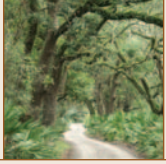


Center for State of the Parks



CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

Cumberland Island National Seashore encompasses 36,347 acres of barrier island and salt marsh in southeastern Georgia, just north of the Florida border. The national seashore includes all of Cumberland Island, which has a total length of 17.5 miles and a width of about three miles at its broadest point. It is the largest barrier island in Georgia and includes nearly 10,000 acres of federally designated wilderness. Another 10,000 acres are potential wilderness.

Each year about 45,000 people visit Cumberland Island National Seashore (primarily by concessioner-operated ferry) to experience one-of-a-kind cultural resources and habitats that are becoming rare elsewhere along the coast. The park offers visitors undeveloped sandy beaches, views of the Atlantic Ocean, opportunities for wildlife viewing and hiking, and the chance to explore historic structures and ruins that date mostly to the late 19th century.

CHALLENGES

- Several key positions are vacant at the park, including the superintendent, fire management officer, purchasing agent, and maintenance mechanic. As a result of these vacancies, there has been a suspension of prescribed fires; work contracts must go through the regional office, a
- process that is often slow; and the park's capacity to address routine and backlogged maintenance has been reduced. Without a superintendent, the park is unable to fill the vacated positions or hire additional staff to meet resource management and park operational needs.
- Due to staffing and funding shortfalls, the park is unable to adequately manage the feral horse population; monitor, protect, and restore critical bird habitat; monitor and manage coastal dynamics; manage cultural landscapes; monitor, protect, and study threatened archaeo-



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Photo of the Boat Captain's House and the Ice House courtesy of the National Park Service.

logical resources; preserve historic museum collections and furnishings; and maintain historic structures. To accomplish this work, the park needs a biologist, biological technicians, protection rangers, a geologist, a cultural resource specialist, an archaeologist, a museum or archival technician, and skilled trades personnel.

- Over the past two centuries, settlers introduced horses and hogs to Cumberland Island. These species became feral and are damaging park ecosystems and competing with native species for food and habitat. Recent estimates indicate there are 200 horses currently roaming Cumberland Island. These horses graze intensely on salt marsh grasses,



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exacerbating erosion and degrading habitat for wildlife. They also destabilize sand dunes, trample shorebird nests, and adversely affect water quality and wetlands habitat. Studies have indicated that reducing the herd to 50 to 70 animals is necessary to protect park ecosystems. However, addressing the island's feral horses is a challenge because of public and political appeal for the animals.

- In addition to horses, feral hogs also contribute to overgrazing and they may eat the eggs of federally protected loggerhead sea turtles. Their rooting harms natural habitat, cultural landscapes, and archaeological sites. The park hunts and traps hogs, but it is difficult to reduce or eliminate populations because the animals can reproduce twice a year. Despite ongoing control efforts, park resource managers estimate there are between 200 and 300 hogs on the island at any given time.
- Additional ethnographic research on the island would result in a more thorough understanding of the park's history, and it would contribute to a comprehensive interpretation of cultural resources. Currently, most museum objects and exhibits address just one group of people, the Carnegie family. The history of African Americans and American Indians should also be conveyed to park visitors.
- More and more people are moving near Cumberland Island National Seashore, spurring waterfront development directly west of the park. Development brings new sources of air, water, and noise pollution, as well as an increased likelihood of disturbing or even injuring wildlife

such as birds and endangered sea turtles and manatees.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- Interns from the Student Conservation Association help protect sea turtle nests on Cumberland Island. They identify new nests each morning, document their location, cover them with wire screen to prevent intrusion by predators such as hogs and raccoons, and keep track of the nests until the eggs hatch.
- The Park Service has put considerable effort into rehabilitating the Plum Orchard Mansion, a Georgian Revival mansion built for Lucy Carnegie's son George. Work has included a new roof; extensive exterior repairs; documentation, cleaning, and conservation of the wallpaper; lead paint and asbestos remediation; installation of structural steel; wall and floor repair; installation of security and fire suppression systems; and mechanical and electrical systems repair.
- Park staff are working to stabilize and preserve the Stafford Chimneys, which are the remains of quarters that housed enslaved Africans during the plantation era. Although the chimneys are located on a private estate, the park is implementing a strategic plan to preserve and fortify the standing chimneys and repair or rebuild those that have fallen.
- A Park Service exotic plant management team has helped the staff of Cumberland Island National Seashore remove more than six acres of non-native plants from the island. These aggressive plants will require treatment with herbicides,

monitoring, and retreatment as necessary until populations are eradicated. The park must also take into account the preservation of some non-native plants as part of the cultural landscape. Park staff must decide which plants to eradicate and which to maintain as part of the cultural landscape.

ABOUT NPCA AND THE CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System.

NPCA initiated the State of the Parks program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks. The goal is to provide information that will help policymakers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Cumberland Island National Seashore, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information on Cumberland Island National Seashore, contact NPCA's Southeast Regional Office Senior Director Don Barger at 865.329.2424 or dbarger@npca.org, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/cuis.