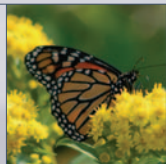


Center for State of the Parks



GATEWAY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA: SUMMARY

REPORT SUMMARY

Touch the bricks of a Civil War-era fort; catch a glimpse of a migrating hawk soaring overhead on its way to Central America; examine a rare, delicate orchid; watch volunteers restore vintage aircraft; or build a sandcastle, picnic with family, and surf along a sandy beach. Many Americans associate these kinds of experiences with national parks such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, Cape Hatteras National Seashore, or Wright Brothers National Memorial. What may come as a surprise is that all of these opportunities—and more—are possible within our nation's most populous urban area at Gateway National Recreation Area, one of our nation's 39 national parks.

Gateway National Recreation Area, located in New York City and northern New Jersey, protects more than 26,000 acres of land and waters offering an array of recreational, cultural, and natural values. More than 330 species of birds and 71 species of butterflies live within the park or stop-over at Gateway during their arduous seasonal migrations along the Atlantic coast.

Gateway is also a living museum full of history that can be seen, touched, and fully experienced by visitors. Gateway's buildings, landscapes, and archaeological sites illuminate important aspects of the region's social, maritime, aviation, and archi-

Gateway protects important wildlife habitat in the heart of one of our nation's largest urban areas.



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tectural history, and include great samples of America's coastal defenses from the Revolutionary War through the Cold War.

Gateway National Recreation Area was created in 1972 to preserve and protect recreational, natural, and cultural resources and to provide a national park experience for the region's urban residents. Unfortunately, when the park was created, many of the natural and cultural resources had been affected by previous uses and by development of the surrounding area. Salt marshes had long been filled, Jamaica Bay had been repeatedly dredged, and the maritime and deciduous forests had been covered in pavement. Buildings evoking facets of history stood in disrepair, their integrity threatened by decades of neglect.

Gateway, along with the entire

National Park System, has for more than a decade suffered from chronic under funding. The gap between need and actual budgets has, over the years, affected the staff's ability to restore historic buildings and maintain education programs. Though much work is still needed to help Gateway realize its full potential, the natural, cultural, and recreational values of the park are undeniable. To have 26,000 acres of federally protected lands and waters in the heart of one of our nation's most densely populated areas is remarkable.

KEY POINTS

- Prior to the establishment of Gateway, much of the land within the park had been significantly developed or disturbed for various projects. Large extents of Jamaica Bay's barrier peninsula and marshes were filled for fortifications and associated complexes, while its northern edge, once a massive city dump, is now a landfill. Natural habitats have



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been dramatically altered in some areas, water inputs and sediment transports have been affected by the hardening of the surrounding landscape, and non-native species are widespread.

- Protecting and preserving salt marshes in the face of ongoing development, human disturbance, runoff, dredging, rising sea levels, and a host of other issues is a key concern for Gateway staff and other regional land managers.
- Construction of a major international airport along the shores of Jamaica Bay in 1942 resulted in the backfilling of marshes and loss of about 4,500 acres of marshland. Since then, the airport's operations have disrupted a nearby seabird colony, polluted adjacent marshes with toxic runoff, and today dominate the park with intense noise pollution.
- Roads and paved surfaces crisscross each of Gateway's units, and with the exception of the salt marshes, there are no remaining areas that support undisturbed natural vegetation. Over time, these disturbances within the park and surrounding region have disrupted and diminished natural hydrological and biogeochemical cycles.
- The estuarine waters surrounding Gateway, Lower New York Harbor, and Jamaica Bay are inundated with treated and untreated sewage, industrial waste, toxic substances that leach out from landfills, and runoff from numerous commercial sites, including regional port facilities, John F. Kennedy International Airport, and thousands of other non-point sources.
- Gateway staff face incredible challenges addressing the maintenance and management needs of more than 400 buildings and structures in various states of repair. Maintenance costs and staff time

associated with managing these buildings are staggering.

- Staffing and funding shortfalls affect all aspects of the park's operations, and create situations where park managers must allocate money and staff time strategically, recognizing that all needs cannot be met with current funding levels. Sometimes funding shortfalls and restrictions on the use of existing funds translate to vacant staff positions and unmet resource protection needs.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- A pilot restoration project on two acres of salt marsh at Big Egg Marsh in Jamaica Bay has shown some initial success, and is being monitored closely by park staff. Partner groups have made this project possible by providing funding. Knowledge gained will help guide the Park Service and other federal and state agencies in nearby restoration projects.
- The New York City Department of Environmental Protection is reclaiming the Pennsylvania Avenue and Fountain Avenue landfills and converting them into upland habitat modeled after the Hempstead Plains—60,000 acres of prairie that once covered much of Long Island. These formerly off-limits landfills will eventually provide open space for taking a walk, reading a book, birding, or simply enjoying a respite from the usual hustle and bustle of the city.
- A new visitor center at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge employs Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards put forth by the U.S. Green Building Council. Geothermal sources provide heat, automatic window shades control the amount of

sunlight entering the building, special reflectors amplify sunlight to reduce the need for electric lights, and flooring and cabinets are made from quick-growing, sustainably farmed bamboo.

ABOUT NPCA AND 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, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

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 policy-makers, 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 the full report on Gateway National Recreation Area published by NPCA's Center for State of the Parks, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president of Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org.

For more information on Gateway National Recreational Area, contact NPCA's Northeast Regional Office at 212-617-2771, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/gate. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park, visit www.npca.org/take_action.