

**Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks**

Grayton Beach State Park

Proposed Unit Management Plan Amendment, June 2017

Introduction

Grayton Beach State Park is located along the Gulf of Mexico in south Walton County. Access to the park is from County Road 30A (or Scenic 30A), a designated Florida Scenic Highway. Access to County Road 30A is from U.S. Highway 98 via County Roads 395, 283, 83 and 393 (see Reference Map). Grayton Beach State Park is located 18 miles east of the City of Destin and 25 miles west of Panama City. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) initially acquired Grayton Beach State Park to develop, maintain and utilize this property for state park and outdoor recreational and educational purposes. The Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (Trustees) hold fee simple title to the park and on January 30, 1985, the Trustees leased (Lease Number 3386) the property to the DRP under a 50-year lease. The current lease will expire on January 30, 2035. Currently, the park contains approximately 2,187 acres.

In 2017, the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP) developed a proposal for a new day use area in the western unit of Grayton Beach State Park, with access to one of the area's coastal dune lakes, Little Redfish Lake, and the Gulf beach. At the site of the proposed day use area, the park's 2013 approved UMP proposed development of a tent camping area. To accommodate the proposed day use area, the tent sites are proposed for future development in an alternative location. New day use and camping facilities will provide recreation and interpretive opportunities for more visitors to this increasingly popular region of Northwest Florida.

The DRP has analyzed the proposal from the standpoint of its potential impacts on the park's natural and cultural resources, recreational use and operations, and with consideration given to the net positive benefits of providing this public access. The DRP has determined that the proposed use of the site is compatible with the park's outdoor recreation and conservation purposes and complements Walton County's efforts to provide increased public access to the area's beaches. This document is a draft amendment to the approved UMP for Grayton Beach State Park to incorporate the proposal for a day use area and relocated tent sites into the park's overall conceptual land use plan.

Regional Visitation

Grayton Beach State Park is part of the Northwest Florida Vacation Region, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Florida. It is estimated that nearly 11.7 million tourists visit the region every year, with peak visitation occurring in June, July, and August (Visit Florida 2015). During these summer months, the region's total population climbs over 4.5 times the permanent resident population (Visit Florida 2015; U.S. Census 2016). Tourism surveys indicate that 95 percent traveled to this Northwest Region for leisure. Over 97 percent traveled by non-air transport, such as by car or RV, and more than 80 percent paid for overnight

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accommodations. Beach or waterfront recreation was identified as the top vacation activity for 70 percent of visitors. Nearly half visited in the summer months, between June and August, with an average length of stay of four nights.

Florida's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) indicates that participation rates in this region for saltwater beach activities, freshwater beach activities, saltwater boat fishing, saltwater non-boat fishing, saltwater boat-ramp use, freshwater boat-ramp use, nature study, hiking, and tent camping are higher than the state average with demand for additional facilities increasing through 2020 (FDEP 2013).

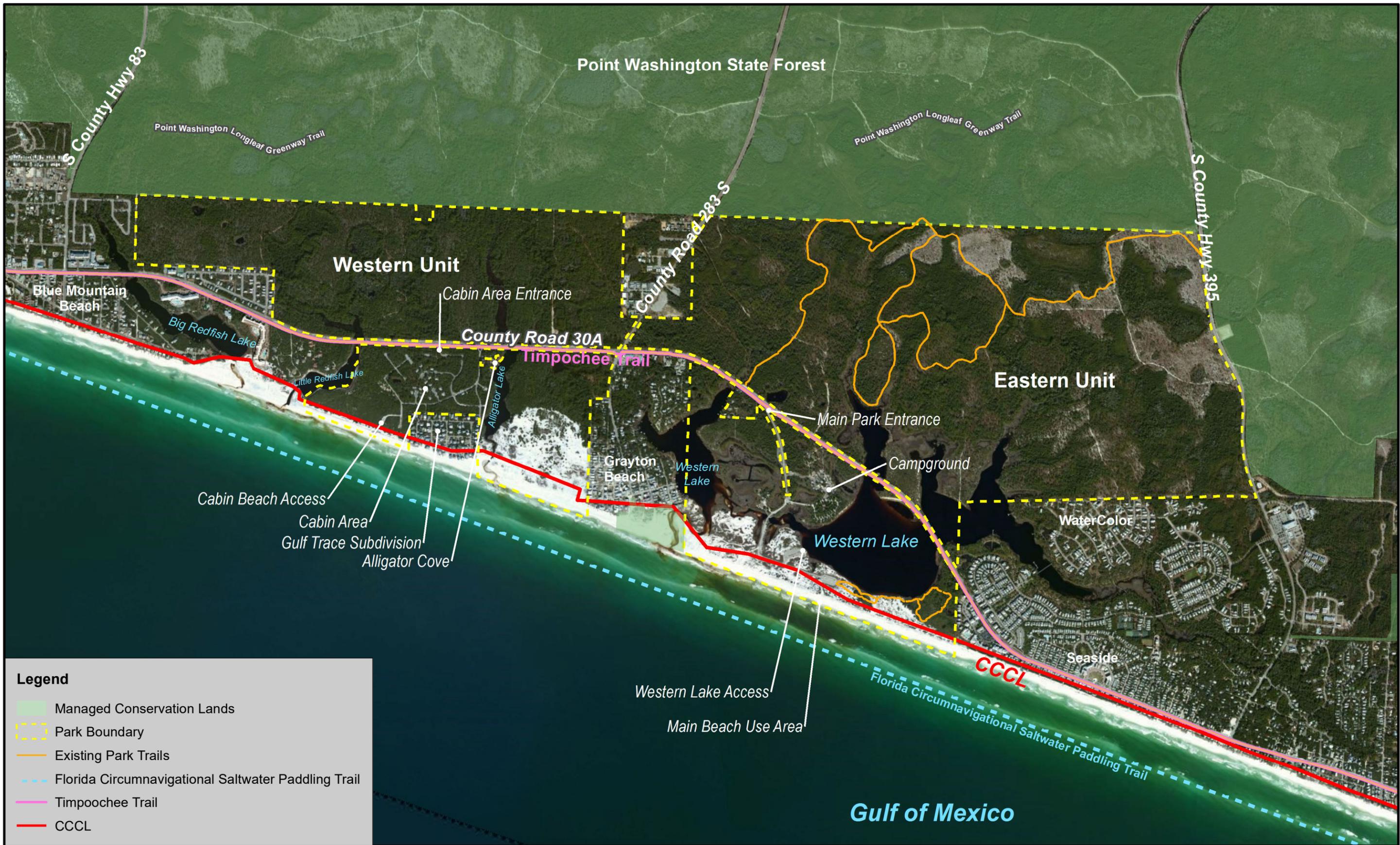
Existing Public Access and Recreation

Grayton Beach State Park offers a recreational carrying capacity estimated at 2,028 visitors per day. Annual attendance during Fiscal Year 2015-2016 was 208,425 visitors. Recreational facilities are primarily concentrated in the park's eastern unit. Parkwide, five areas provide day use and overnight opportunities: Main Beach Use Area, Western Lake Access Area, Eastern Family Campground, Western Cabin Area, and the area of the park north of County Road 30A. The Main Beach Use Area offers a daily recreational capacity of about 1,108 persons, with three picnic pavilions, one bathhouse, and two boardwalks for access to the Gulf beach. Popular uses of the park's beachfront are swimming, shoreline fishing, paddling, and snorkeling. A .75-mile nature trail extends east from the beach parking area. The Western Lake Access Area offers a boat ramp and paddling launch for recreation on the park's largest coastal dune lake. North of County Road 30A, the park features a network of multi-use trails.

For overnight facilities, the eastern unit features a 59-site standard-facility campground, including additional access to Western Lake. The park's western unit features 15 duplex cabins and a beach boardwalk currently not available for day use access.

Natural Resources

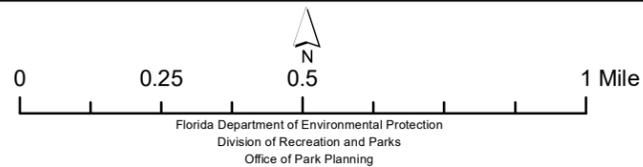
The natural communities surrounding the proposed day use area consist primarily of scrub. Embedded within the scrub, several small natural communities occur, including depression marshes, mesic and wet flatwoods, estuarine unconsolidated substrate, and estuarine tidal marsh. Several depression marshes are scattered throughout this area, each ringed with mesic flatwoods. Bordering the shoreline of Little Redfish Lake, occur estuarine unconsolidated substrate, estuarine tidal marsh and a narrow strip of mesic flatwoods. An isolated stand of wet flatwoods also occurs in this area. Developed and disturbed features, including a paved loop road with culs-de-sac and clearings, exist throughout the site as remnants of a residential development planned prior to state acquisition. Park cabins were constructed on the clearings. Unused segments of road and clearings are identified for restoration to scrub.



Legend

- Managed Conservation Lands
- Park Boundary
- Existing Park Trails
- Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail
- Timpochee Trail
- CCCL

GRAYTON BEACH STATE PARK



REFERENCE MAP

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Two variations of scrub, including sand pine scrub and oak scrub, are found in the park. Oak scrub is found on the sandy ridges of relic dunes adjacent to the beach dunes and is in good condition parkwide. The coastal oak scrub is particularly dense in certain areas of the park, such as south of the cabins near the beach access boardwalk. Scrub community occurring adjacent to beach dunes is significant habitat for Choctawhatchee beach mouse (*Peromyscus polionotus allophrys*). These adjacent and ecotonal scrub-beach dune areas provide shelter for beach mice during and after catastrophic storms that occasionally alter the primary dune systems. Soils and vegetation are highly sensitive and will be protected by routing visitor access along designated paths.

Sand pine scrub is found further inland, commonly adjacent to the oak scrub. Sand pine scrub at the park is in good condition. Most of the scrub community exhibits uneven age stand character. Coastal scrub is also home to listed plant species, such as Gulf Coast lupine (*Lupinus westianus*) and largeleaf jointweed (*Polygonella macrophylla*). Healthy populations of these species are present throughout the park because of the good condition of its scrub habitat and both are present in the proposed development areas.

Adjacent to the proposed day use area is Little Redfish Lake, which is an example of the globally rare coastal dune lake natural community. Statewide, coastal dune lakes are only found in the northwest panhandle coastal region. Portions of three coastal dune lakes – Western Lake, Alligator Lake and Little Redfish Lake – occur within the park boundary. Interpreting these communities and facilitating visitor access provides an experience unique to this region. Access to Little Redfish Lake will be provided in a manner that is sensitive to coastal dune lake ecosystems.

The proposed tent camping area is situated within an area of dense scrub. Fewer wetland features characterize this small area, although it is closer to Alligator Lake. Best management practices for protection of scrub and coastal dune lakes will be applied to site planning.

Cultural Resources

Five cultural surveys have been conducted within Grayton Beach State Park (Anderson and Phillips 2000; Campbell and Mallory 2004; Curren, et al. 1998; Jones 1988; Shingler 2005). To date, however, no comprehensive Cultural Resource Assessment Survey of the park has been completed. At this time, two cultural sites are identified along the Little Redfish Lake shoreline – two prehistoric features that include shell middens and encampments representing an unknown period. Although only two sites are currently recorded, roughly 30 percent of the area is considered to have high sensitivity for archaeological resources. Uplands adjacent to Little Redfish Lake are the most sensitive locations.

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Conceptual Land Use Plan

Proposed Little Redfish Lake Day Use Area

The new day use area is proposed for development in the western unit of Grayton Beach State Park to provide recreational and interpretive access to Little Redfish Lake and the Gulf beach. The site is located west of the existing park cabins and east of Little Redfish Lake. The park's Main Beach Use Area currently provides the only facilitated beach access for day use and is located two miles east of the proposed Little Redfish Lake Day Use Area.

Proposed recreation facilities include a paddling launch and an observation deck over the scenic coastal dune lake. Access to the eastern shoreline of Little Redfish Lake is proposed by a boardwalk stemming from a new 24-space parking area. The parking area is proposed to include a small day use restroom. Using the existing roadbed, an on-grade path stemming south from the new parking area will connect to the existing beach boardwalk. Cabin guests and campers will access the Little Redfish Lake and beach boardwalks by an on-grade path directly from the cabin area. ADA access accommodations will be made available.

Vehicle access to the day use and cabin areas will diverge at the entrance area, as day visitors will veer west and overnight visitors will veer east. Improvements to the entrance area from 30A will include a gate with an iron ranger for vehicle access to the day use area and a gate with a keypad to access the cabins and tent sites. A pedestrian crossing will be developed at the entrance for safe access to the portion of the park located north of County Road 30A.

Restoration

The current parking area, located adjacent to the existing beach boardwalk, will be partially restored to oak and pine scrub, reducing the width of the existing asphalt and shoulder. Restoration will maintain a corridor for the on-grade path to the beach boardwalk. Other extensions of the park road, which do not lead to day use or overnight facilities, are proposed for complete restoration. Approximately 2.5 acres of road and clearing will be restored to scrub.

Proposed Tent Camping Area

A tent-only camping area, including up to 12 walk-in sites, one bathhouse, and 24 parking spaces (two spaces per tent site), will be planned for a two-acre area east of the cabins on the east side of the cabin access road. This proposed site will replace the previously proposed site as identified in the 2013 approved UMP. From this location, campers can access the Little Redfish Lake Day Use Area by the path from the adjacent cabin area. Vehicle access to the campsites will follow the cabin road with parking spaces along the roadside. Tent sites will be located along a 400-foot scenic path.



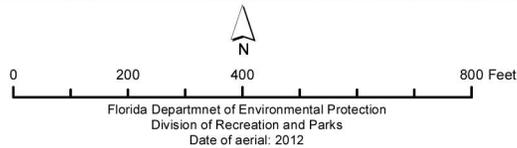


- 1 Entrance Improvements (Gate w/ Iron Ranger and Gate w/ Keypad)
- 2 Re-pave Existing Road
- 3 Restoration of Old Roadbeds
- 4 Parking Area (22 Gravel Spaces and 2 Concrete ADA Spaces)
- 5 Restroom
- 6 Boardwalk to Little Redfish Lake
- 7 Paddling Launch
- 8 On-Grade Path to Beach Access
- 9 Tent Camping Area

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Image courtesy of USGS Earthstar Geographics. SIO © 2017 Microsoft Corporation

Grayton Beach State Park



Little Redfish Lake
Conceptual Improvements

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Potential Impacts of the Proposed Use

Development of the proposed day use and tent camping areas is not expected to adversely affect the park's natural communities. The DRP will ensure that construction and operation of the new facilities will not hinder the park's resource management activities. Best management practices for scrub, dune, beach, and coastal dune lakes will be prioritized in all design elements. Impacts of potential unauthorized parking along the access roads may be avoided by installation of landscape elements, including split rail fencing and natural barriers.

Cultural resource impacts are not expected due to the minimal footprint of new development proposed. The majority of the day use area, including the parking and restroom, will use existing clearings and roadbed. Boardwalk extending to Little Redfish Lake will mitigate potential erosion or trampling of potential resources. As with all construction or other ground-disturbing activities on state land, however, review by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources (DHR) will be obtained during the design phase of the project. Archaeological investigation by a professional archaeologist or monitoring of the work by a qualified archaeological resource monitor will be conducted as part of the construction, as directed by DHR.