



1141 Sheridan Rd. NE, Atlanta, GA 30324
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CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE:

WILDERNESS EDUCATION PLAN

December 2020



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INTRODUCTION

This Wilderness Education Plan specifically identifies ways that the NPS and partner organizations can better educate Georgia residents and park visitors about the Cumberland Island Wilderness and their role in protecting and preserving it.

Wilderness is a place where human impact is significantly unnoticed, where natural processes — rather than human activity — are the primary influences. The Wilderness Act of 1964 was passed by the U.S. Congress to ensure that ecological, historic, scientific, and experiential resources are protected for future generations.

The National Wilderness Preservation System is managed by the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, but all citizens have a role and responsibility for protecting designated Wilderness Areas.

In 1982, the U.S. Congress formally designated Cumberland Island Wilderness. However, designating Wilderness is only the first step toward achieving its protection; the critical process is to prevent the progressive decline and loss of Wilderness values by staunchly applying good Wilderness stewardship.

The National Park Service has a responsibility to the public, based on its enabling legislation, to facilitate Wilderness education and interpretation, resource significance, and stewardship.

We request that the NPS consider the included recommendations and take the following steps:

- Develop a comprehensive Wilderness Management Plan that establishes a framework for management guidance.
- Establish individual elements of a Wilderness Education Program.
- Establish a priority for funding and implementation of the elements of the Plan.
- Provide a plan for continuity of the Program.



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SIGNIFICANCE

The following statements provide the connections between Cumberland Island National Seashore's enabling legislation and Wilderness interpretive programs:

1. Wilderness designation provides the highest level of legal protection for some of the most pristine and least manipulated wildlands in the United States.
2. Lands that qualify for Wilderness status are a rare and diminishing resource.
3. Wilderness provides critical habitat for rare and endangered species, as well as protection of other necessary components of healthy and diverse ecosystems (air quality, watersheds, and natural soundscapes).
4. Wilderness provides a learning laboratory for scientific activities that address climate change, natural systems and their preservation, management, and stewardship.
5. Wilderness provides the opportunity to explore personal and societal values.
6. Wilderness contains qualities such as scenic beauty, natural sounds, and opportunities for reflection and solitude that are important for human inspiration and rejuvenation. The designation and management of Wilderness affords opportunities for exploring concepts such as preservation, freedom, interdependence, ingenuity, and land ethics.
7. Wilderness provides exceptional opportunities for challenging recreational experiences, allowing current and future generations the opportunity to experience risk, reward, and self-reliance.

BACKGROUND

Past and Present Wilderness Interpretation Practices

Cumberland Island National Seashore has not employed / does not currently employ any interpretive practices to educate the public about its federally-designated Wilderness Area.

- November is Wilderness Month, which typically features a mention on social media by the National Park Service.

FUTURE PROJECTIONS ON WILDERNESS USE

With increased use of Wilderness comes increased human-related impacts and degradation, unless there are corresponding increases in Wilderness education efforts and support from partner organizations.



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CHALLENGES

The NPS is faced with a number of challenges, both geographic and societal, in managing and protecting Cumberland Island National Seashore and Wilderness Area:

1. Not all visitors know that the state of Georgia and Cumberland Island features a federally-designated, protected Wilderness Area.
2. Not all visitors know that federally-designated Wilderness Areas are managed and protected by an administering federal agency such as the National Park Service.
3. Not all visitors understand that federally-designated Wilderness Areas exist so that people can experience wild places without disturbing or destroying natural processes at work there, thus keeping wilderness wild for future visitors.
4. Not all visitors understand that federally-designated Wilderness Areas are protected and valued for ecological, historical, scientific, and experiential reasons that make them important to everyone.
5. Not all visitors have a natural resource ethic that causes them to act in ways that help protect the park or Wilderness Area.
6. Not all visitors understand how to safely enjoy Cumberland Island Wilderness or how to ensure the protection of its natural resources.
7. Not all visitors understand the overall benefits that Cumberland Island Wilderness offers for the park and visitor experience, even if they never step foot into the actual Wilderness Area.
8. Not all visitors understand how their actions could ultimately lead to damage and/or the potential loss of wilderness, or how current protections benefit the long-term protection of its resources.
9. Not all visitors understand that everyone has a role in protecting the Wilderness or the significance of barrier islands to our state's overall well-being.
10. The number of visitors to the Georgia coast has risen, a trend expected to continue in the future. This increase means that more people will impact the island, either directly through visits to the island or indirectly through ecological changes on the mainland that impact the island and its surrounding air and waters.



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EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT CUMBERLAND ISLAND WILDERNESS

Plan Goals

1. To increase awareness that the state of Georgia features this federally-protected Wilderness Area on its coast. Many of our state's residents think of wilderness as "places far away from us" or as "one of the western parks".
2. To impart a natural resource ethic to visitors that leads them to act in a way that protects and preserves Wilderness.
3. To educate visitors about positive, low-impact use of Cumberland Island National Seashore.
4. To help the public understand that the integrity of Cumberland Island National Seashore is directly attributable to its Wilderness protections.

Target Audiences:

- Diverse non-Wilderness visitors (Americans who traditionally have not visited or valued Wilderness)
- Georgia residents
- Park visitors: Daytrippers, birders, backcountry campers/hikers
- Hunters/fishers/boaters
- Outfitters/guides
- Organized groups
- Youth
- Advocacy/conservation groups
- NPS, concessioner staff
- Media



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METHODS FOR CONSIDERATION :

Immediately integrate the inclusion of Wilderness history, character, protections, and value into the Cumberland Island National Seashore museum, located on the mainland in St. Mary's, GA.

Immediately integrate the inclusion of Wilderness history, character, protections, and value into printed Cumberland Island National Seashore visitor materials, such as brochures, that are available in the museum, visitor center, and ranger station.

Ensure all volunteers, rangers, and interns are fully educated on Wilderness history, character, protections, and value.

- This personnel should be up-to-date on current research / scientific projects within the park and be able to share that information with visitors.

Establish a team of specially-trained park volunteers to support rangers specifically related to the Wilderness Area:

- These volunteers would work with rangers to reach the public in ways including:
 - Incorporating Wilderness history, character, protections, and value into the court-mandated vehicular tours through the Wilderness.
 - Dockside programming that incorporates Wilderness education.
 - Rangers or park volunteers can offer weekend walking tours within the Wilderness, providing the opportunity to interpret the importance of wilderness and practices that preserve it.

Provide printed, reusable education display material (ie, laminated posters or flyers) for hanging display on the ferry from St. Mary's to Cumberland Island. Visitors can explore the poster at their leisure, but it would serve as a visual reminder that the area contains a federally-protected Wilderness Area and its related significance.



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Rangers, park volunteers, and partner organizations establish a 'Speakers Bureau', making themselves available to local groups, schools, etc., to ensure that people know that CINS includes a federally-protected Wilderness Area.

Offer environmentally-friendly "Leave No Trace" personal trash bags featuring the NPS logo, a message ("Protect your Wilderness,") and a set of basic rules for low-impact visits to Cumberland Island Wilderness Area.

- Make these accessible at the Visitors' Center upon check-in under the "Leave No Trace" principle.

Design and install signage which can be erected at boat ramps that open onto the Intracoastal Waterway. Similar to signs at trailheads in other parks, this sign could carry a message such as "Protect your Wilderness," the NPS logo, and/or a short set of guidelines for low-impact visits.

Engaging youth:

- Integrate Wilderness education into the existing Junior Ranger program.
- To reach a broader audience of youth, create a "Wilderness activity trunk" with accompanying curriculum teachers' guide, accessible to teachers across the region. *Ex:*
<http://www.montanaturalist.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/MNHC-Trunk-Guide-oct-2014-smaller-file.pdf>
- Create a free curriculum for educators, including access to video (above), along with several primary, intermediate, and middle-school level lesson plans available for download online.



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Media-centered methods:

Leverage media (newspapers, radio, television, and social networks) to inform visitors and the community about wilderness barrier islands and the practices that preserve and protect them.

Produce educational video content that:

- builds the understanding that part of Cumberland Island is a federally-designated Wilderness Area,
- celebrates the value of this area and the need to preserve and protect it for future generations,
- teaches what practices do and do not disturb or destroy this area, and
- imparts a land ethic that leads people to act in ways that preserve and protect the Wilderness.

The video content could be available:

- as a video program at the Visitors' Center
- as downloadable content on visitors' devices
- during public-service time provided by local television channels
- civic and service group meetings
- in schools, and
- on the seashore and NPS websites

This could include thirty-second (:30) or one-minute (1:00) spots that celebrate proximity to and the protections of a federally-protected Wilderness Area. Additionally, production of a related thirty-second (:30) sound recording.

Emphasize Wilderness history, character, protections, and value in NPS' existing social media channels (Instagram, Facebook).

Prepare a "boiler-plate" piece of copy to be added to all park press communications, highlighting the protection of a federally-designated Wilderness.



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Sponsor press trips to Cumberland Island, providing media with the opportunity to report on Wilderness. Participation in these trips by local and regional media will make firsthand information on the Wilderness available to audiences across Georgia and the Southeast.

Design and distribute a leaflet that features the NPS logo, messaging (“Protect your Wilderness,”) and a short set of basic rules for low-impact island visits.

- Include a brief “Did you know...?” section that identifies CINS as containing a federally-protected Wilderness Area and a brief “If you go...” section, listing basic rules for low-impact island visits.
- Establish a partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to distribute these with mailed boat registrations in coastal Georgia.
- Ensure materials are available to sport fishing association meetings, fishing tournaments, bait shops, boating and marine supply stores, outboard boat and motor sales stores, fishing-license bureaus, etc.

Partnership Program:

Establish opportunities for non-profit organizations or potential donors interested in participating in Wilderness education initiatives.

- Include information on how to collaborate with the NWPS and provide opportunities identified by the NWPS.
- Engage Wilderness advocacy organizations, such as Wild Cumberland, Wilderness Watch, and other groups who could facilitate education, volunteer recruitment, and oversee citizen science opportunities.

Internal opportunities include:

- Wilderness presentations at regular and regional staff meetings
- Information and training for front desk and visitor contact staff, concessioners (ie, ferry staff)



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MEASUREMENT

Implement monitoring processes to track effectiveness of education efforts, including:

- Documenting distribution of Wilderness information and materials
- Documenting number and types of violations
- Periodically re-monitoring impacted areas
- Conducting 'informal surveys' during Wilderness contacts
- Visitor surveys and feedback
- Partner surveys and feedback



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CONCLUSIONS

Local, regional and statewide populations are growing and will continue to grow — as has Americans' desire to reconnect with nature. With this comes increased use; increased use brings increased risks to this recovering barrier island ecosystem, demanding more intentionally concentrated and intensive Wilderness education efforts.

The National Park Service has limited financial resources, and partnership with advocacy organizations and allies will be critical to ensuring that Cumberland Island National Seashore can continue to derive the protections it receives as a federally-protected Wilderness Area.

Historical records clearly demonstrate that Wilderness Act visionaries believed that wilderness character consists of tangible, physical components as well as intangible, psychological, and spiritual components.

The obligation to preserve Wilderness character should influence all visitor use and management actions for Cumberland Island National Seashore.

The National Park Service has a responsibility to the public, based on its enabling legislation, to facilitate Wilderness education and interpretation, resource significance, and stewardship.



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REFERENCE

NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan, dated 6/6/02

PS 2001 Management Policies 6.4.2 (Wilderness Interpretation and Education)

“Keeping it Wild in the National Park Service:
a user guide to integrating Wilderness character into park planning, Management, and
Monitoring,”

A Companion Document to the 2014

*Wilderness Stewardship Plan Handbook: Planning to Preserve Wilderness Character
(WASO 909/121797; January 2014)*



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