility lines and removing "development and debris" associated with human occupation except those that are culturally significant; and minimally maintaining the Burma Trail.

The Army Corps Breach Contingency Plan of 1996 was replaced in 2017 by the *Final Fire Island Wilderness Breach Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.* It laid out four separate goals associated with the management of the High Dune Wilderness breach. These four goals were to: 1) protect the wilderness character; 2) protect the island's natural and cultural features along with its surrounding ecosystems; 3) protect human life; and 4) manage potential economic and physical damage to the surrounding areas.[78] Under this plan, the breach would be allowed to grow and evolve naturally unless human intervention required closure

due to the threat of "loss of life, flooding, and other severe economic and physical damage to the Great South Bay and surrounding areas."[79] The National Park Service established several criteria that would determine if the breach has changed to the point where it poses a physical or economic threat. The data obtained from monitoring the breach would determine whether these criteria have been met or exceeded; but until then there will be no human intervention.[80] In short, the recent management plan outlines the National Park Service priorities for the future.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

As discussed throughout this chapter, the National Park Service plans to implement several management goals to maintain a sustainable environment for the protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources within Fire Island National Seashore. These goals include coordinating with the public for regarding stewardship and preservation of resources; working with others to ensure land use and development do not denigrate environmental quality while respecting community character; protecting and enhancing the visitor experience and educating the public regarding their role in stewardship; maintaining the integrity of the roadless character of the barrier island and promoting waterborne transportation; and providing accessible facilities that are sustainable and environmentally sensitive.[81] Superintendent Romero's top priorities are revising vehicle regulations and the implementation of the Fire Island to Montauk Point Reformulation Plan.

In recent years, the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has caused a shifting of uses, populations, and changes to the built environment that could not have been foreseen. The pandemic has caused a higher year-round population, as people left denser areas, seeking more sparsely populated locations in which to live. This, in turn added more students on the island and also led to being homes converted to permanent residences, with many property owners enlarging houses for year-round residency.[82]

This growth in population and new construction on the island has made developing new vehicle regulations one of the seashore's leading priorities, as the increase in population creates a demand for more permits.[83]

VEHICLE REGULATIONS AND PRESERVING THE ROADLESS CHARACTER OF FIRE ISLAND

Much work has been done since the late 1970s to revise vehicle regulations and to increase water-based transportation for Fire Island. Attempts were made to revise the off-road vehicle regulations in the 21st century; however, these regulations were never finalized and not been revised since 1987. The current primary goal of park leadership is to update the driving regulations.

Part of the reason for the lag in updating the vehicle regulations are ongoing conflicts among the communities, residents, visitors, and Fire Island National Seashore regarding vehicle use.

As of 2022, the regulatory update process will be ready for National Environmental Policy Act review, with the preparation of an Environmental Assessment addressing the effects of alternative vehicle regulations. Fire Island National Seashore wishes to create a "more efficient and less burdensome driving permit program for both the [National Park Service] and community members."[84] In 2020, a webinar was developed to begin a collaborative effort between Fire Island and the local communities to discuss off-road vehicle management. The webinar provides a brief background and synopsis of the regulations and points out the challenges recognized in present-day Fire Island. These identified challenges and concerns are that ferry transportation is inadequate; too many vehicles, carts, and bikes make it too crowded; there are not enough permits to meet the demand; there is a pandemic-driven increase in year-round residents; there are limitations in beach access for vehicles; and concerns over the time of day driving is allowed.

Fire Island National Seashore's overall objective is to "preserve the roadless character of Fire Island and ensure that water-based transportation is the primary form of access to Fire Island whenever and wherever feasible."[85] Off-road routes through Fire Island developed decades ago, and this policy continues to instruct what those routes may be. One route is along the Atlantic Ocean on the south shore of Fire Island, within Seashore boundaries between the water's edge and 20 feet seaward of the beach grass (*Ammophila breviligata*) line. If the water is higher than this 20-foot line, no vehicle travel is permitted (Figure 4-26). A second



Figure 4-26. Federal regulations for vehicles on the beach state that travel is restricted to the area between the water's edge and 20 feet seaward of the beach grass line. No vehicle traffic is permitted if the water is higher than this 20-foot line. The tire tracks in this image clearly show that this rule is not followed (NPS, "Off-road vehicle management," 2020).

route is a one-mile route in the interior of the Island, crossing the "Lighthouse Tract" from the easterly end of the paved road in Robert Moses State Park to the eastern boundary of the Lighthouse Tract, which is the western boundary of the community of Lighthouse Shores–Kismet Park. A third route is an interior route that extends intermittently the length of the island, commonly referred to as the "Burma Road," for limited travel by public utility and law enforcement vehicles and fire-fighting apparatus (Figure 4-27). A final route option is the posted dune crossings from the beach to the "Burma Road" or to pathways within the island communities (Figure 4-28).[86]

To supplement revised vehicle regulations the National Park Service plans to improve water-based transportation for Fire Island. The United States Department of Transportation researched the effectiveness of Fire Island's waterborne transportation system and identified how the ferry service and intermodal transportation could be improved for visitors.[87] Recommendations included improving and upgrading existing facilities, adding new lateral routes, and adding four new ferry terminals along Fire Island.[88] Ideally, the resultant decrease in traffic would decrease erosion, which is discussed further in a subsequent section.





Figure 4-27. Burma Road, shown on the left, runs through the Point O'Woods community, crossing a concrete path, which intersects with the narrow-gauge train tracks visible on the right (Marstel-Day, LLC) (top right).

Figure 4-28. Burma Road and a dune crossing – the Atlantic Ocean is in the far background. Dune crossings to Burma Road are sanctioned in the current 1987 vehicle regulations. Much of the island can only be reached by driving off road/over sand, and interior access is by way of dune crossings such as the one shown here (Marstel-Day, LLC) (bottom right).

EROSION PROTECTION – FIRE ISLAND INLET TO MONTAUK POINT, NEW YORK REFORMULATION

In 2013, in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy, the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, was passed. This act allowed the Reformulation study and initial project construction to be completed using only federal funds.[89] This initial project construction completed before the Reformulation Plan was approved was called the Fire Island Inlet to Moriches Inlet Stabilization Plan. In 2020, a Record of Decision was published, which allowed the reformulation plan and proposed construction to move forward. The plan consists of the following: construction of a 90-foot-wide berm and 15-plus foot dune with dune grass planted along the developed shorefront of Fire Island. The dune and berm are to be renourished every four years for 30 years (Figure 4-29).

The plan includes condition assessments of the inlets and identifying the needs for inlet sand bypassing to maintain navigational inlets and breach response for 30 years after initial construction. Actions of the plan also include the removal of the beach groins at Ocean Beach; construction of a feeder beach in Montauk along 6,000 feet of shoreline; and construction of coastal process features and providing nourishment at 12 barrier island locations to restore cross-island sediment transport.[90]

To implement this plan, the federal government acquired over 800 acres of land, in easements stretching from Fire Island to Montauk Point. A total of 535 parcels were affected. For Fire Island, parcels stretch along the seashore within the community districts. Thirty-five houses along the Fire Island beachfront have been removed (Figure 4-30).[91]

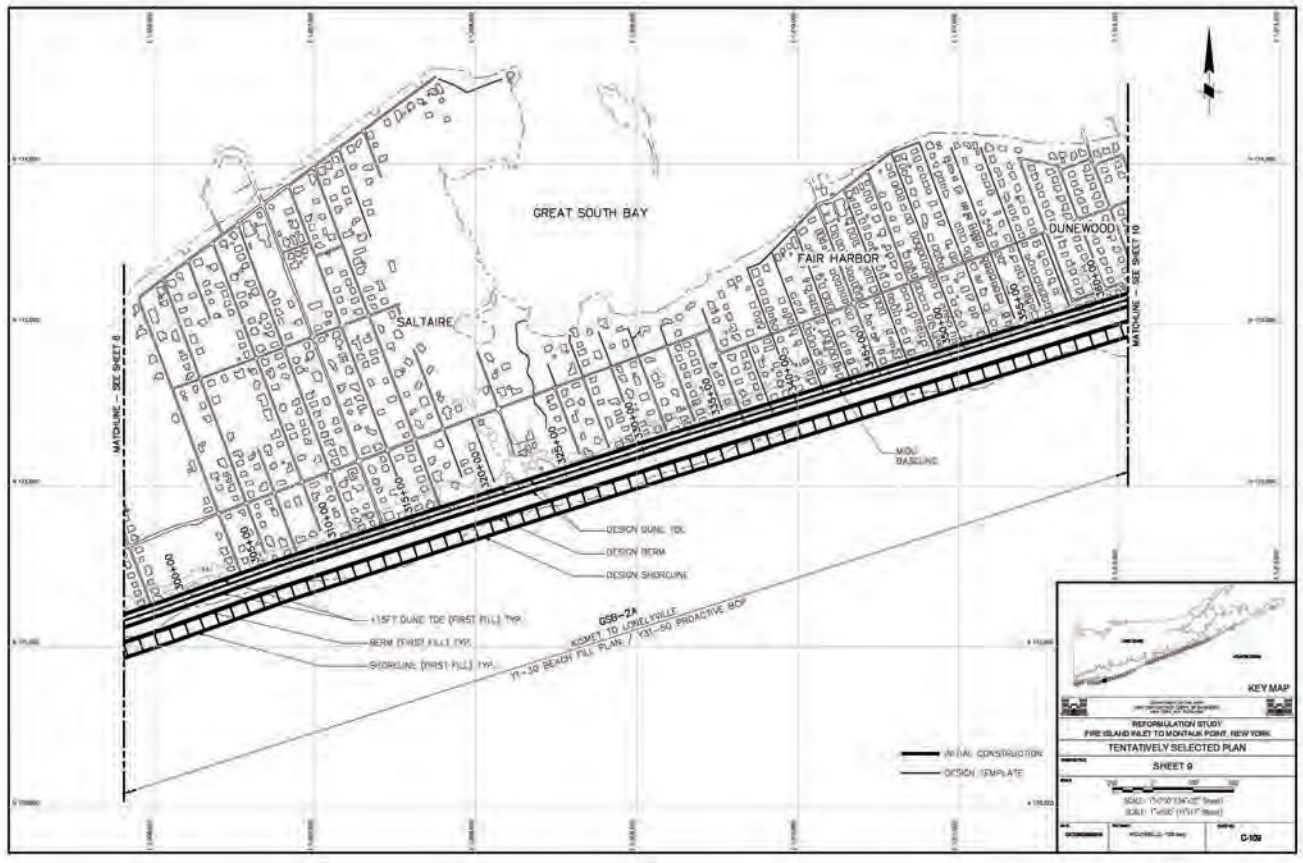




Figure 4-29. 2018 construction plan associated with the Fire Island to Montauk Point plan for Saltaire and Fair Harbor. The figure shows the location of the first fill for the dune, berm, and shoreline. Plans are for the construction of a 90-foot-wide berm and 15-plus-foot dune with dune grass planted along the developed shorefront of Fire Island. The dune and berm are to be re-nourished every four years for 30 years (USACE) (top).

Figure 4-30. Stretch of Ocean Beach homes in 2015 that were demolished by United States Army Corps of Engineers to accommodate for dune reconstruction (Foderaro, *NYT*, 2015) (above).

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE INTERACTION AND COOPERATION WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

> *Civic Engagement is a continuous, dynamic conversation with the public on many levels that reinforces the commitment of both NPS and the public to the preservation of heritage resources, both cultural and natural, and strengthens public understanding of the meaning and contemporary relevance of these resources. Civic engagement encompasses all in a dialogue about the meaning and future of the Nation's heritage resources.*
>
> *— NPS Director's Orders 75A, Civic Engagement and Public Involvement*

The National Park Service has advocated for more meaningful engagement and cooperation between its parks and the public since the 2000s. Each of the governing bodies with authority within the Fire Island National Seashore, which includes towns of Islip and Brookhaven and the incorporated villages of Saltaire and Ocean Beach, have their own local laws. Coordination between the National Park Service, the public, and these governing authorities is critical to ensure goals and objectives are understood between each, and to reduce potential conflicts between them.

Director's Order 75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement was released in 2003.This order outlined the purpose and need as well as the framework to create plans and develop management programs with the public in mind. It is consistent with the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916, which requires the National Park Service to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."[92]

With Director's Order 75A in place, Fire Island National Seashore management invited the public to assist in the development of the updated General Management Plan. The National Park Service sought input from the public regarding issues such as vehicle regulations, zoning regulations, and natural resources management. Decisions regarding these issues could have been detrimental to sustaining relationships if Fire Island National Seashore had not sought their cooperation. Spearheaded by Superintendent Mike Reynolds of Fire Island National Seashore, a civic engagement workshop was held in 2006 in which community representatives were invited to discuss a variety of topics with National Park Service staff.[93] The primary goal of the workshop was to create a dialogue and develop action items to prepare a new General Management Plan. A second goal was for the communities to work with Fire Island National Seashore to redefine their role under local law and within federal authority. Fire Island National Seashore administration made it a priority to gain community support and cooperation in the preparation of the new General Management Plan.

A series of roundtable discussions identified a variety of issues to be addressed for a successful management framework to be created as part of the General Management Plan. First, Fire Island National Seashore needed to establish a clear identity and define its role within the community framework. In addition, communities wanted more public transparency from the National Park Service and United States Army Corps of Engineers. Fire Island National Seashore needed to determine how the vision of the Nature Conservancy and the United States Army Corps of Engineers fit with the group's vision in their combined effort to preserve the environment and protect the lands and waters of Fire Island. The Nature Conservancy is a non-profit, non-government partner to the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The Nature Conservancy had not responded to offers for public debate by this time. Communities want to be heard more, and to attain equal status to other organizations such as The Nature Conservancy. The coalition of communities on Fire Island desires to have an identity beyond the Fire Island Association. This association is a coalition of the 17 Fire Island communities to protect the Island and to promote the best interests of all Island homeowners, business owners, and visitors. In addition, the communities feel that they are seen as part of a problem rather than the solution. These communities feel that Fire Island National Seashore needs to improve federal driving regulations, the process for obtaining vehicle permits, control insects, do more to allow residents to live on the island year-round, encourage growth in an environmentally responsible way, and encourage more National Park Service staff to reside on the island. In addition, the roundtable discussions identified that enforcement must be used to begin to solve problems.

Additional opportunities to develop a more open relationship with the communities of Fire Island were presented when various aspects of the management plan were pursued in greater detail. One such topic was that of deer management. The National Park Service conducted a survey among the community residents to identify the issues and perspectives of community members regarding the deer population, and the roles of the National Park Service and the communities in managing the increase in the deer population and mitigating impacts it causes.[94] As previously stated in the community workshop the prior year, the survey found that most of the community members did not believe that Fire Island managers listened to the communities for their input.[95]

The 2012, the National Park Service conducted a Community Character study to survey the residents' perspectives regarding life on Fire Island.[96] A total of 545 residents completed the Community Character survey. The survey asked residents their reactions to photographs to the following Fire Island subjects: natural environment, vehicular circulation, pedestrian way, entrances, fences, landscaping, residential and commercial structures and landscapes, gathering places, and mobility. Regarding above-ground utility wires, 46 percent of the residents polled strongly opposed their use and 33 percent were not bothered by them. A total of

33 percent of the polled residents found it unfavorable for personal use of vehicles to have limitations compared to 28 percent who found it very favorable. Eighty percent of the residents found boardwalks and paths to be very important to extremely important. Very few people, 5 percent of the people surveyed, felt that houses should be either one or two stories tall. The remaining half of the surveyed public either felt that there should be no standards (5.7 percent); that houses could range up to three stories (12.4 percent); that houses should not be above one story of the surrounding dunes (15.4 percent); or that heights should be limited to the height of the surrounding vegetation (10.8 percent). Regarding infill construction, 27 percent of the surveyed residents felt that owners should be able to construct whatever they want as long as it meets code, and 62 percent felt that new housing should fit into the character of the existing built fabric. The survey also identified that people predominantly walk versus any other form of transportation. Only 40 percent of those surveyed commonly use the water taxi, and 60 percent either seldom or never use it. Such insight from communities will guide further National Park Service efforts.

CONCLUSION – 1979 TO PRESENT

When the National Park Service began actively managing Fire Island National Seashore after 1979, there was considerable work to be done to better understand the cultural and natural environment, the stakeholders, and its role on the barrier island. In the 1980s, land continued to be acquired by the National Park Service. Property rights litigation ensued, driving regulations were updated, and the National Park Service was challenged across all levels, by the United States Congress, the Secretary of the Interior, local authorities, and the public.

Through all of this, the National Park Service continued to propose and implement management actions to increase accessibility to the island and add resources to improve the visitor experience. An important accomplishment during this period was the designation of six-and-a-half miles of the island as a designated federal wilderness area. The National Park Service also undertook environmental studies to better understand how to manage the Fire Island National Seashore. Several studies were completed to identify the impacts of cultural activities, including engineering modifications to the beaches, dunes, and shorelines. In addition to protecting various aspects of the natural environment, the National Park Service worked to preserve important cultural resources on the island, including the Fire Island Lighthouse, and the Carrington Tract. During the 1980s, the National Park Service also began to consider how to incorporate and protect the more intangible aspects of the national seashore, including the cultural characteristics of the local communities.

Implementation of recent management goals have focused on storm protection, erosion control, sea-level rise, deer management, protection of the threatened piping plover, and updates to vehicle regulations. Implementing steps towards each of these goals affects the cultural landscape and continues to shape the environment. Fire Island is a dynamic landscape that continues to evolve through natural physical processes and cultural modifications, both of which the National Park Service will continue to preserve and protect as demographics potentially change.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF FIRE ISLAND – 2020 DECENNIAL CENSUS

The demographics of Fire Island have remained fairly static over the years, with a predominantly seasonal population. Traditionally, the number of residents during the summer increases into the tens of thousands, whereas the number of year-round residents has remained quite low. However, the 2020 census reflected a significant increase in year-round population numbers most likely due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, as people sought to move to lower-density, more rural locations.

In 2020, the population of the entire island consisted of 934 year-round residents. The 2020 United States decennial census for Fire Island is organized into three areas: Ocean Beach, Saltaire, and the remainder of Fire Island, which is listed under Fire Island Census Data Place. All residents and dwellings that are not within the incorporated villages of Ocean Beach and Saltaire are grouped under the Fire Island Census Data Place. The two villages have smaller populations combined than the rest of Fire Island. Ocean Beach has a population of 153 people, and Saltaire is home to an estimated 113 people.[97] These numbers are more than double what they were in 2010. The Fire Island Census Data Place, with 668 year-round residents, has a larger population than the two incorporated villages because it includes residents from within fifteen communities across much of the island.

The small year-round population resides in only 11 percent of the houses on the island. In 2020, there were 4,380 total houses on Fire Island, with only 500 occupied year-round.[98]

Of the 934 residents on Fire Island, a majority identified as white (81 percent) with nearly 10 percent as Hispanic and 2 percent identifying as black.[99] Interestingly, there were about the same numbers of men and women.

The 2019 estimated data collected by the United States Census every five years as part of the American Community Survey provides more details than currently available in the 2020 census. It must be noted, however, that the 2020 numbers are more accurate than the 2019 estimates, especially due to the sizable increase of year-round residents because of the Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020.

Categories listed in the 2019 estimated census include age, income, education levels, marriage status, family size, native country, and citizenship. These categories of people (e.g., similar age, education, race, income) that were living on Fire Island before the Covid-19 pandemic may or may not have changed in 2020. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the residents' average age was 50 and the average income was just over $38,000. Approximately half of the population earned over $50,000.[100]

Finances and other demographic categories varied across the island. However, using the numbers associated with the Fire Island Census Data Place as a good sampling of residents, approximately 31 percent had a bachelor's or graduate-level degree. The estimated census also suggests that the majority of residents, nearly 60 percent, are married and 23 percent have never been married. In addition, nearly 70 percent of all households are families. Three-quarters of the population were born in New York State and only eight percent are not United States citizens. These demographics in general may or may not be true in different communities, which are described individually in the subsequent section.

FIRE ISLAND COMMUNITIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Fire Island remains a highly popular beach vacation destination. Some commercial areas provide entertainment and dining, but communities are largely family-centric and often exclusive properties.

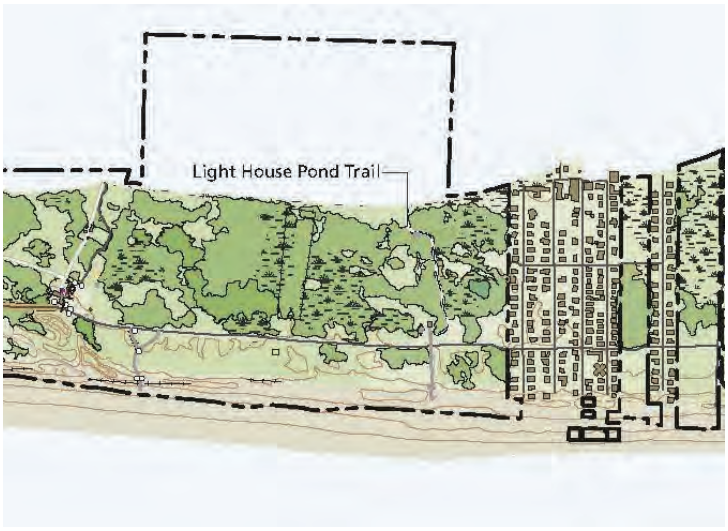


Figure 4-31. Kismet, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

KISMET, FIGURE 4-31

One observer summarizes growth in Kismet, saying:

> . . . by the early '60s a lot of housing construction had taken place and a lot of it was investment properties designed to house renters. Kismet developed in the '70s as what we call a 'grouper community' where a large group rented the house for the season, which brought our population weekends way up, so it was a popular time for groups to come out for weekends. In the late '80s and early '90s, we began evolving into a more family-oriented type community. New owners purchased real estate and used the houses and in turn rented them to smaller families and right now we are pretty much a family-oriented community with a few group houses left and a few singles.[101]

Today, there are around 250 houses in Kismet. As the community located closest to the Fire Island Inlet Bridge, Kismet is home to many year-round residents of the island. As of 2006, 14 families inhabited Kismet year-round while around 50 dwellings were occupied through winter. Kismet is surrounded on both sides by land owned by the National Park Service. The community is laid out in a grid, with five concrete walks facing north–south and three facing east–west. The house styles and landscaping choices are eclectic, with each property having a distinct personality from its neighbors. The downtown of Kismet is located along the bay front, where one can find commercial businesses.[102]



Figure 4-32. Kismet and Saltaire, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

SALTAIRE, FIGURE 4-32

Between 1962 and 2020, the number of houses in Saltaire increased by more than 200 percent, from 128 to 432, respectively.[103] About 31 people are year-round residents.[104] Saltaire has two churches: an Episcopal Church on Broadway and a Roman Catholic Church at the corner of Lighthouse Promenade and Navy Walk. The fire department is located on Broadway. In the late 1980s, a community softball field was also constructed on Broadway. The main social thoroughfare surrounds the ferry dock, which is in a central location to amenities such as the park, doctor's office, market, liquor store, and library. There are no public restaurants or bars present in Saltaire.[105] The boardwalks on Bay and Lighthouse Promenades are constructed of concrete, and all the other walks are wooden and feature distinctive diagonal planking.[106]

When asked how Saltaire is different than other Fire Island communities, a resident explained:

> Saltaire is primarily residential. Very little commercial. We have one market. There is a yacht club, which is a private club. And a couple of churches. Outside of that, there are no commercial buildings in the village. So I think that it is a community for families, a community for people who just don't want too much activity, who want things on the quiet side. If they want to have more action, more activities, they can go to other communities. If they want to go to a restaurant, they can go to Kismet or Fair Harbor or Ocean Beach. So it is a quiet residential community and it is really geared towards kids. Kids and families and if you look at the original advertisements in the *New York Times* back in the 1900s, that was the advertisement—a community for children. And that has sort of been the guiding light in the community ever since then. And everything is structured around that. So I would characterize it as a family community geared towards children for quiet recreation.[107]

In 1979, Fletcher and Kintz recommended the northern section of Saltaire as a historically and architecturally significant historic district eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.[108]



Figure 4-33. Fair Harbor, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

FAIR HARBOR, FIGURE 4-33

In the early 1980s, community residents debated on whether to incorporate, but eventually decided against it.[109] Today, Fair Harbor is seen primarily as a family community. Most of the commercial establishments — including food shops, a gardening center, a clothing store, and a wagon depot — are located on Broadway Avenue, running north–south. The bayfront area, which includes the ferry dock, is the center of social and commercial activities. Since Fair Harbor is on a narrow part of the island, the community only has two east–west walks, with the north–south walks paved and providing beach access. As of 2006, there were almost 400 homes, and approximately ten families inhabited Fair Harbor year-round.[110]



Figure 4-34. Dunewood, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

DUNEWOOD, FIGURE 4-34

Dunewood has the Dunewood Yacht Club, marina, and ferry dock on the bay side next to the bay beach. Today, the community grid has four walks extending from the bay to the ocean and three lateral paths, all maintained by the Property Owner's Association. With the cooperation of other nearby communities, an extensive beach restoration project was completed in 2004. As of 2008, the community consisted of about 100 houses.

A resident explained how Dunewood stands out from the other communities, stating:

> The uniqueness of Dunewood is the absence of any store, any bar, any restaurant, anything. And so it is probably one of the more peaceful communities . . . .[111]

As with other communities on Fire Island, the ferry dock in Dunewood is seen as the premier social space of the community. Although Dunewood lacks the commercial amenities that other communities on the island boast, residents still gather for social and recreational activities such as fishing.[112]



Figure 4-35. Lonelyville, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).



Figure 4-36. Atlantique, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

LONELYVILLE, FIGURE 4-35

Lonelyville remains one the smaller beachfront communities on Fire Island.[113] There are no restaurants or other commercial ventures. Many of the current residents of Lonelyville are inter-generational families. Homes on the western side of the community tend to be older, smaller cottages while those on the eastern side tend to be more modern structures constructed around the concrete walk.[114] Those who have not had groceries brought in from the mainland go shopping in nearby Fair Harbor.[115] As there is no dock in Lonelyville, the community is accessed from the Dunewood Ferry. The community has seen little development in the last twenty years.[116]

ATLANTIQUE, FIGURE 4-36

The central east–west walk in Atlantique is all sand, and some of the north–south cross walks have raised boardwalks in addition to a cart path. There are four walks that lead to the beach. The Appalachian Mountain Club operates a 24-bed hostel in Atlantique, taking up nearly an entire block.[117] Atlantique remains one of the smallest Fire Island communities. Its bay beach adjoins the large marina in Atlantique Beach, which is the strip of land owned by the town of Islip that is east of Loneleyville and west of Atlantique; Atlantique Beach is a gathering place with boating and recreational opportunities for the residential Atlantique.[118]



Figure 4-37. Robbins Rest, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).



Figure 4-38. Fire Island Summer Club and Corneille Estates (NPS Existing Conditions Map).



Figure 4-39. Ocean Beach, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map)

ROBBINS REST, FIGURE 4-37

Robbins Rest is one of the smallest communities on the island today, with only about 40 homes. The community has no boardwalks or other walkways. With no ferry service, it must be reached by water taxi.[119] Until 2007, Tequila Jack's was a popular restaurant and bar in the community; a small group of local partners bought the establishment to ensure the community remained peaceful with little noise or intrusion from outside communities.[120]

FIRE ISLAND SUMMER CLUB AND CORNEILLE ESTATES, FIGURE 4-38

Fire Island Summer Club remains a prestigious, privately owned community. Two concrete walks lead from the central walkway to the ocean.[121] Commercial services and ferry access are available in nearby Ocean Beach.

Today, Corneille Estates consists of a two-block-wide area of homes. The community has only one ocean-to-bay walk, which is characterized by an elevated boardwalk with unusual angles and turns. Residents of Corneille Estates often patronize Ocean Beach for commercial and social7activities. The community is an unincorporated area of the town of Islip.[122]

OCEAN BEACH, FIGURE 4-39

Ocean Beach is the unofficial capital of Fire Island. The commercial area continues to provide retail, dining, and entertainment outlets for many of the otherwise residential communities on Fire Island. The community is also the location of the island-wide elementary school. The community has tight restrictions to keep the community orderly with its many visitors. Ocean Beach employs its own police force and holds court weekly.[123] Focal points in the town are the Ocean Beach Community House and the Firemen's

Benevolent Association. The number of housing units between 1962 and 2020 has not changed substantially, from 605 to 591, respectively. As of 2020, approximately 76 people resided year-round in Ocean Beach, making it the most active year-round community on Fire Island.[124]



Figure 4-40. Seaview, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

SEAVIEW, FIGURE 4-40

The Seaview Association estimated that there were around 360 houses in the community by 2000. Community spaces include Seaview Park, which has a memorial to three Seaview residents who were killed in the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center; Bay Beach; ballfield and tennis courts; and a playground. Seaview has two synagogues: one at Beachwold Avenue and Neptune Walk, and the other at Homesite Walk near Bay View Walk. Seaview is more remote than nearby Ocean Beach, largely due to the lack of a large commercial district. Only one store exists in the community, the Seaview Market, which has operated in Seaview since 1941; there is also a liquor store and nursery available to the community. A marina provides boat access. This small commercial area is located on the bay front. This community is generally considered expensive and desirable for its larger lots and family-oriented atmosphere.[125]



Figure 4-41. Ocean Bay Park, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

OCEAN BAY PARK, FIGURE 4-41

By 2008, Ocean Bay Park had a grocery store, three bars and restaurants, two pizza shops, and a bagel shop. The town fire department is east of Bay Beach.[126] Walks in Ocean Bay Park have the right-of-way paved with concrete at grade level, and the rest is an elevated board walkway. Bay View Walk parallels the bay and provides access to all commercial establishments, except for the Fire Island Hotel. In the summer season, the eastern boundary shared with Point O'Woods is fenced off primarily due to Ocean Bay Park's reputation for raucous parties. This eastern portion is where most of the nightlife is located, while the western section of the community is largely residential.[127]



Figure 4-42. Point O'Woods, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

POINT O'WOODS, FIGURE 4-42

Storms in 1992 and 1993 caused considerable damage in Point O'Woods. As a result of these storms, several homes have been moved back farther from the ocean; this was a benefit afforded by the fact that the association owns all the land in common.[128] As of 2022, the community has 133 residences.[129] The sparsely populated land provides many open green spaces, although some are in marshy areas. The vegetation in Point O'Woods is predominantly native shrubs and brush and is not covered in invasive bamboo like some other parts of Fire Island; there are also more woodlands here than anywhere else on the populated parts of the island. Homes have a cohesive architectural style. A fence lines the western boundary, separating it from Ocean Bay Park. The main walk follows the planned diagonal route connecting the community center with the ferry dock, and then continues to the east following the alignment of the dunes. As in other communities, the private ferry dock in the northwestern corner of Point O'Woods is the center of social and commercial activity. The Yacht Club is also in this area as well as a small market.[130]

Inland from the bay are the Point O'Woods Association offices and the community firehouse. A narrow-gauge baggage railway connects the residential areas to the dock, with the tracks originally serving guests of the Inn who arrived with heavy luggage. The 1890s auditorium built by Culyer still stands in the center of the community and is used for social events and other recreational activities. The tennis courts are found next to the auditorium and the church is farther to the west. Point O'Woods was once home to a United States Post Office, although it was forced to give up this service when it refused to open to serve the rest of Fire Island.[131]

OAKLEYVILLE

As of 2006, only 11 residences stood in the community in what is essentially unimproved land in a two small clusters along a winding road near the bay. Life in Oakleyville is extremely secluded compared to life in other parts of Fire Island; the clusters are well hidden in an unvisited area of the Sunken Forest. There is no ferry in Oakleyville, and residents must privately arrange transport. A memorial garden, originally roses but now holly, dedicated to AIDS victims is near a residence, and a second memorial of driftwood is dedicated to those "who have lived, loved, and died" in connection with the Oakleyville community.[132]

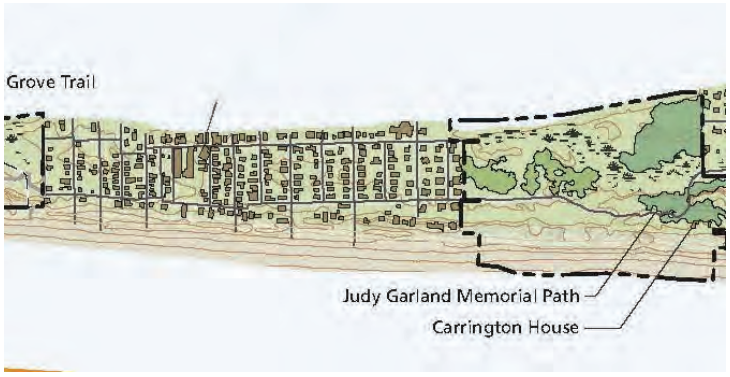


Figure 4-43. Cherry Grove, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

CHERRY GROVE, FIGURE 4-43

By the early 2000s, Cherry Grove consisted of around 300 cottages, which are connected by 16 wooden walks that run from ocean to bay and are crossed by two lateral walks. These boardwalks cross the dunes to allow access to the beach front. Many of the cottages are situated on small plots, with natural vegetation such as scrub pine, holly, and shadblow blanketing the yards. The streets consist of raised wooden planks. A distinct difference in the building of the Cherry Grove cottages that distinguishes them from others on the island is that they were originally built behind the dunes, rather than on top of them.[133]

Like with other communities on Fire Island, the area surrounding the dock is considered the Cherry Grove commercial district. Here, there is a post office, a community house, a fire department, a realty office, several hotels, restaurants, and clubs are also located nearby. The Ice House, a notable Cherry Grove nightclub, is located near the dock and includes a restaurant, pool, bar, and dance hall. A notable structure on the landscape is the Belvedere Guest House, a large rococo-style hotel and resort that can be seen from the bay. Cherry Grove is well known for its nightlife, and the public spaces here are generally quiet before mid-day.[134]



Figure 4-44. Fire Island Pines, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

FIRE ISLAND PINES, FIGURE 4-44

Fire Island Pines is the second-largest community, after Ocean Beach, with roughly 600 homes present in 2006. The summer population peaks around 5,000 people; in 2006, about 40 residents reportedly lived here year-round—a number that most likely has increased. It is the only community on the island with a 100-unit apartment complex. The Pines also features a community center, which was constructed on the former location of the Lone Hill Life-Saving Station.[135]

Two main boardwalks run laterally through the town, and a third is bisected by the harbor, with 22 walks crossing the community, running from bay to ocean. Twelve of these walks are constructed to cross the dunes with stairs descending to the beach. Wooden trash cans for each house are cleverly hidden inside the boardwalks. The boardwalks are largely shaded by native vegetation. The ferry dock and marina are in the form of a small harbor, and around this area the commercial space has grown. Beside the dock are several cafes and restaurants, real estate offices, and a supermarket; the fire department, police station, post

office, and community center are on the side of the main road that cuts through town. A medical facility, an auditorium, and a library are also present in the community.[136]

The architecture of Fire Island Pines is much more modern than that found in other areas of Fire Island. These are lavish, modern mansions with extensive landscaping and hardscaping that reflect the wealth of the Pines community. Many homes also have pools; approximately three-quarters of all pools on Fire Island can be found in Fire Island Pines. While the Pines are known for the lavish modern architecture, there are also smaller homes that fit in with the overall standard cottage aesthetic of the island.[137]



Figure 4-45. Water Island, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

WATER ISLAND, FIGURE 4-45

Water Island has a ferry dock with ferry service in the summer months but no public services. There is a large boardwalk along the bay front and three that cross the community to the beach. Although many residents resisted the introduction of modern amenities in the mid-twentieth century, most homes now have electricity. Many Water Island residents have constructed fences around their homes to prevent further erosion on the bay side.[138] As of 2006, there were 40 homes in Water Island.[139]



Figure 4-46. Davis Park, 2022 (NPS Existing Conditions Map).

DAVIS PARK, FIGURE 4-46

As of 2006, there were approximately 250 houses at Davis Park, as well as a marina that could hold up to 200 boats. A summer ferry service runs from Patchogue to Davis Park. The marina is the focal point of the community, similar to elsewhere on Fire Island. A post office is located close to the ferry landing, while opposite is the fire and police departments. A Catholic Church and medical facility are also in the community. A central boardwalk runs the length of Davis Park, and numerous boardwalks cross this, running from bay to ocean.[140] Boardwalks are only for walking—bicycles are not permitted in Davis Park.[141]

END OF PERIOD LANDSCAPE NARRATIVE SUMMARY – EXISTING CONDITIONS PLAN

Today, the Fire Island National Seashore, excluding the William Floyd Estate, encompasses 18,967 acres of upland, tidal, and submerged lands along a 26-mile stretch of the 32-mile barrier island. A significant portion of the island is the 6-½ miles of federally designated wilderness, the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness. This area encompasses 1,380 acres and is composed of an intact dune/swale system, marshes, wetlands, pine woodlands, reed grasslands, and patches of forest. The Sunken Forest, near the center of the island, is a rare maritime forest primarily of 250- to 300-year-old American holly trees. There are large concentrations of white-tailed deer throughout the island, which is evident on the beaches, in the communities, and in the forest—with much of the understory reduced to nothing from their browsing.

On the western boundary of the seashore, the Fire Island Lighthouse is an important entry point for visitors but also an iconic historic monument for interpretation of the history of navigation in the area. The eastern end of the Fire Island National Seashore is dominated by Smith Point County Park, a recreational beach for visitors arriving from Long Island. This also provides an entry point into the High Dune Wilderness, which is by foot only. The roadless character resonates not only here at this entry point, but also along the entire length of the national seashore.

The 17 communities, concentrated on the western half of the island, are for the most part closely built, with basic paths as their main thoroughfares, primarily meant for pedestrians or bicyclists. These paths are covered in slatted boards, cement, and some are sand. A few of the communities have commercial and recreational areas and several have support buildings, such as fire stations and churches. Each of the communities have access to the oceanside beaches and many of these are over-dune wooden crossings. Very few vehicle crossings exist along the beach. Small lots within the communities predominate and new construction is typically taller and larger than the older cottages. Many times, views within the communities are limited to the path due to the overgrowth of vegetation around the perimeter of these lots plus the addition of perimeter fencing around many of the residences.

The period plan maps, Figures 4-47 through 4-51 (located at the end of the chapter), depict existing conditions on Fire Island as of 2022. These maps were produced from information taken from contemporary maps of the National Park Service Cultural Resources Inventory System, New York State GIS Ortho imagery dated 2018, LiDAR dated from 2012, and field review from 2021.

NATURAL SYSTEMS AND TOPOGRAPHY

The Fire Island National Seashore consists of a 26-mile-long beach that runs the entire length of the island. These 26 miles include the associated dunes, swale, scrub vegetation, wetlands, marshland, and forestland as well as the Smith Point County Park on the eastern end. The bayside of the island is primarily flat marshland. The areas of the island behind the oceanfront dunes are typically undulating, or flat, as in the case within some of the communities, except in the Sunken Forest and High Dune Wilderness areas. Wetlands are located at the eastern end of the island and much of these wetlands are covered with a grid of drainage tiles. Unique natural landscapes include the High Dune Wilderness and the Sunken Forest (Figure 4-52). A breach at Old Inlet, caused by Hurricane Sandy, which allowed the Atlantic Ocean to join with the bay, is also of note.

The Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness is a stretch of land is located east of Davis Park (approximately in the center of the island), and runs approximately 6-½ miles east to Smith Point County Park. This High Dune Wilderness area includes pine forests, wetlands, and sand dunes.

The Sunken Forest consists of an ancient forest, large primary dunes, interdunal swales of grasses and shrubs, and wetlands and marshes along the bay. The Sunken Forest is an old-growth maritime American holly forest, one of only a few such forests in the world, and as such it has been classified as a globally-rare forest.

Hurricane Sandy was responsible for generating the most significant geomorphological changes in the past 40 years to Fire Island. The storm created the breach formed at the Old Inlet within the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness.

Nearly ten million cubic feet of sand nourishment have been placed on Fire Island, rebuilding the beaches and the dunes that were swept away during major storms. Nearly seven million cubic feet was added between 2015 and 2019.[142]



Figure 4-52. View of the Sunken Forest from the bay side. Image shows marsh grasses with the forest in the background (Marstel-Day, LLC).

This sand nourishment was primarily implemented along the oceanside of the communities on the western half of the island including Kismet, Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Ocean Bay Park, Seaview, Point O'Woods, Fire Island Pines, and Davis Park. Sand and mud placement also occurred along the bayside, but in much smaller amounts than on the oceanside of Fire Island. To note, Cherry Grove is the only community to never have had sand nourishment because the community has never allowed for houses to be built on the dunes.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND USE

The western half of Fire Island consists primarily of the residential areas including 17 communities ranging in size from one street/boardwalk to a dozen or more streets. These communities all contain residential uses, and some have commercial, government, recreational, ecclesiastical, and transportation uses. Several areas on the western half of the island are not populated and are owned by the National Park Service.

The Fire Island Lighthouse is at the far western end of the Fire Island National Seashore. The lighthouse continues to function as a navigational aid, and the complex includes a museum and interpretative center. Other public areas on Fire Island include Sunken Forest between Point O'Woods on the west and Cherry Grove on the east, which is used as a nature preserve with trails (Figure 4-53). Another public area includes the Sailors Haven area in the Sunken Forest, which includes a marina and other visitor's facilities. The Carrington Tract, another public area, is managed by the National Park Service, is east of Cherry Grove and includes forested land, wetlands, and scrub vegetation, along with the Carrington House and secondary structures. The dwelling is currently vacant. The Talisman area and the surrounding forest are public areas located between Fire Island Pines and Water Island. The Talisman area is a large, undeveloped area of forest and scrub vegetation with a few visitor's facilities structures in the area. Watch Hill is



Figure 4-53. Elevated boardwalk through the Sunken Forest (NPS, "This Park's Personality").

a National Park Service visitor's center, marina, and campground, and includes a residential area for employees and researchers (Figure 4-54).

The Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness is a public area on the eastern half of the island. The High Dune Wilderness is a natural environment with very limited human impacts. The High Dune Wilderness has two zones for camping. The eastern zone is located approximately 1.75 miles west of the Wilderness Visitor Center (about 1,000 feet west of the initial location of the Old Inlet Breach created by Superstorm Sandy in 2012) and stretches to the west and ends 1,000 feet east of the Bellport Beach boardwalk/trail. The western zone is defined as 1,000 feet west of the Bellport Beach boardwalk/trail and extends to Long Cove (approximately 1 mile east of the eastern most beach access at Watch Hill). The southern boundary of the High Dune Wilderness is the toe of the primary dune. The area south of the boundary is open for backcountry camping only during certain dates (Figure 4-55).



Figure 4-54. Watch Hill has the largest of the two National Park Service marinas on the island, with capacity for 183 boats. It has a ferry dock, marina, general store, restaurant, campgrounds, bathhouse, boardwalks, trails, and a visitor center. Several residences in Bayberry Dunes (top of photo) remain for National Park Service use (NPS, nps.gov 2018, photo credit: Busch) (top right).



Figure 4-55. Camping is a recreational use allowed in the High Dune Wilderness in two separate camping zones north of the primary dune. Camping on the beach is allowed on the Great South Beach adjacent to the High Dune Wilderness only during certain dates of the year (NPS, *Wilderness Stewardship Plan*) (below).

Smith Point County Park, east of the High Dune Wilderness, features a public park with a beach, and camping. The former Great Gun Marina is a public area at the east end of Fire Island within Smith Point County Park and consists of a boat dock, shelters, and boardwalks. Finally, other public areas include additional small tracts of undeveloped land such as forested lands covered with scrub that include several ocean-to-bay tracts between Kismet and Saltaire, on both sides of Atlantique, and on both sides of Robbins Rest.

At present, the islands in Great South Bay within the legislative boundary of Fire Island National Seashore are nearly uninhabited. West Fire Island does have a few in-holders with homes on private tracts. Recreation is the only noted uses of the bay islands. Water fowl hunting is allowed in the area of the wilderness and on bay islands. There are hunting rights provided on a portion of Pattersquash Island for members of the Pattersquash Gun Club.[i] Shoreline waterfowl hunting is permitted from East Fire Island, West Fire Island, and Sexton Island. The bay islands primarily function as nature preserves.

CIRCULATION

Those traveling to Fire Island by car can park at either the Robert Moses State Park on the west end or Smith Point County Park on the east end. One typically parks a vehicle at these locations and enters Fire Island National Seashore by foot, unless the vehicle has a vehicle permit to travel further inward, but only from the western end of the island.

The Fire Island communities have retained their boardwalks, mostly constructed of raised walks of slatted boards though in some cases they are paved with concrete. Some of the communities also have cart paths. The primary method of movement within and between the communities is by foot or bicycle (Figure 4-56). A small number of vehicles are permitted however, either by the incorporated villages, or the towns of Brookhaven or Islip, and/or Fire Island National Seashore. Vehicles use the boardwalks and are permitted along the beach during certain times (Figure 4-57). Circulation patterns are summarized below for several of the communities and public areas.

All of the communities except for Point O'Woods are laid out in a grid or an irregular grid of north-south and east-west walks and much of the organization within the communities have not changed since their inception. The pedestrian walks range from sand, concrete, and raised boardwalks and some communities have separate raised wagon/cart paths. Commercial areas are focused along the bay fronts.

Burma Road does not travel through Cherry Grove; however, it is visible throughout many of the communities as a sand path or in some cases covered with concrete. Burma Road travels through the Sunken Forest and it is visible throughout the entire length of the wilderness area and continues along the length of Smith Point County Park. The paved roadway on Fire Island extends from Smith Point Bridge onto the island and immediately terminates into a roundabout with a large parking lot to the east.

Lateral movement across the island is encouraged by way of water—either with private boats, or private water taxies. Transportation from Long Island to Fire Island is primarily by ferry. The importance of mobility by way of the Great South Bay is reflected in the number of boat slips available across the island. There are nine marinas within the Fire Island National Seashore, plus one at the Robert Moses State Park, all of which provide for nearly 1,100 boats that dock on Fire Island. The following is the list of marinas within Fire Island National Seashore along with the number of berths at each: Kismet (100), Atlantique (157), Ocean Beach (130), Sea View (50), Ocean Bay Park (47), Sailor's Haven (47), Fire Island Pines (85), Davis Park (250), and Watch Hill (183).



Figure 4-56. Photo showing Burma Road and the sand path, with an elevated cart boardwalk shown on the left. There are no paved roads through the Fire Island National Seashore. Travel is done on the sand, boardwalks, or concrete paths (lejabeach.com) (top right).



Figure 4-57. The seashore beach is the main route along Fire Island, even for school buses. Burma Road, the main thoroughfare, runs through portions of the interior of the island; however, some communities are completely without vehicle access and do not have any portion of Burma Road in their village, hence the school buses must drive along the beach (Fire Island Association, top inset; Gruban, bottom) (bottom right and below).

VEGETATION

The natural environment is critical to the Fire Island National Seashore and is at the forefront of the enabling legislation and the numerous management plans adopted since 1964. The landscape is important for its beaches, dunes, forests, wilderness areas, and the barrier island vegetation that provides a landscape unlike any other. The native vegetation on Fire Island has been described as falling into one of three categories: 1) dune and swale community; 2) the Sunken Forest; and 3) the salt marsh community.[143] The primary dune is vegetated with beachgrass. The Sunken Forest contains 250- to 300-year-old American holly, shadblow, and sassafras maritime forest and is considered one of only two such forests known in the world (Figure 4-58).[144] The federal tracts on Fire Island are relatively native in vegetation.

The vegetation within the communities has grown significantly over the last century, changing the landscape and viewsheds considerably. Vegetation is used as a buffer between properties and lots, and in many cases prevents views and vistas that once were wide open between properties during the initial development of the early twentieth century. The current vegetation, along with the structures, has created a landscape of visual density within these communities (Figure 4-59). Non-native species on Fire Island appear to be concentrated within the communities. A few of the non-native species on the seashore include Japanese black pine, Japanese honeysuckle, bamboo, and thistle.





Figure 4-58. A study in 1985 reported that the flora diversity across Fire Island is relatively monotonous. Vegetation consists of approximately 76% grass, 16% brush (shrubs and woody vines), and 8% forest. The 1985 study determined the two largest families were the grasses, with 59 species, and the daisy family, with 57 species (Marstel-Day, LLC) (top right).

Figure 4-59. Slatted boardwalk in a community showing the overgrowth of vegetation (Zeldman 2006) (bottom right).

BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

Buildings and structures on Fire Island are concentrated on the western half of the island within the residential communities and the Fire Island Lighthouse area. Sailors Haven in the Sunken Forest, Watch Hill on the western edge of the High Dune Wilderness, and Smith Point County Park on the eastern end of Fire Island are public areas with a variety of visitor's facilities.

The lighthouse area, located at the westernmost section of Fire Island, is composed of 13 historic structures within two separate clusters: the light station and the radio compass station. The light station area contains the lighthouse, keeper's dwelling, the stone terrace, the 1939 boathouse, and the Fresnel lens building built in 2010. The radio compass station area contains the lighthouse annex building built in 1906, the annex garage, tool house, oil house, storehouse, the ruins of the wireless station's engine house, and the foundation of the battery house. Other concrete foundations remain in the area as well as the guy wire remnants that mark the site of two large radio towers that were demolished in 1937.

Sailors Haven in the Sunken Forest has a marina, ferry dock, visitor center, boardwalks, and a bathhouse. The Talisman area has a few structures, including housing units, a condemned motel, a boat dock, bathhouse, restrooms, boardwalks, and picnic area. The Watch Hill area is a large visitor's area includes a ferry dock, marina, general store, restaurant, campgrounds, bathhouse, boardwalks, and a visitor center. Several residences in Bayberry Dunes remain for National Park Service use. The Smith Point County Park has a few structures including a visitor's center and bathhouses.

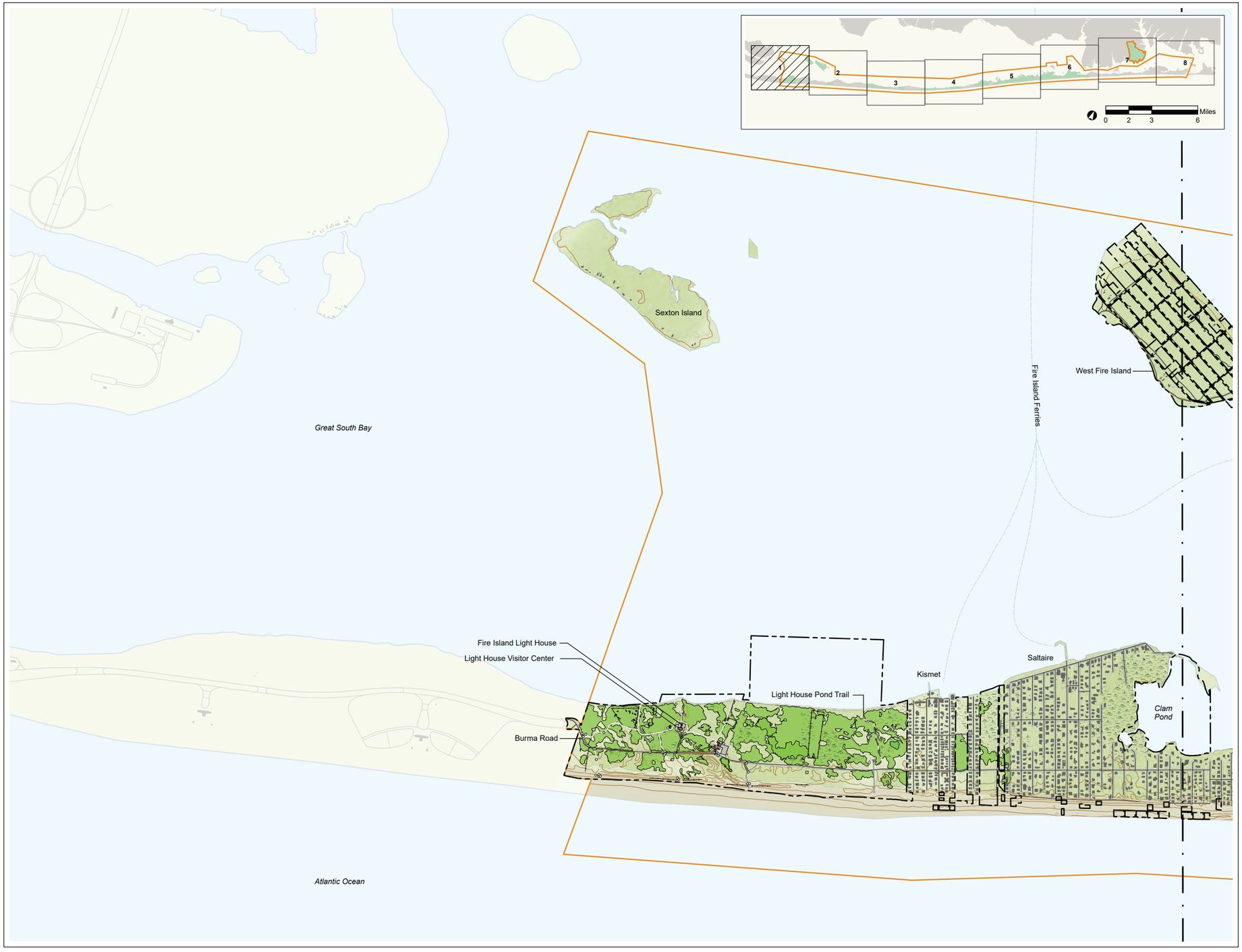
Bellport Beach, owned by the town of Bellport, dissects the High Dune Wilderness and is a strip of land that runs from the bay to the ocean. In 2021, a large pavilion on tall pilings in nearly ruinous condition stood on the oceanside beach in Bellport Beach. It was removed in 2022.

Development on Fire Island continued during the last 40 years and the 17 communities each experienced growth. The 2016 General Management Plan lists approximately 4,200 private properties within the communities and the 2020 United States Census records 4,380 residences. Nearly all of the communities are heavily built with Ocean Beach being one of the most densely-built communities. Communities like Fire Island Pines have retained larger lots and Point O'Woods still remains sparsely built.

Commercial properties are focused in Ocean Beach, Ocean Bay Park, Cherry Grove, Fire Island Pines, and Davis Park. Commercial properties are located in other communities but not in large concentrations. The residential buildings range from small one-story cottages dating back to the early 20th century to two-story buildings with decks and swimming pools, featuring the modern architectural styles of the late 1900s and 2000s. Numerous modernist-style, custom-designed houses have been built in the last several decades throughout several of the communities on the island, especially in Fire Island Pines. Many of these new structures use materials and construction techniques that withstand future hurricanes such as impact-resistant windows, vertical cement siding, and rust-proof roofs. No more houses stand on the dune crest or seaward of the dune within the Fire Island National Seashore.

VIEWS AND VISTAS

The primary views and vistas throughout Fire Island National Seashore were from the beach, either looking out to the Atlantic Ocean or along the length of Fire Island in either direction. Boardwalks were constructed in Sailors Haven during this period and there were important views from the interpretative trails within and near this area – to the Atlantic Ocean from along the beach or atop the dunes, and from the boardwalk looking out to the Great South Bay. Watch Hill also provided significant views toward Long Island across Great South Bay.



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 2022 Existing Conditions

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. NPS Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS)
2. New York State GIS Orthoimagery, 2018
3. USGS LiDAR, 2012
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Field Review, October 2021

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- CLI/Fee Boundary
- Legislative Boundary
- Hydrography
- Lawn
- Woods
- Coastal Scrub Vegetation
- Beach
- Wetland/Marsh
- Building
- Unpaved Road or Pathway
- Paved Road
- Boardwalk
- Trail
- Fence
- Interpretive Sign / Wayside
- Well
- Flag Pole

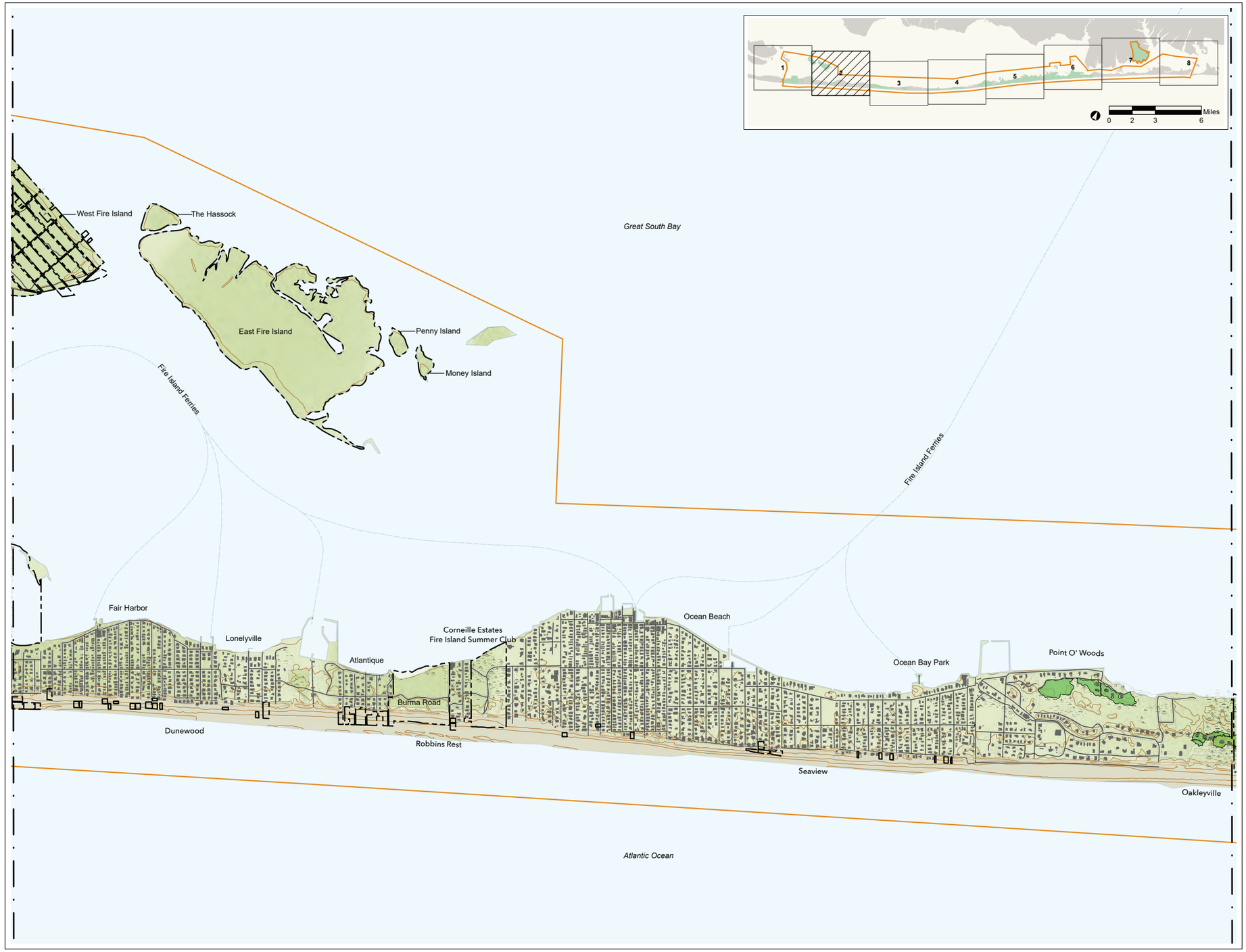
NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. Contour Interval = 5'
3. All features shown in approximate scale and location

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 1.1

Figure 4-47. Period Plan—Fire Island Existing Conditions, 2022, Map #1



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 2022 Existing Conditions

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
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SOURCES

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2. New York State GIS Orthoimagery, 2018
3. USGS LiDAR, 2012
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Field Review, October 2021

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- CLI/Fee Boundary
- Legislative Boundary
- Hydrography
- Lawn
- Woods
- Coastal Scrub Vegetation
- Beach
- Wetland/Marsh
- Building
- Unpaved Road or Pathway
- Paved Road
- Boardwalk
- Trail
- Campground Site
- Well

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. Contour Interval = 5'
3. All features shown in approximate scale and location

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 1.2

Figure 4-48. Period Plan—Fire Island Existing Conditions, 2022, Map #2



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 2022 Existing Conditions

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. NPS Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS)
2. New York State GIS Orthoimagery, 2018
3. USGS LiDAR, 2012
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Field Review, October 2021

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- CLI/Fee Boundary
- Legislative Boundary
- Hydrography
- Lawn
- Woods
- Coastal Scrub Vegetation
- Beach
- Wetland/Marsh
- Building
- Unpaved Road or Pathway
- Paved Road
- Boardwalk
- Trail
- Campground Site
- Well

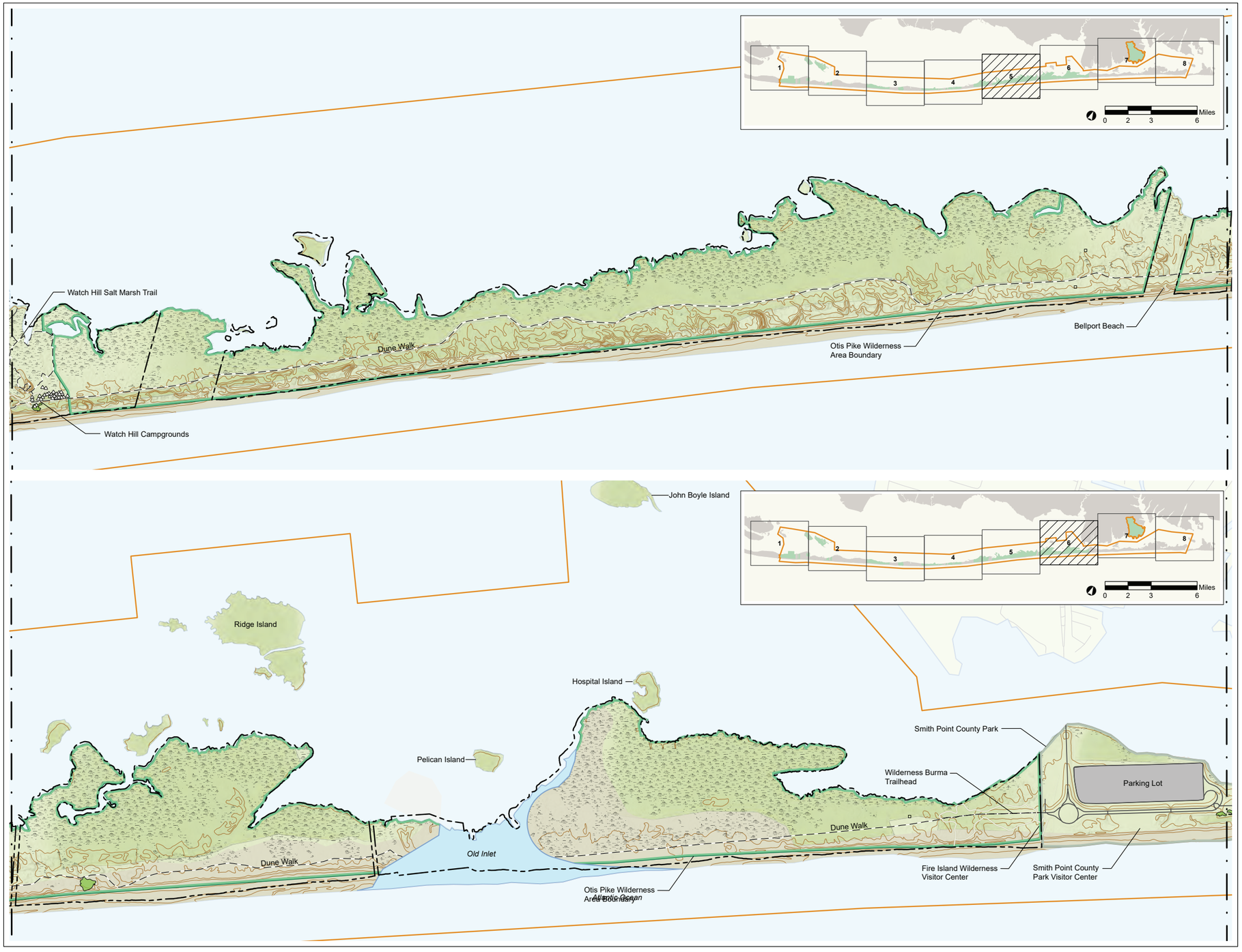
NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. Contour Interval = 5'
3. All features shown in approximate scale and location

0 375 750 1,500 Feet

Drawing 1.4

Figure 4-49. Period Plan—Fire Island Existing Conditions, 2022, Maps #3 (top) and #4 (bottom).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 2022 Existing Conditions

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. NPS Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS)
2. New York State GIS Orthoimagery, 2018
3. USGS LiDAR, 2012
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Field Review, October 2021

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- CLI/Fee Boundary
- Legislative Boundary
- Hydrography
- Lawn
- Woods
- Coastal Scrub Vegetation
- Beach
- Wetland/Marsh
- Building
- Unpaved Road or Pathway
- Paved Road
- Boardwalk
- Trail

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. Contour Interval = 5'
3. All features shown in approximate scale and location

Drawing 1.6

Figure 4-50. Period Plan—Fire Island Existing Conditions, 2022, Maps #5 (top) and #6 (bottom).



Cultural Landscape Report

Fire Island National Seashore

Fire Island, New York

Fire Island 2022 Existing Conditions

National Park Service
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. NPS Cultural Resources Inventory System (CRIS)
2. New York State GIS Orthoimagery, 2018
3. USGS LiDAR, 2012
4. NPS Landsnet Boundaries and Tracts
5. Field Review, October 2021

DRAWN BY

Kelsey Little, ArcGIS Pro 2.7, 2021

LEGEND

- CLI/Fee Boundary
- Legislative Boundary
- Hydrography
- Lawn
- Woods
- Coastal Scrub Vegetation
- Beach
- Wetland/Marsh
- Unpaved Road or Pathway
- Boardwalk

NOTES

1. Projection: NAD83 UTM Zone 18N
2. Contour Interval = 5'
3. All features shown in approximate scale and location

Feet
0 375 750 1,500

Drawing 1.8

Figure 4-51. Period Plan—Fire Island Existing Conditions, 2022, Maps #7 (top) and #8 (bottom).

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ENDNOTES

1. Irvin Molotsky, "Fire I. Supervisor Defends His Policies." New York Times, August 29, 1979.
2. J.W. Stewart and J. Ritenour, *Draft Staff Report on Land Acquisition Review*, Fire Island National Seashore (September 14, 1979): 1–24, referenced in Ned Kaufman and Charles Starks, *Land Regulation at Fire Island National Seashore: A History and Analysis, 1964-2004* (National Park Service, Northeast Region and University of Massachusetts, 2008), 117–119.
3. J.W. Stewart and J. Ritenour, *Draft Staff Report on Land Acquisition Review*, 1–24.
4. Ibid.
5. Amendment adding the Dune District as an overlay to the Fire Island National Seashore was enacted in Public Law 95-625, section 322 (16 USC 459e), 95th Congress, approved November 10, 1978. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-92/pdf/STATUTE-92-Pg3467.pdf; Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Zoning Standards, Final Rule, 45 Federal Register, No. 12, (January 17, 1980), 3261–3270.
6. Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Zoning Standards, Final Rule, 1980, 3262.
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8. "Article XI: Use District Regulations: Residence BAA District," Town of Islip, NY, accessed September 19, 2022, https://ecode360.com/7704300.
9. "Article XVIII: Great South Beach in Fire Island National Seashore," Town of Brookhaven, NY, Land Use Legislation, Zoning, accessed September 19, 2022, https://ecode360.com/8597976?highlight=fire%20island&searchId=.
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11. Public Law 88-587 (16 USC 459e), 88th Congress, approved September 11, 1964, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg928-2.pdf#page=6.
12. Public Law 88-587.
13. Public Law 96-585, 96th Congress, approved December 23, 1980, https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/96/585.pdf.
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15. National Park Service, *General Management Plan*, 1978. Work proceeded shortly after designation to either remove or update resources that were not compatible with the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness designation. This work is referenced in the Leonard Bobinchock, Wilderness Management Plan, Fire Island National Seashore (National Park Service, FINS 011927, 1983).
16. Bobinchock, *Wilderness Management Plan*, 6.
17. Bobinchock, *Wilderness Management Plan*, 4–7. Each of these cottages was removed per guidance in the Wilderness Management Plan.
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19. "Otis Pike Wilderness Nature Trail," American Trails, NRT Database, accessed April 25, 2022, https://www.nrtdatabase.org/trailDetail.php?recordID=2267.
20. Bobinchock, *Wilderness Management Plan*, 19.
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25. National Park Service, *Land Protection Plan*, 27.

26. Ibid., 26–27.

27. Ibid., 18, 22.

28. Ibid., 18–19.

29. Ibid., 17–19.

30. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, 132.

31. Public Law 98-482, 98th Congress, approved October 17, 1984. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-98/pdf/STATUTE-98-Pg2255.pdf.

32. House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Report [To Accompany H.R. 3697], 98th Congress, 2nd session, 1984, 3–4.

33. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, 135.

34. Public Law 98-482, Sect. 4.

35. Ibid., Sect. 4.

36. Ibid., Sect. 3.

37. Kaufman and Starks, *Land Regulation*, 138.

38. "Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Federal Zoning Regulations," Proposed Rule, 52 Federal Register, No. 194, (October 7, 1987), 37586-37592; "Fire Island National Seashore, New York; Federal Zoning Regulations," 56 Federal Register, No. 168, (August 29, 1991), 42788-42795.

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45. The western tip of Fire Island has grown approximately 212 feet annually between 1825 and 1939 referenced in Lee E. Koppelman and Seth Forman, *Fire Island National Seashore, A History* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 20–21.

46. Michael Bilecki, oral interview on December 9, 2021, by Kristie Baynard, Marstel-Day, LLC.

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50. "Fire Island Pre-NEPA Off Road Vehicle Driving Regulation and ORV Management Plan," National Park Service Planning, Environment, and Public Comment, accessed December 2021, https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=97189.

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57. National Park Service, *Environmental Assessment, Fire Island Community Short Term Storm Protection, Fire Island, Suffolk County, NY, Fire Island National Seashore*, 1998, Appendix B.

58. National Park Service, *Environmental Assessment, Fire Island Community Short Term Storm Protection,* 1998.

59. To be eligible a property must be at least 50 years of age, unless it is exceptionally significant, and it must be significant for one or more of the following: associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; must embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or may be likely to yield information important to history or prehistory.

60. Laraine Fletcher and Ellen Kintz, *Historic Resource Study, Fire Island National Seashore, Long Island, N.Y.* (Division of Cultural Resources, North Atlantic Regional Office, National Park Service, 1979).

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73. Superintendent Alexcy Romero, oral interview on December 15, 2021, by Kristie Baynard, Marstel-Day, LLC.

74. National Park Service, *Pre-NEPA Webinar: Off-road Vehicle Regulation and ORV Management Plan* (National Park Service, 2020).

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76. National Park Service, *Wilderness Stewardship Plan and Backcountry Camping Policy, Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness*, Fire Island National Seashore, 2016, 5.

77. National Park Service, *Wilderness Stewardship Plan*, 12.

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79. Ibid., ix.

80. Three criteria are listed in the Wilderness Breach Management Plan: 1) geologic controls: if the breach migrates beyond specific geologic controls (erosion resistant clay on either side of the breach), growth of the breach would be less predictable. 2) Cross-sectional area: an increase in cross-sectional area above the 300-600 square meter range would indicate breach growth and a condition in which the evolution of the breach is less predictable and impacts to the surrounding areas may change. 3) Water level as measured by tide gauges: the National Park Service would look for changes in the patterns of water level heights, seasonal changes, and changes in variability at Bellport compared to the rest of the Great South Bay, specifically an increase in the water level.

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82. Superintendent Alexcy Romero interview, December 15, 2021.

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109. Low and Taplin, *Ethnographic Overview*, 146.

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114. Fletcher and Kintz, *Historic Resource Study*, 112.

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APPENDIX 1. HISTORY OF SAND PLACEMENT ON FIRE ISLAND

Year	Locality	Volume Placed (cubic meters)
1980	Davis Park	11,500 (ocean) 11,500 (bay)
1980	Fire Island Pines	2,700
1981	Fair Harbor	22,600
1981	Saltaire	1,400 (bay)
1983	Great South Beach	7,700
1980–1989 total = 57,400 cubic meters		
1990	Watch Hill	3,800
1991	Great South Beach	2,300
1992	Smith County Park	37,700
1993	Fire Island Pines	5,000
1993	Davis Park	3,800 (mud)
1993	Saltaire	15,300
1993	Fair Harbor	5,400
1993	Kismet	7,300
1993	Dunewood (assumed Fair Harbor)	800
1993	Smith Point Boardwalk	8,300
1994	Bellport	3,000
1994	Seaview	42,000
1994	Fire Island Pines	133,800
1994	Fair Harbor	137,600
1994	Dunewood (assumed Fair Harbor)	23,700
1994	Saltaire	290,500
1994	Ocean Bay Park Beach	107,000
1994	Point O' Woods	145,300
1996	Smith Point Boardwalk	41,400
1996	Water Island and Barrett Beach	57,300
1996	West of Moriches Inlet	152,200
1997	Smith Point Boardwalk	8,300
1997	Fire Island Pines	500,000
1990–1999 total = 1,731,800 cubic meters		
2003/2004	Fire Island Pines	429,600
2003/2004	Saltaire, Fair Harbor, Dunewood, Lonelyville	549,800
2007	Smith Point Park	172,000
2007	Davis Park	21,000
2000–2007 total = 1,172,499 cubic meters		

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