



Southeast Region Coastal and Ocean Park Strategy

This document sets forth a strategy for coordination and implementation of activities associated with coastal and ocean parks in the Southeast Region. It sets forth a proposed communication structure within the region as well as identifies programmatic themes in keeping with both Department of Interior and NPS initiatives relative to federal management of ocean resources.

Context

The Southeast Region of the National Park Service has 24 units that have interests or jurisdiction that encompasses the ocean or borders the ocean coast or estuarine environment. These 24 units represent over 1,125,000 acres of marine and estuarine waters, approximately 35% of the total for all of the NPS park units. In addition, these parks represent over 620 miles of coastline. These parks represent highly diverse coral reef ecosystems, dynamic coastal barrier islands, tidally influenced estuarine systems, abundant fisheries, and historically significant coastal fortifications and maritime structures. A table with the SER parks with ocean, estuarine resources, or coastline is attached (attachment 1).

- Oceans Act passed by Congress in 2000 establishing U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy; the Commission released a report “An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century”;
- U.S. Ocean Action Plan developed by the Administration in response to Commission’s report outlining immediate and long-term activities at the Federal level;
- NPS developed Ocean Park Stewardship Action Plan to increase the service-wide emphasis on restoring and conserving marine and estuarine resources.

Background

Over the last 2-3 years, the Department of Interior and the National Park Service have been placing greater emphasis on the management, coordination, and stewardship of ocean resources. Significant developments include:



Though the Southeast Region has been active in various aspects of these plans, this strategy sets forth a deliberate and focused approach to management and stewardship of ocean related issues.

Themes

These themes will be pursued to the greatest extent possible through partnerships, collaboration, and coordination with our federal partners as well as Tribal, state, local governments, private entities, and not for profit organizations.

I. Advance our understanding of marine & estuarine ecosystems, coastal features, natural processes, and cultural resources in coastal environments. Three of the five Inventory and Monitoring Networks in the SER encompass coastal and/or marine parks: S. Florida/Caribbean Network (SFCN), Southeast Coast Network (SECN), and Gulf Network (GULN). These networks are well underway with efforts to inventory plant and animal species for these parks as well as moving quickly toward implementation of long term monitoring programs for these parks. As the data is certified and made available, the networks will provide a pivotal and crucial role in working with the parks to help them use this information in their management as well as making information available to the public to increase visitor understanding and stewardship of the resources. In addition, information and recommendations provided by the WASO-funded Watershed Condition Assessments will lead to more informed management and planning for coastal parks. The monitoring programs developed under the I&M networks will help identify the need for scientific studies such as research needs related to: 1) coral bleaching; 2) decreased fish stocks; and, 3) establishing carrying capacities and quantifying impacts to sensitive/fragile marine resources, such as seagrass beds and shoals frequented by mariners.

II. Forge partnerships and increase collaboration. The Region is in a good position to work with partners and park neighbors as appropriate to encourage a collaborative consideration of ocean and coastal issues to accomplish mutual goals, particularly as they relate to the idea of a seamless

network of ocean parks, sanctuaries, refuges, and reserves. The agreement between DOI and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration provides an impetus to expand this consideration beyond DOI. In addition, the Marine Protected Areas Center Inventory of Sites has led an effort to document Marine Protected Areas nationally. By working as a seamless network of ocean stewards at both the park and I & M network level, opportunities for leveraging resources toward a shared vision are possible. In addition, the region is involved in regional collaborative efforts such as the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership and the Gulf of Mexico Regional Partnership organized to foster proactive ocean and coastal stewardship among agencies and conservation organizations at the Federal, State, and local levels.

III. Increase Public Awareness and Education. Through sharing of information with interpretative programs and through volunteer programs and similar opportunities, the parks of the Southeast are building and expanding the capacity of the visitor and the public to support the parks. Parks will take the lead on identifying specific activities, curriculum, or opportunities to engage visitors and supporters in ocean park stewardship. In addition, through engagements with civic organizations and schools and through participation in education and outreach opportunities such as Coastal America and Learning Centers, the region will share information and build the body of knowledge relative to coastal and marine resources.



IV. Conserve and restore ocean and coastal resources. Through efforts such as coastal wetland restoration, management of marine protected areas/reserves, and ecosystem restoration efforts, we will seek to consider resources in a larger ecological framework for the long term benefit of the plants, animals, and natural functions that they provide. By

understanding jurisdictional issues and resolving jurisdictional obstacles, we will provide adequate protection and enforcement of effective rules and regulations as well as enhance visitor safety and enjoyment.

V. Seek and secure research to expand our knowledge relative to ocean and coastal resources.

As research and scientific questions become apparent, the region will pursue support for studies at the park, network, regional, or cross-regional scale. By prioritizing our needs and working with our partners, such as USGS, we will expand the base of knowledge and peer-reviewed research on ocean and coastal ecosystems. To be successful, we must find ways to meet recognized informational deficiencies and data gaps, such as acquiring identified data sets (side scanning and seismic surveys for bathymetry, carrying capacity studies and related management thresholds, creel censuses, etc.), which will be crucial in assisting the parks in making science based management decisions relative to marine resources.



Implementation

Implementation of the SER Coastal and Ocean Park Strategy will be spearheaded by a Steering Committee. The purpose of this committee will be to:

- (1) Develop an annual work plan with identifiable outcomes and/or objectives;
- (2) Identify and develop cross cutting budget initiatives to further SER objectives;
- (3) Track progress and report progress to the Regional Director on an annual basis.

This Committee will be chaired by the Deputy Regional Director. Committee members will include the ARD for Natural and Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Interpretation; Division Chief, Science & Natural Resources; four park Superintendents, and a Park Resource Management

Chief. Staffing will be primarily from the SERO Natural Resources Division which includes the Inventory and Monitoring Program.

While the Steering Committee will provide direction and leadership for implementation of this strategy, successful implementation of the strategy will require the concerted efforts of individuals and programs across the region.

Roles and Responsibilities

Regional Point of Contact

The SERO Point of Contact for the SER Coastal and Ocean Park Strategy will be the Chief of the Science & Natural Resources Division. The division chief has oversight of regional NR management issues, technical assistance, service-wide funding call, and natural resource challenge funding which affords a broad view of the resources available within the region. In addition, as the regional point of contact for WASO and Natural Resource Program Center, the division chief can serve as a central point for receiving and directing information from the national program managers to the field through the I & M networks and/or directly to coastal and marine parks as warranted.. The Regional Point of Contact will also be responsible for sharing information and engaging other regional office disciplines (e.g. planning, cultural resources, interpretation, and law enforcement) in support of this strategy as well as identification or coordination of opportunities at the regional or national level to leverage resources. The Regional Point of Contact will also ensure that regional participation on coastal related boards, committees, and workgroups (e.g. Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, Coastal America, etc.) is aligned with the regional themes. The expertise within the division (fisheries management, coastal geomorphology, wetlands, threatened & endangered species, invasives, GIS, and data management) will also provide support for efforts identified under the strategy.

Field Coordination for Inventory and Monitoring

The South Florida/Caribbean Network (SFCN) Coordinator will serve as the Field Coordinator for communication between the network coordinators (GULN and SECN) as well as parks within the SFCN. Information will flow from the regional point

of contact to the Field Coordinator who will make information available or coordinate response as needed. Likewise, when needed, the Field Coordinator will provide updates to the Regional Point of Contact as grass roots efforts or implementation of national initiatives takes place. The Field Coordinator, working with the other network coordinators, will also be responsible for identifying opportunities for sharing or leveraging I&M related work (e.g. coordination on protocols to collect similar data, sharing of data in similar formats to provide regional perspective to coastal and ocean park data and trends, etc.).

GULN & SECN I & M Network Coordinators

The Gulf Network and the Southeast Coast Network coordinators will support the themes and initiatives of the regional strategy as well as national initiatives. By working with the coastal and marine parks in the respective networks, opportunities for leveraging resources, problem-solving, and issue identification can take place within the context of network meetings and collaborations. The Network Coordinators (GULN, SECN, and SFCN) will have periodic discussions on common issues and opportunities for coastal and marine parks to maximize synergy among the networks. Issues requiring regional or national attention will be communicated via the SFCN coordinator to the Regional Point of Contact, unless circumstances warrant a different approach.

Parks

The coastal and ocean parks within the SER will pursue efforts both independently and jointly toward meeting the objectives described in this strategy. The park Superintendents will serve as champions for coastal and ocean park issues in their parks ensuring that resources across disciplines are engaged as needed. The Superintendents will also raise issues to their respective network boards which will serve as a first stop for collaboration and identification of issues. In addition, some Park superintendents have specific roles on national or regional efforts (e.g. the Gulf of Mexico Regional Partnership). In those cases, the respective Superintendents will ensure communication, as warranted, with the Regional Point of Contact, the Field Coordinator, and/or the Steering Committee.

As this strategy moves forward, there may also be opportunities to identify leads in specific fields such as interpretation, cultural resources, or law

enforcement. These roles may be held by persons located in the regional office, within a network, or within a park.

Ongoing Communication

To facilitate sharing of information among the parks, the networks, and the Atlanta base regional office staff, the following communication mechanisms will be used:

1. Establishment of a SER Coastal and Ocean Park intranet web site for posting of relevant documents, links, contacts, and products.
2. Holding biannual conference calls or meetings to discuss opportunities and issues associated with implementation of the regional strategy. One of these meetings could be held in person if resources allow.
3. Providing short updates or heads up in the Natural Resource Division monthly hot topics newsletter.

Tracking Progress

To ensure ongoing regional progress in this arena, it will be critical to institute a reporting mechanism. The region will attempt to not initiate reporting that is duplicative to national reporting requirements. To the extent possible, highlights of accomplishments under this strategy will be drawn from other reporting requirements. An annual report will be compiled and submitted to the Regional Director during the first quarter of the fiscal year. In conjunction with this, a briefing will be scheduled with the Regional Director to highlight accomplishments and identify challenges and planned activities for the coming year. Similarly, park superintendents from the 24 SER units with marine interests or jurisdiction will be encouraged to provide summaries of progress being made in implementing the SER Coastal and Ocean Strategy as part of the superintendent's annual accomplishment report submitted to SERO. SERO will in turn review these reports and post excerpts and/or a synopsis to the SER Coastal and Ocean Park intranet site.

Table 1. Ocean and Coastal Parks in Southeast Region *

Unit Name	Year Established	Size (acres)	Waters (acres)	Coast (miles)
Biscayne National Park	1968	175,250	168,666	50
Buck Island Reef National Monument	1961	19,015	18,839	3
Canaveral National Seashore	1975	57,662	39,680	24
Cape Hatteras National Seashore	1937	30,750	3,993	153
Cape Lookout National Seashore	1966	28,243	19,674	56
Castillo de San Marcos National Monument	1924	20	0	1
Christiansted National Historic Site	1952	27	0	1
Cumberland Island National Seashore	1972	36,415	10,262	30
De Soto National Memorial	1948	27	0	1
Dry Tortugas National Park	1935	64,701	64,661	4
Everglades National Park	1934	1,508,508	625,000	155
Fort Caroline National Memorial	1950	138	0	0
Fort Frederica National Monument	1936	241	0	1
Fort Mantanzas National Monument	1924	228	0	1
Fort Pulaski National Monument	1924	5,623	1,023	22
Fort Raleigh National Historic Site	1941	512	0	1
Fort Sumter National Monument	1948	200	125	1
Gulf Islands National Seashore	1971	137,793	115,189	76
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, Barataria Preserve	1978	18,818	156	18
Salt River Bay National Historic Park and Ecological Preserve	1992	948	600	1
San Juan Island National Historic Park	1966	1,752	0	1

Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve	1988	46,500	38,000	1
Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument	2001	13,893	13,893	3
Virgin Islands National Park	1956	14,689	5,650	22
SER Totals:		2,161,953	1,125,411	626

<i>Padre Island National Seashore (part of Gulf Network for I&M)</i>	1962	130,434	32,500	66
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** data from National Park Ocean Stewardship Strategy*