

A G E N D A

TOWN OF CHINCOTEAGUE

Chincoteague to Assateague Beach Access Committee

August 31, 2011 - 9:00 AM

Town Hall Council Chamber

1. Call to Order
2. Update on the August 23rd CNWR Economic Impact Study meeting
3. Review of NPS Summer 2011 Newsletter Alternatives
 - Draft recommendations from the Town (due Sept 16th)
 - Other actions
4. Post-Storm Short Term Response Plan for Beach Access
 - Review current FWS response to post Irene conditions
5. Other discussion items or future committee agenda items



MEMORANDUM

To: Chincoteague to Assateague Beach Access Committee
From: Bill Neville, Planning Director
Date: August 31, 2011
Subject: USFWS Draft Economic Impact Study

- ❖ **A meeting between USFWS staff and Town staff was held on August 23rd to provide direction to the economists following release of the proposed alternatives on the 22nd.**
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Robert Ritter and William Neville attended a meeting on August 23rd with Lou Hinds, Tom Bonetti, Jim Caudill (FWS economist), and 2 Volpe Center staff to review the first draft economic impact study. Town comments were provided along with confidential data for Accomack County from the VEC that allows a search of employers/employee counts by zip code for the Town and County.

The Town Council has requested a study similar to the Kennedy Space Center report that evaluates alternatives by jobs and dollars. We requested if the IMPLAN models completed for Wallops Island could be incorporated. We requested criteria to be added as an estimate of the value of fishing/shell fishing to the local economy so that it is not just about visitors to the Refuge. We asked if there was a way for the model to account for general changes in real estate value based on the alternatives.

We talked about the Merritt Island NWR CCP that takes this information, assigns a positive/neutral/negative impact value and then averages the economic impact in with every other EIS criteria to decide which is the preferred alternative.

USFWS Division of Economics will produce a version 2 of the study for team review before the comparison of alternatives can be completed (cost estimates for each alternative still needed)

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August 31, 2011

Patricia Kicklighter, Superintendent
Assateague Island National Seashore
7206 National Seashore Lane
Berlin, MD 21811

RE: Assateague Island National Seashore
General Management Plan Alternative Concepts

Dear Ms. Kicklighter:

On behalf of the Town of Chincoteague and the Chincoteague to Assateague Beach Access Advisory Committee, I am presenting several compliments and comments regarding the General Management Plan (GMP) Alternative Concepts for the Assateague Island National Seashore that are included in your Summer 2011 Newsletter #2.

Clearly there has been a lot of work that has gone on behind the scenes since your last communication with the public (Newsletter #1 in November 2009) and there is a limited window of time for community participation. As the gateway community to the southern end of the Assateague Island National Seashore, one of our greatest concerns is the NPS interagency agreement with USFWS that provides for traditional recreational opportunities and high density visitor use in the Virginia sub zone. Thank you for your continued support on our behalf, and consideration of the following:

1. Recreational Use Areas

- a. Support for the use of 'management zones' to identify different areas of Assateague Island so that all of the purposes of the National Seashore can be met in different areas.
- b. Request that the significant investment in recreational facilities and infrastructure should be listed as a fundamental resource on page 4.
- c. Request that recreation and stewardship should be listed first under interpretive themes on page 5 to reflect the traditions of the NPS
- d. Support for Alternative 2 defense of the visitor areas policy in both Maryland and Virginia.

“Artificial dune fortification, habitat manipulations, and possible beach nourishment would be used to protect the developed visitor areas from the effects of natural coastal processes and climate change/sea level rise...storm overwash and breaches in the developed visitor areas would be repaired, while natural evolution of the island's backcountry areas would continue without interference...”

This makes sense to protect and actively manage important public use areas and allow natural processes to take their course in other management zones. It should apply to Virginia and be incorporated into a new interagency agreement.

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2. Public Safety and Beach Management

- a. Support for Alternative 2 proposal for NPS to expand its existing partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers related to erosion control. This implements the direction provided by Congress in the 1965 Act, Section 8, which created the Assateague Island National Seashore and requires the Secretary of the Interior to cooperate with the Secretary of the Army in the study and formulation of plans for beach erosion control and hurricane protection of the seashore.
- b. Request that the NPS initiate a study with USACE of the Tom's Cove shoreline to determine the best means (including beach nourishment and/or 'land base replenishment') to continue recreational beach use, and protection of the health and human safety of the residents of Chincoteague Island from the potential effects of natural hazards that are currently provided by the existing management of Assateague Island.
- c. Support for USACE to study dredging or other improvements to maintain tidal flow to the north end of Chincoteague Bay as an active management solution to the reported decline in water quality of the central bay area.

3. Shellfish Leases

- a. Support for Alternative 1 and 2 Natural Resource Management that allows for continued commercial fishing and leasing of submerged lands within the seashore boundary for commercial aquaculture.
- b. Oppose Alternative 3 and 4 Natural Resource Management that limit or ban commercial fishing and aquaculture within the seashore boundary. Without the managed use of our natural resources by private industry, the NPS would be responsible for dealing a critical blow to a vital portion of the local economy and a traditional lifestyle of the native population.
- c. Request that any communication between NPS and VMRC regarding shellfish leases and commercial fishing to be shared with the Town of Chincoteague.

4. Watch Houses

- a. Support for Alternative 1 which proposes no action related to privately owned structures associated with submerged land leases in Chincoteague Bay within the seashore boundary
- b. Oppose Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 that propose regulations for wastewater treatment and disposal and/or removal of private structures until more information is provided and a reasonable and cost effective approach is negotiated with property owners.\

5. ORV/OSV

- a. Oppose the policy that would permanently close areas to OSV use if coastal storms or other natural processes create breaches/inlets that cut off access to portions of the beach. If NPS continues to administer OSV permits for the FWS along Toms Cove in Virginia, this policy would permanently remove access to the Hook as soon as the 'let nature take its course' management approach is effective in breaking through the existing parking areas whether the barrier island heals itself or not.

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- b. Support for a policy that recognizes the potential for natural forces to temporarily close OSV access until such time as the beach is naturally restored or restored through active management. Support Alternative 3 OSV policy that would replace area lost to OSV use by opening other portions of the island to oversand vehicles.
- c. Request NPS support of OSV access to the Coast Guard Station during summer months for programmed activities.
- d. Request NPS support for OSV secondary or emergency access to the Wildlife Loop or Beach Road if the Virginia recreational beach area is relocated to the north by FWS.

6. Infrastructure

- a. Request that the significant investment in recreational facilities and infrastructure should be listed as a fundamental resource on page 4.
- b. Oppose all Alternatives that abandon the public trust and allow existing visitor use facilities and infrastructure, specifically bridge access from the mainland to Assateague Island, to be subjected to natural coastal processes without maintenance, repair or replacement.
- c. Oppose the current direction of seashore management that favors the use of alternative transportation systems and treats the idea as a Fundamental Value.
- d. Support for continued bridge access at both the north and south end of Assateague Island for both public access and emergency services.

7. Marine Research Reserve

- a. Oppose the concept of a Marine Research Reserve until more information is provided. Specifically, our question is will the intended use for research and environmental education restrict public or commercial use of the Chincoteague Bay?

8. Options

- a. Support for Alternative 1 because of the adaptive management that has been successful for the last 20 years.
- b. Support for Alternative 2 because of the management zone concept and the strong emphasis on traditional beach recreation.
- c. Oppose Alternatives 3 and 4 because the NPS appears to abandon its responsibilities toward the National Seashore in favor of natural coastal processes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments at this point in the planning process. Our concerns and support are based on review of the Newsletter #2 which only provides general information to make a well informed decision about the alternatives in a short period of time. The Town of Chincoteague will continue to rely on NPS staff to support public recreational beach use and shoreline management in Virginia through the interagency agreement with the FWS.

Sincerely,

John H. Tarr
Mayor

BREAKING NEWS...

Refuge Update

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge will be partially open to public access starting Tuesday, August 30th.

General public access will be permitted from 7am to 8pm on a temporary basis. We hope to resume normal hours on Friday.

Entrance to the Refuge will be free for the next few days during the recovery process.

Visitors will have access to the Assateague Lighthouse, Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center, Wildlife Loop, Swans Cove Trail, and the Service Road.

The Herbert H. Bateman Educational Center (Visitor Center) will offer extended operating hours from 8am to 6pm.

The beach parking lots were overwashed during the storm and buried in upwards of 18 inches of sand. Therefore the Beach and beach parking lots are closed to public access for maintenance.

Due to the lack of available parking, visitors are encouraged to bike to Swans Cove Trail to enjoy the beach.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with National Park Service staff to clear as much of the parking area as possible before Friday, September 2nd.

When the Beach reopens, visitors should plan for limited beach facilities (i.e., toilets only).

The Over Sand Vehicle (OSV) access is closed at this time.

General Access Messages

1. The refuge will be partially open to public access starting Tuesday at 7:00 am.
2. General public access will be permitted from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm on a temporary basis. (We hope to resume normal hours on Friday).
3. Entrance to the refuge will be free for the next few days during the recovery process.
4. Visitors will **only** have access to the Assateague Lighthouse, Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center, Wildlife Loop, Swans Cove Trail and the Service Road.
5. Refuge visitor center will extend its hours of operation, opening from 8:00 am - 6:00 pm.
6. Due to lack of available parking we are encouraging folks to bike to Swans Cove Access to enjoy the beach. Several lifeguards will be on duty from approx. 8:00 am to 5:00 pm

Beach Access Messages

1. On Saturday, August 27, Hurricane Irene swept past Chincoteague NWR, impacting the refuge habitat and facilities.
2. Refuge staff began to assess impacts on Sunday, August 28. Impacts known at this time include:
 - Approximately 4 inches to 18 inches of sand was deposited in various areas of the parking lots, making them inaccessible.
 - A breach developed in Swan's Cove pool, a brackish impoundment at the south end of the refuge. The pool is now directly connected to the ocean. open connected to the tide.
3. Hurricane Irene happened less than a week before the start of the busy Labor Day holiday, when thousands traditionally visit the refuge and adjacent Assateague Island National Seashore.
4. All beach parking lots are closed to public access for maintenance.
5. The OSV access is closed at this time.
6. **The refuge is committed to working with NPS staff to clear as much of the parking lot as possible before Friday, September 2nd.**
7. **When we reopen, visitors should plan for limited beach facilities (i.e. toilets only)**

Upcoming Public Meetings (CCP)

The two public meetings, planned for later this week, to talk about the refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) will continue as originally planned. These meetings are being conducted to obtain broad input on four draft alternatives that have been developed to outline the future management of Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge for the next 15 – 20 years.

- On August 30, a public meeting will be held from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. at the Eastern Shore Community College located at 29300 Lankford Highway, Melfa, VA 23410. Call (757)-789-1789 for assistance with directions.
- On August 31, a public meeting will be held from 4:00 – 7:00 p.m. at the Delmarva Discovery Center located at 2 Market Street, Pocomoke City, MD. Call (410)-957-9933 for assistance with directions.

The effects caused by Hurricane Irene illustrate the potential impacts that intense coastal storms can have on the refuge habitats and facilities.