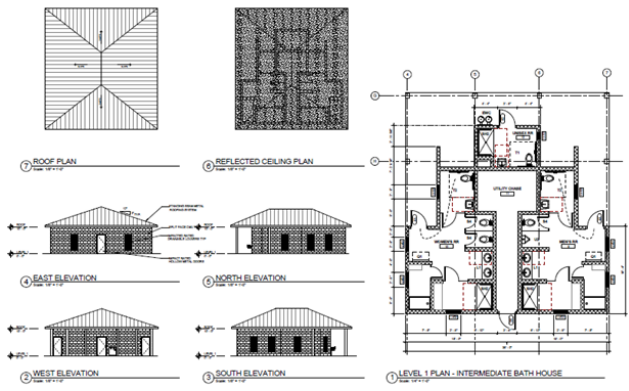




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan





T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Timeline

On October 10, 2018, Hurricane Michael devastated northwest Florida with unprecedented force, leaving many communities and regional assets in severely damaged condition. Included among the damages were eight Florida State Parks, with T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park near the center of the hurricane landfall.

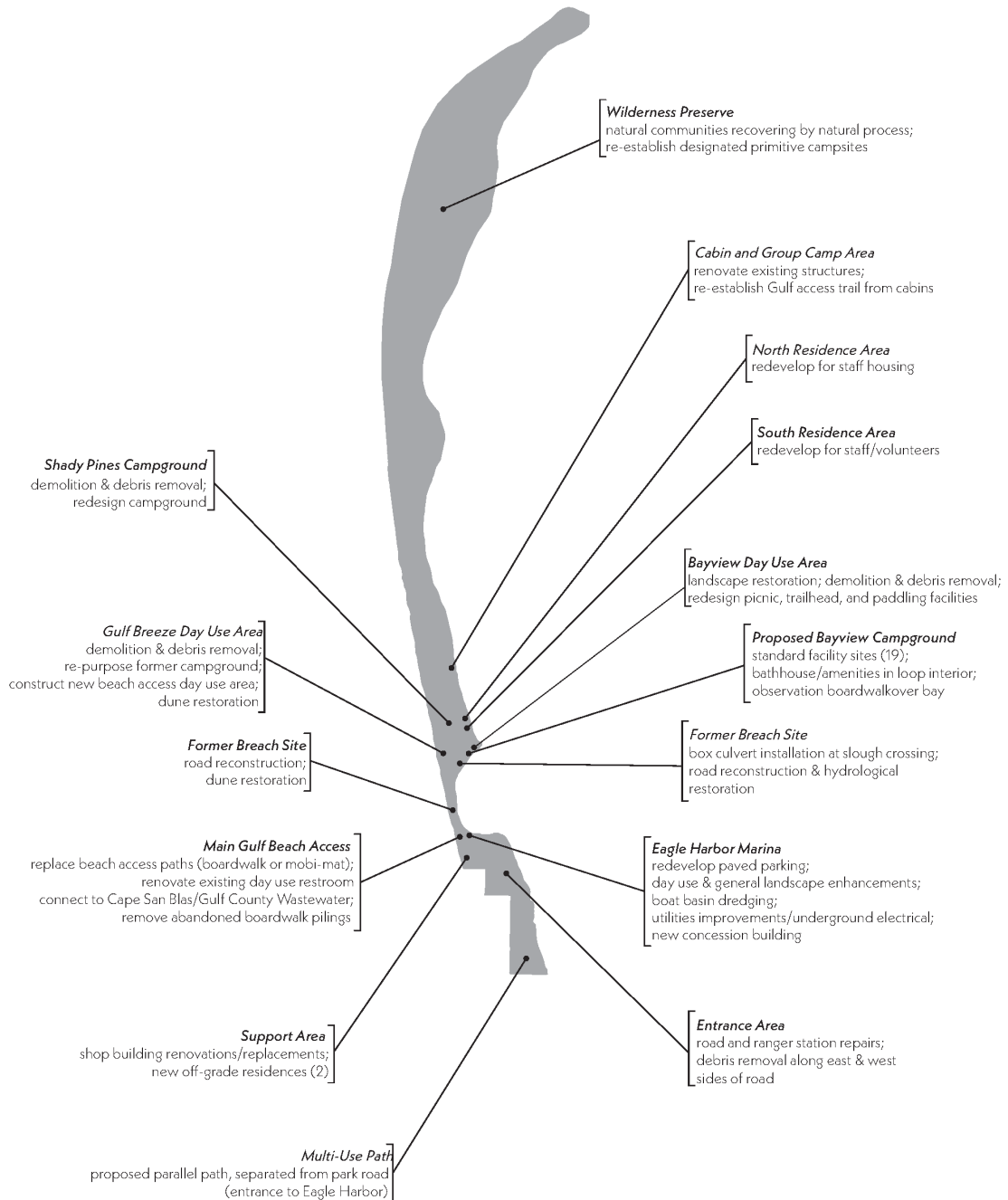
The initial recovery actions and subsequent long-term redevelopment planning for St. Joseph Peninsula State Park have taken approximately three years to complete. As of October 2021, the Division of Recreation & Parks intends to complete the reconstruction of most or even all park facilities in the park by July 2021.

October 10, 2018	Hurricane Michael landfall in northwest Florida
October 2018 – January 2019	Assessments of parkwide damages and infrastructural triage under emergency authorizations
January 15, 2019	First general public meeting conducted in Port St. Joe (Gulf Coast State College) to describe impacts and hear from community stakeholders (approximately 130 participants)
January 18, 2019	Reopening of southernmost Gulf beach and bay shoreline access for day use
April 30, 2019	Second general public meeting conducted in Port St. Joe (Centennial Building) to provide progress updates on recovery efforts and planning concepts with opportunity for stakeholder comments (approximately 90 participants)
November 2018 – February 2019	Gradual process of natural accretion of sand in the breach site
November 2019	Complete authorization and deposition of native beach sand from a permitted offshore site for full repair of the breach site
November 2019 – September 2021	Ongoing debris removal and planning, surveying, designing, and permitting for reconstruction of park infrastructure and use-area facilities
September 20, 2021	Third general public meeting conducted virtually to describe all redevelopment concepts and hear from stakeholders
September 30, 2021	Open-house format public meeting conducted at the St. Joseph Bay Buffer Preserve visitor center to further engage with stakeholders regarding park redevelopment concepts



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Redevelopment Projects Map





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Land Use Improvements & Resource Management

The following report describes all public access and park service support facilities projects that have been planned for the redevelopment of St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, in south-to-north geographic order:

Multi-Use Path and Entrance Area

- A multiuse (bicycle-pedestrian) path separated from the park road will extend north from the existing Cape San Blas Trail, providing a safe alternative to driving into the park.
- Repairs to gate and lower park road completed to welcome visitors and for ease of driving.
- Completed minimally-invasive debris removal along east and west sides of park road to maximize natural regrowth of flatwoods vegetation and scenic viewsheds for visitors on arrival.
- Reduced fire hazard adjacent to neighboring residential communities.

Support Area

- Support buildings for maintenance and storage have been repaired to continue daily park operations to support visitor services and resource management.
- Two new off-grade staff residences are designed, permitted, and under construction.

Eagle Harbor Marina

- Create new parking for beach visitors and boaters, within former paved footprints, realigning the configuration to maximize safety and convenience.
- Redesign of pedestrian walkways between concession area amenities.
- Basic landscape enhancements to encourage growth of naturally occurring coastal vegetation.
- Re-dredge boat basin to maximize safe navigation by visiting watercraft.
- Extend electrical utilities underground north from the marina site.
- New concession building with restroom to replace existing structure has been designed and permitted. To be constructed in a later phase.

Main Gulf Beach Access

- Renovate existing aged day-use restroom.
- Connect to Cape San Blas/Gulf County wastewater facilities south of park.
- Replace boardwalks extending to beach from parking and picnic area.



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Land Use Improvements & Resource Management

Former Breach Site (project area 1)

- Road reconstruction has been completed along nourished sand corridor with restored dunes and coastal vegetation.
- Extend electrical utilities underground through this corridor.

Former Breach Site (project area 2)

- A newly constructed road now crosses significant slough feature utilizing large box culverts, where on-grade roadbed formerly bisected the waters.
- Box culverts have restored natural hydrology to this slough (consistent with 2014 UMP) and are sufficiently wide to allow passage of paddlers during low tide conditions.
- Yielding favorable restoration results, i.e., water quality and ecological improvement.

Proposed Gulf Breeze Day Use Area (Former Gulf Breeze Campground)

- Extensive debris scatter from former campground has been removed and natural dunescape is returning with native plant installations.
- Ruined bathhouses have been demolished.
- A short segment of new roadway will bring visitors to a parking area with access to the Gulf beach where previously the park only offered overnight facilities.
- The new Gulf Breeze Day Use area will allow visitors to explore an area of beach north of Eagle Harbor with a scenic backdrop of piney flatwoods and open marsh that provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife.
- Opportunities for passively viewing and interpreting this interior landscape will be provided by short walking paths and a potential observation platform.
- Additional amenities at this location will include overflow parking for vehicles with boat trailers, a restroom, and covered pavilions.

Shady Pines Campground

- New box culvert installed to cross slough for campground access, maximizing natural hydrology.
- Complete redesign and reconstruction planned, including realignment/reconfiguration of campground roads away from the natural wetlands to maximize use of dry terrain for campers.
- Significant natural and infrastructural debris scattered throughout has been removed. Many standing declining/dead trees removed, while protecting eagle nest within the vicinity.
- Reestablish walking trail access to Gulf beach directly from the campground.



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Land Use Improvements & Resource Management

Shady Pines Campground (continued)

- New campground will feature approximately 36 standard-facility campsites and 10 tent campsites with the potential for multiple (estimated total of four) elevated tent camping platforms overlooking the forested/wetland interior of the peninsula. Other observation decks may also be included for campers to interpret surrounding landscape.
- Two new bathhouses will be centrally located within the campground.

Bayview Day Use Area

- Regrading and restoration of original terrain to be completed where deep soil erosion occurred.
- Reestablish the Bayview Hiking Trail stemming from this day use area.
- Continue to utilize this site for launching paddlecraft/small watercraft where Eagle Harbor is optimally suited for larger motorized boats.
- Construct new shade pavilions for picnics and use by hikers and paddlers.

Proposed Bayview Campground

- A new campground loop will be created on the site of a former boat trailer parking loop road.
- Campers will enjoy a scenic view over the waters of St. Joseph Bay.
- Approximately 19 standard-facility campsites proposed within interior of this loop.
- Potential design elements:
 - Interior of campground loop will be canopied by natural scrubby flatwoods landscape.
 - Interior of loop will be traversed by a footpath with a centrally located bathhouse.
 - Observation boardwalk with covered platform extending from camping area.

Residence Areas

- Staff residences, heavily damaged by the hurricane will be reconstructed to ensure that management presence continues to serve the resources and visitors of the park.
- Campsites for volunteers may be established to promote ongoing community-supported stewardship and recovery of the park.

Cabin and Group Camp Areas

- The eight cabins and linked boardwalks were moderately to severely damaged by storm surge flooding and will be renovated and/or reconstructed as necessary to bring back this highly popular overnight accommodation within the park.
- Gulf access trail from cabins will be reestablished for cabin visitors to reach the beach within short walking distance.
- Restore water and electric utilities to group camp area.



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Land Use Improvements & Resource Management

Wilderness Preserve

- Natural debris scatter along shoreline and within scrub interior has dissipated by natural processes, making way for growth of successional vegetation.
- Where there was extensive acreage of standing dead trees with widespread canopy loss, new oaks and pines are rapidly emerging in the understory.
- These highly sensitive natural communities not suitable for clearing but have demonstrated natural resilience to the impacts of the hurricane.
- Wilderness preserve management calls for minimal, non-mechanical solutions.
- Seven designated primitive campsites to be reestablished after safety and access concerns are resolved.



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to describe progress on and plans for the redevelopment of St. Joseph Peninsula State Park three years after Hurricane Michael devastated the Florida Panhandle; regionwide devastation that included the infrastructure and natural landscape of this beloved and beautiful park.

The Florida Park Service held three public meetings to gain stakeholder input during its post hurricane efforts. The first meeting, which was held in January 2019 in Port St. Joe, was to describe the impacts and invite public comments and questions about potential routes to recovery.

The second meeting, conducted in April 2019, also in Port St. Joe, was to communicate solutions to the first major hurdles in recovery and to garner further public and stakeholder input. That meeting involved a joint effort with the DEP Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection and the Florida Geological Survey to address complex issues pertaining to the massive breach through the peninsula and to consider the peninsula's ecological relationship to the waters that surround it.



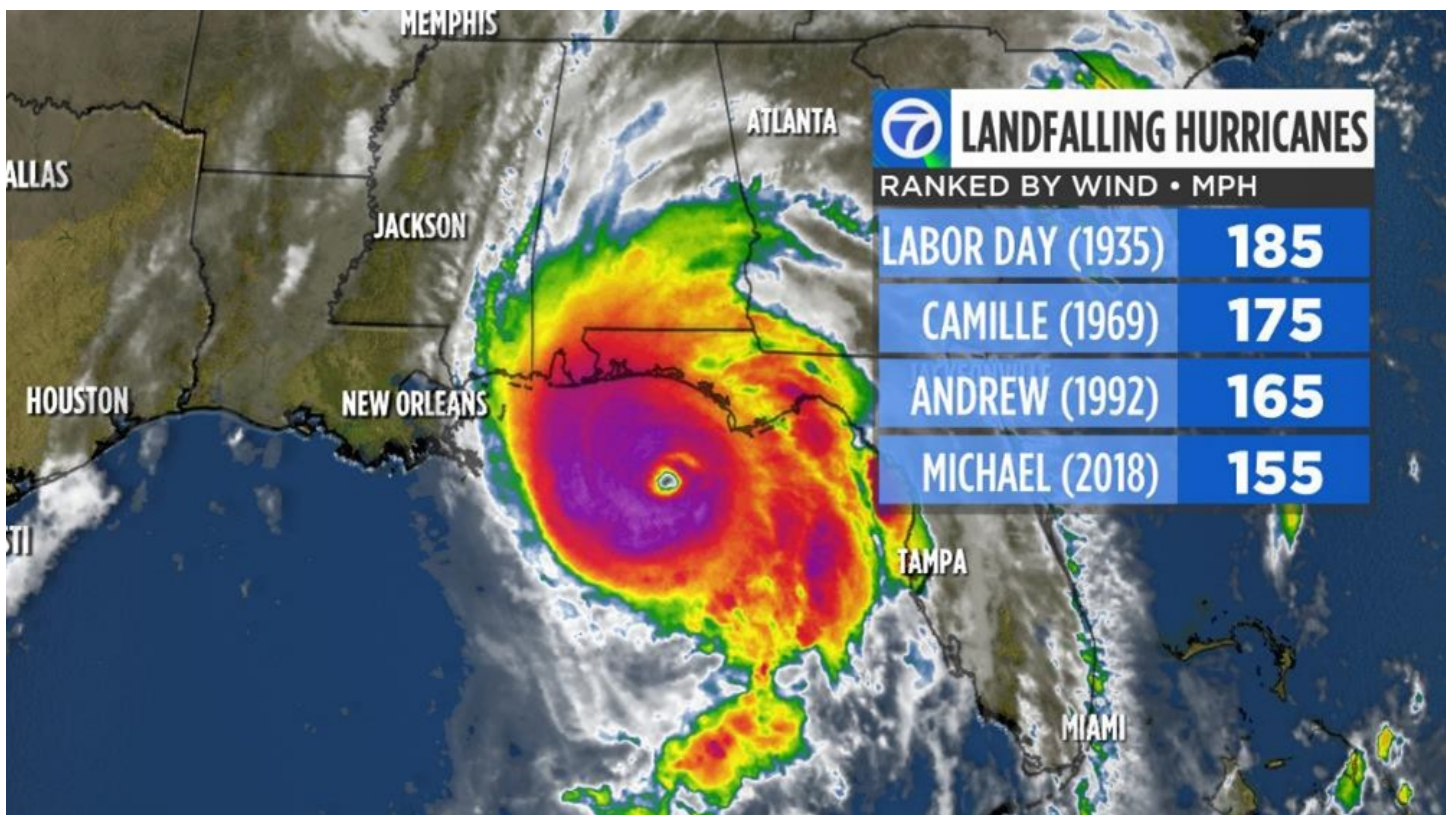


T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Hurricane Michael

On October 10, 2018, Hurricane Michael struck northwestern Florida with unprecedented and highly destructive force, from which numerous communities are still recovering to this day. It was a hardship endured by many individuals, families, cities, and, collectively, this entire stretch of the Gulf Coast.

While many impacts, along the coast and farther inland, were mended swiftly, others took longer, and still some continue to be addressed through complex engineering, environmental evaluations, and financial considerations. Very much included in the affected geographic area, and with a mixed story of both short- and long-term recovery, is St. Joseph Peninsula State Park.





T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Hurricane Michael

St. Joseph Peninsula State Park was not the only unit of the Florida Park System to incur considerable damages to infrastructure and natural and cultural resources.

Since the hurricane, most of the eight parks listed below have made major, if not complete, recoveries, including roads, facilities, utilities, and buildings; perhaps less for their natural landscapes.

St. Joseph Peninsula, which was situated in the center of the storm's path, has required an especially long recovery effort.

Heavily Impacted Parks:

Torrey State Park

Three Rivers State Park

Florida Caverns State Park

Falling Waters State Park

St. Andrews State Park

Constitution Convention Museum State Park

T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park

Dr. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park





T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK

Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Pre-Hurricane Conditions

To best understand the scope of the redevelopment, it is important to review the park as it was before Hurricane Michael, because, by looking at the park's pre-hurricane capacity, we can better explain how and why things are being reconstructed or redeveloped the way they are.

Acquired as a state park in 1964, encompassing 2,791 acres, St. Joseph Peninsula has a well-established history as an anchor of conservation and ecotourism in Northwest Florida. Prior to the hurricane, in Fiscal Year 2017-2018 alone, the park welcomed nearly 300,000 recorded visitors. Those multiple hundred-thousands of visitors collectively spent over \$21 million dollars in the local area in conjunction with their park visits. These expenditures yielded an estimated Direct Economic Impact of over \$22 million dollars of tourism and outdoor-recreation spending. This economic activity supported an estimated 300 jobs across the local & regional area.





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Pre-Hurricane Conditions

For day use, the park has been most known as a destination for:

- Accessing approximately 20 miles of shoreline along both the Gulf of Mexico and St. Joseph Bay, including about 10 miles on the Gulf and another 10 miles on the bay – with abundant opportunities for swimming, snorkeling, shoreline fishing, and wildlife observation.
- Hiking along networks of interpretive trails and boardwalks, including an eight-mile trail through 1,950 acres of designated wilderness preserve and launching boats or kayaks, paddleboards, and canoes into the clear waters of St. Joseph Bay.
- To support all of this resource-based outdoor recreation and interpretation, the park offered substantial amenities.





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Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Pre-Hurricane Conditions

For overnight use, the park also boasted 119 campsites in two separate standard-facility campgrounds, eight cabins and seven designated primitive campsites widely spread across the wilderness preserve in the northern reaches of the peninsula.

The striking sunsets west over the Gulf, dark skies by night, and impressive sunrises east over the bay certainly made for rewarding overnight experiences that many visitors sought out for decades.



To sustainably support these camping and cabin experiences, the park offered considerable specialized infrastructure.





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Post-Hurricane Conditions

Unfortunately, all park amenities and infrastructural components to support day and overnight access to this conservation area were heavily damaged by Hurricane Michael.

Visitation dropped to between 17-18,000 visitors per year, having only the capacity to offer the most basic day use access in the southernmost portions of the park.

The subsequent pages of this report will examine each of the specific sites of the park that have been most significant in this long hurricane recovery story; to identify progress, the natural processes that have occurred, the tasks that have been successfully completed, and the next projects that are planned.

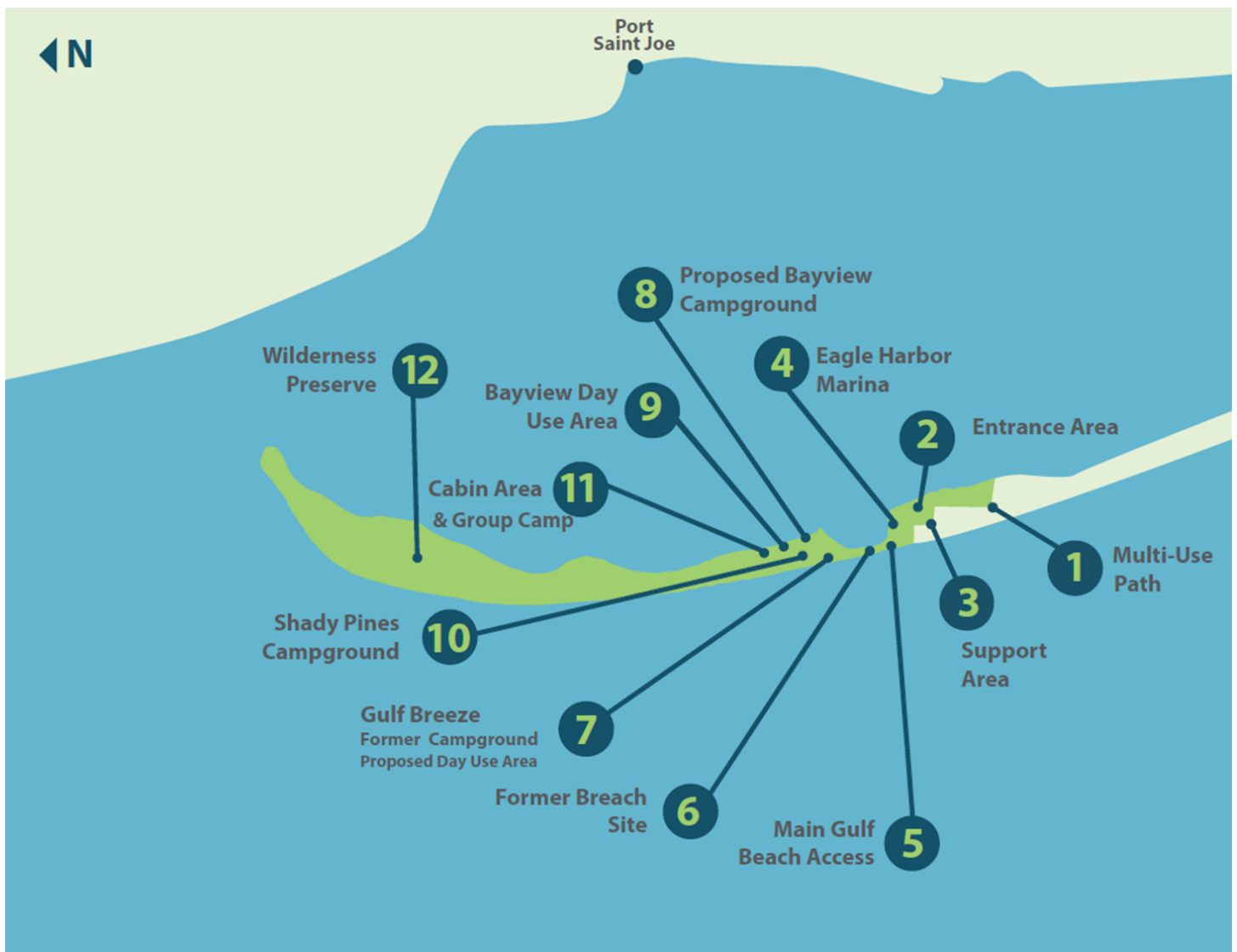




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Redevelopment Areas

This parkwide map, with a rotated north-south-oriented position, flags the 12 main redevelopment project sites, geographically ordered north to south - from where visitors first enter the park to the wilderness preserve.

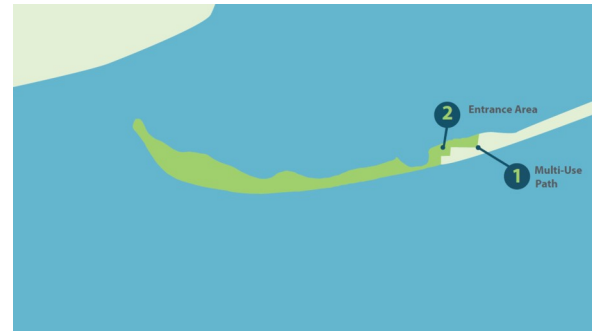




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Multi-Use Path & Entrance Area

Beginning at the south end, where Cape San Blas Road meets St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, there are two elements to consider: a proposed multi-use path to extend into the park and the broader entrance area that marks the visitor's arrival into this special place.



Where many cyclists already ride the busy park road (without a dedicated lane), construction of a multi-use path has been a longstanding concept for diversifying modes of access to the park and to bring more cyclists and pedestrians into the park safely and confidently, extending parallel to the existing park road – but separated modestly from motorized vehicular traffic, with a vegetated median as a buffer.



If constructed, the trail would terminate at the south end of Eagle Harbor. This concept was widely shared and approved through the 2014 unit management plan but has not yet had the funds for construction.

The big picture of post-hurricane redevelopment has urged the Park Service to revisit the multi-use path as a viable option for reducing car traffic, reducing strain on limited parking, and for capitalizing on the already long-existing and popular trail that runs parallel to Cape San Blas Road.

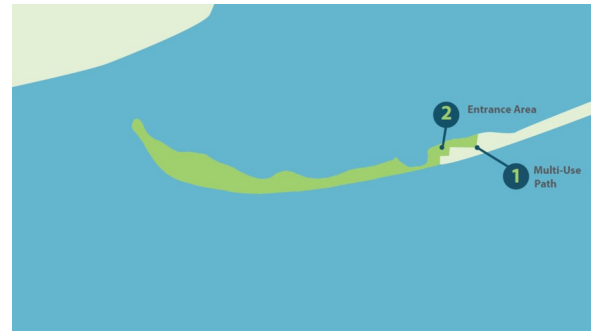




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Multi-Use Path & Entrance Area

The true park entrance is often perceived as being where the park road meets the ranger station, where entrance fees are collected, campers register, wayfinding and interpretive information is given, and where park staff initially greets incoming visitors.



But the entrance for St. Joseph Peninsula constitutes an entire area – a one-mile scenic road corridor from the park gate at the southern edge of the park boundary that opens every morning at 8:00 am, passing the trailhead for the Maritime Hammock Trail (which is currently open for hiking), and frequently driven by cars, trucks, boat trailers, RVs, and cyclists.

Clearing large volumes of debris and restoring this vital stretch of road and the ranger station were crucial first steps in the recovery of the park. The proposed multi-use path and other roadway and ranger station improvements will be made gradually to ensure optimal park access and sense of arrival.





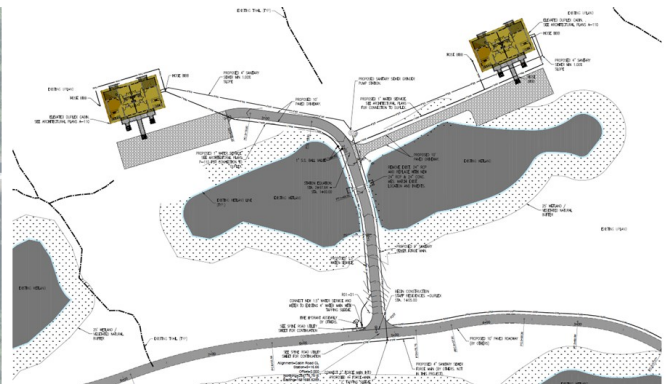
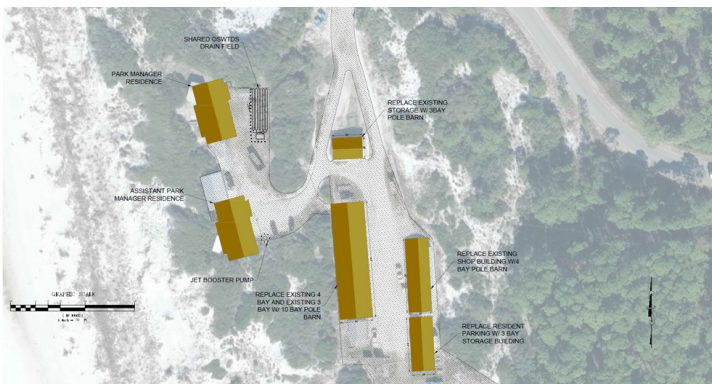
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Support Area

After the ranger station, on the west side of the peninsula, is a small area devoted to park service support.

The support area is the maintenance, storage, residence, and operational hub for rangers, managers, and biologists who are stewards of the park resources, maintain facilities, and interact with the many park visitors to ensure high-quality visitor experiences. This area took a notable toll in the hurricane and has been largely reconstructed to resume critical operations.

An addition that was carefully designed and permitted, and that is now in progress by virtue of post-hurricane emergency orders, is two new off-grade (stilted) structures to house essential staff who can be available to ensure safety and tend to a wide array of infrastructural and resource managements needs (including fire management and wildlife monitoring) around the clock. One other small support area, located in the northeastern portion of the park, will also be redeveloped with similar critical needs in mind.





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Eagle Harbor Marina

Eagle Harbor Marina is the park's most developed day use area, serving as a bayside hub for many park visitors.

Eagle Harbor provides popular access to the protected waters of St. Joseph Bay, with its expansive seagrass flats, sandy shoals, and diversity of marine fauna – readily accessible for boaters and paddlers seeking to fish, scallop, snorkel, and just generally explore.



One of the main infrastructural assets of Eagle Harbor Marina is its vehicle parking, especially for boaters and anglers towing boat trailers. The loss of parking at this site, even with the temporary solutions put into place for the interim, has been a significant setback and demands redevelopment plans to create new parking for boaters (and also beachgoers and concession customers), within former paved footprints, and realigning the parking spaces and travel lanes to maximize safety and convenience.





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Eagle Harbor Marina

Although the size and shape of the new parking area is still under internal consideration, tentative designs indicate the feasibility of 32 paved parking spaces, another 50 spaces unpaved (but stabilized with gravel or crushed shell), and ample travel lane for efficient (uncongested) traffic circulation.



Other design elements and utilitarian attributes or needs may include redesigning the pedestrian walkways between the concession area amenities, basic landscape enhancements to encourage growth of naturally occurring coastal vegetation, and re-dredging the boat basin to maximize safe navigation (in and out) by visiting watercraft, reconfiguring electrical utilities underground (if feasible) north from the marina site, and constructing a new concession building, with a restroom and various visitor amenities, to



replace the small and aged existing structure at this site. This concession building, although designed and permitted, is to be constructed in a later phase.



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Main Gulf Beach Access

Adjacent to Eagle Harbor, and in several ways sharing the same infrastructural amenities, is the Main Gulf Beach Access for park day visitors. This popular beach access shares the same latitude as Eagle Harbor and the narrow stretch of easily accessible bayside beach, but instead of looking east over Eagle Harbor and St. Joseph Bay, we are now turning our attention west overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.



The main path that accesses and passes the restroom building and the dune cross-over boardwalk were heavily damaged and the seaward slopes of the dunes themselves were sheared off by wind and water.

In the interim, an alternative on-grade boardwalk located several hundred feet to the south, where the dunes did not form an unpassable ledge,

has provided the only visitor access to the sandy beach of the Gulf – but improvements, and return to its former level of service, are currently underway and the vegetated dunescape is recovering well by natural processes and deliberate restoration efforts.





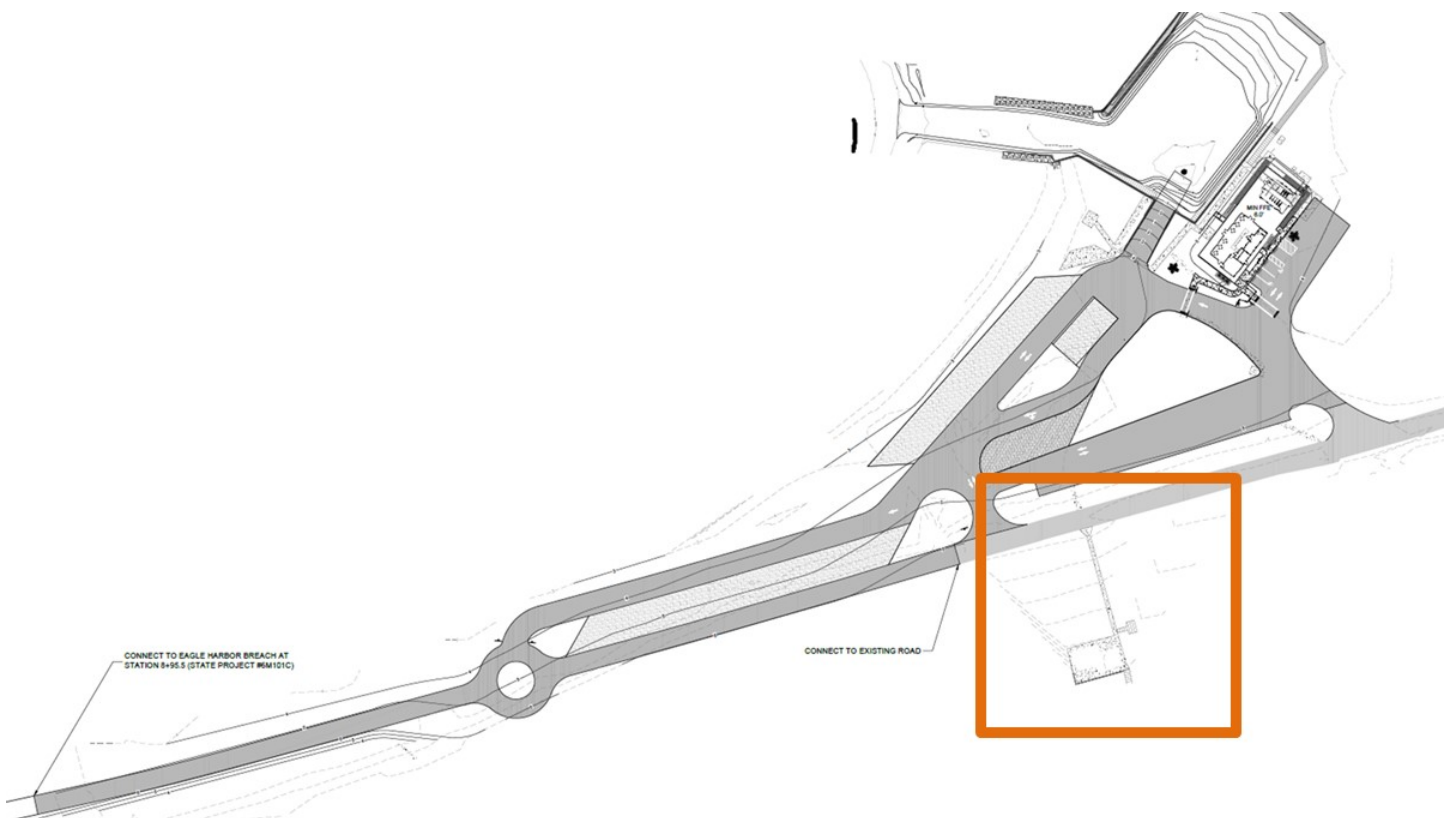
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Main Gulf Beach Access

For this location, plans are to finish the renovations of and access to the existing aged day-use restroom, which was swept over by storm surge and buried under sand, ideally connecting to Cape San Blas-Gulf County wastewater facilities beyond the park, and to replace the former boardwalks extending to the beach from the parking and picnic area.



Framed in orange on the map below— relative to the larger project of redeveloping Eagle Harbor and the parking area, the Main Gulf Beach Access is quite small in size and number of features. The importance of this beach access point, however, is noteworthy, as this is where the vast majority of the park's visitors have always accessed the Gulf.

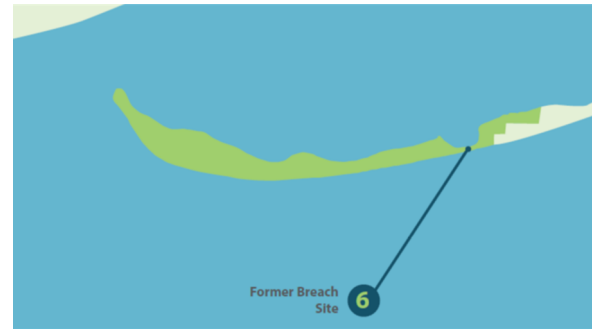




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Gulf-Bay Breach

Only a short distance north of the Main Gulf Access, the former breach was not the location of a specific use area or visitor amenity. It was a narrow stretch of the peninsula that consisted mostly of beach and sand dunes on each side of the park road – narrow because of the way that Eagle Harbor carves out a deep cove in the bayside of the peninsula's landform.



Even if it did not take with it very much infrastructure, the breach that severed the St. Joseph Peninsula has remained one of the most iconic images of how this hurricane altered the physical landscape of Northwest Florida.

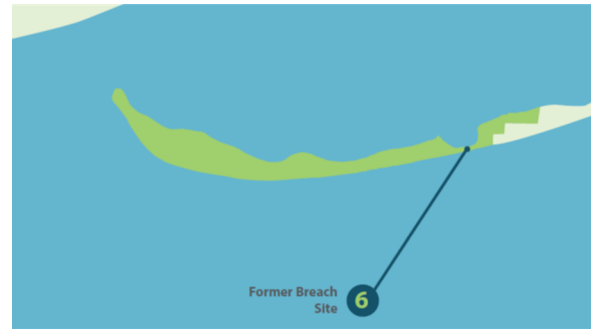




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Gulf-Bay Breach

The breach occurred within the state park, approximately one mile north of the park entrance, rendering 8.5 miles of the park as an island, which significantly complicated recovery and redevelopment efforts.



The wide breach meant that the DRP would need to wait for the littoral drift – the transport of sand by longshore currents – to naturally and gradually fill the breach and to then augment and expedite this natural process with more sand pumped from a permitted offshore site.



Fortunately, within a matter of several months, the natural accretion of sand occurred as predicted.

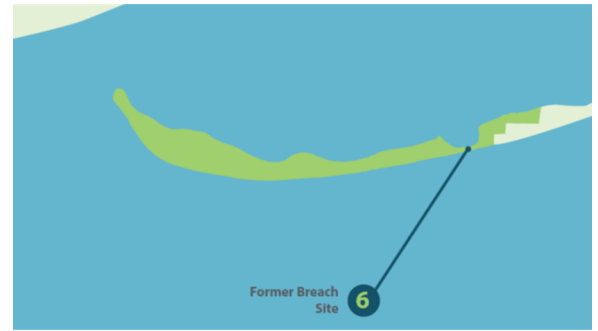




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Gulf-Bay Breach

This natural accretion put to rest the debates over whether to leave the breach open as a navigable pass or to increase seawater circulation through St. Joseph Bay, which DEP later assessed might have had adverse consequences on the ecology of the bay and would also have created very costly and challenging logistics for any future park operations north of the breach.



Between February and October 2019, the Florida Park Service and Department of Environmental Protection coordinated with the US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission to strategize and permit the deposition of 154,693 cubic yards of native sand on the former breach site.

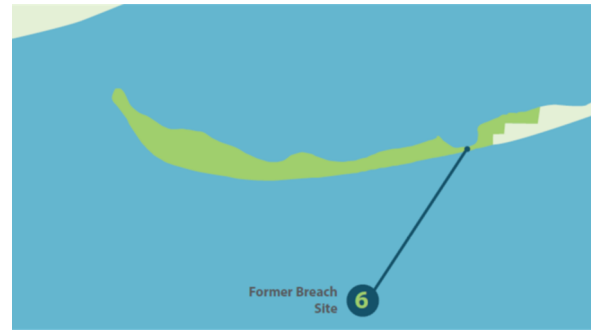




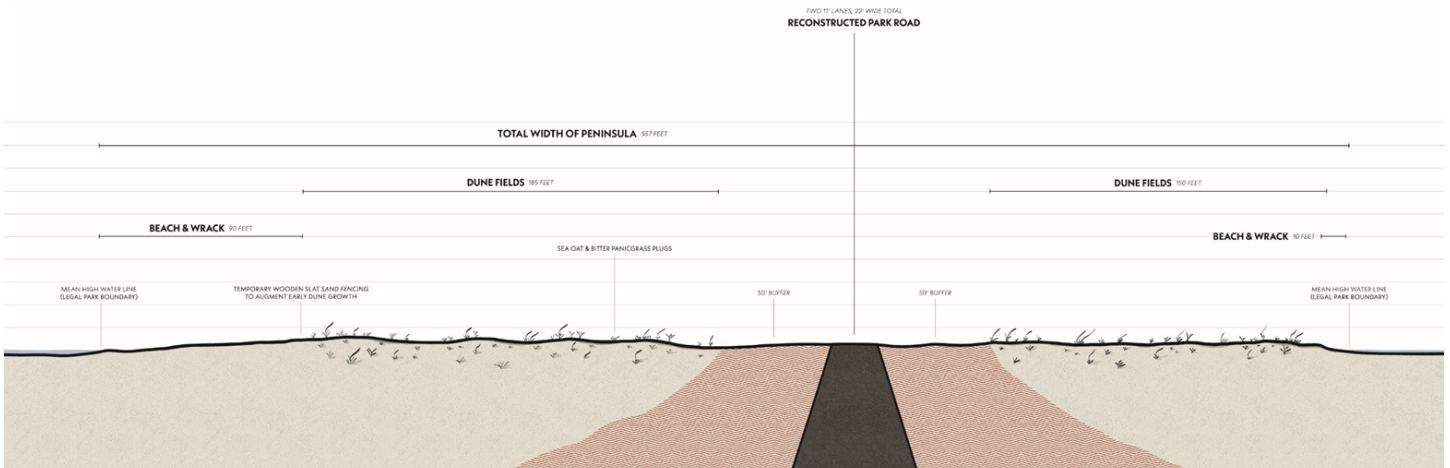
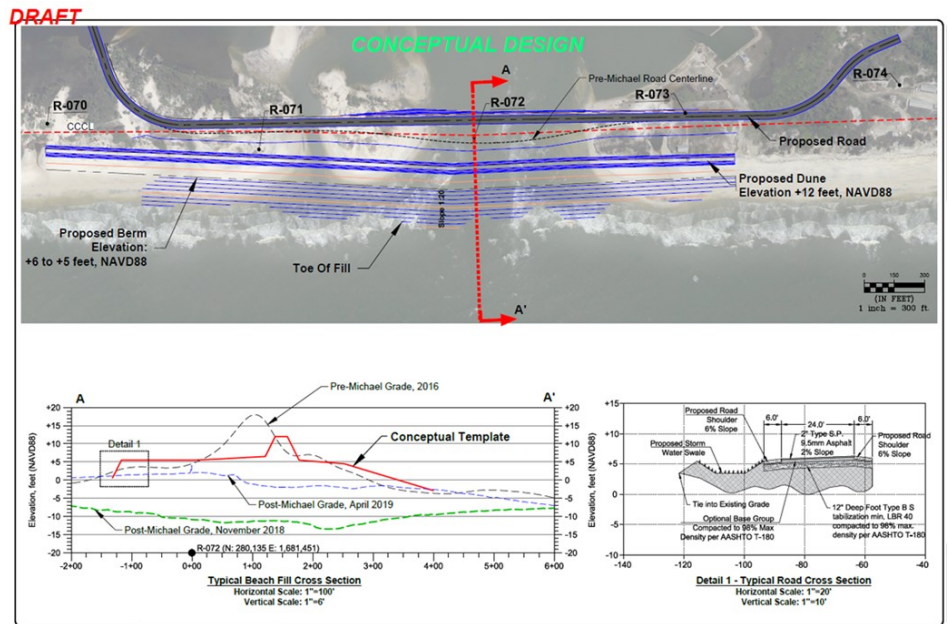
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Gulf-Bay Breach

Pursuant to specific permit conditions, this placement of sand (geographically centered on R-Monument 72) was completed with collection and study of bathymetric and topographic survey data, comparison of current data to historic data (to ensure that the sand remained within the bounds of the pre-hurricane uplands), and physical monitoring of site conditions (including the presence of wildlife) during the process.



Below is an illustrated example of how the DRP Office of Park Planning worked closely with District 1 biologists, the Bureau of Design & Construction, and aquatic preserve partners to steer toward the reconstruction of a necessary park road while successfully restoring the peripheral dune landscape.

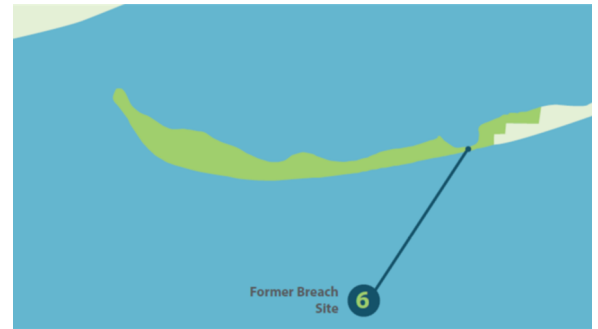




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Gulf-Bay Breach

The result was a stable and compact sand base, over which a new road could be paved, new utility lines could be buried underground, and dunes and shorebird nesting and resting habitat could be restored. Development of the new road is pictured below.



Applying our existing knowledge of coastal systems ecology and geomorphology and consulting with numerous subject-matter experts from across DEP and other agencies, we identified the natural patterns of

vegetation from the foredunes to the back dunes and successfully reconstructed the dune system that was previously found in the area where the breach occurred.

This very recent photo – facing north up the Gulf side of the peninsula – captures a segment of the reconstructed dune ridge with sea oats and varieties of planted dune vegetation. The posts and rope delineate the sensitive restoration zone and deter foot traffic while the new dunes continue to form and the flora takes stable root.

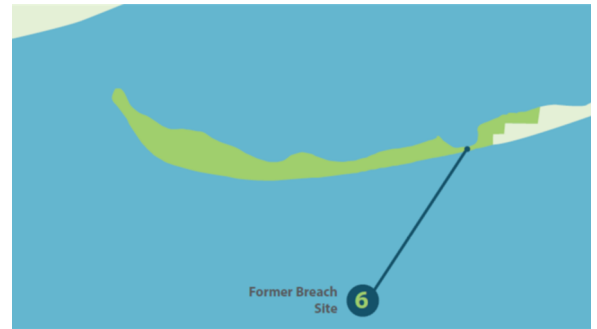




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Gulf-Bay Breach

Approximately one mile farther north along the park's spine road, on the far side of the breach, we achieved another remarkable planning and redevelopment success.



Now able to drive load-bearing construction vehicles across the former breach, the DRP implemented conceptual land use and hydrological restoration objectives from the 2014 unit management plan – the installation of a wide and sturdy twin-barreled box culvert.

This box culvert essentially functions as a bridge and fixes the hydrological impediment that previously separated a large area of saltmarsh from the bay. With the former road segment lost to storm surge, we gained an ideal opportunity to reconstruct the road in a manner that would be less prone to the destructive forces of water pressure in the future and that returned natural hydrological flow to a bisected waterbody.



The rebounding ecology of this saltmarsh slough is evident already today and may now even be accessible to ambitious paddlers passing through the box culvert on a low tide.

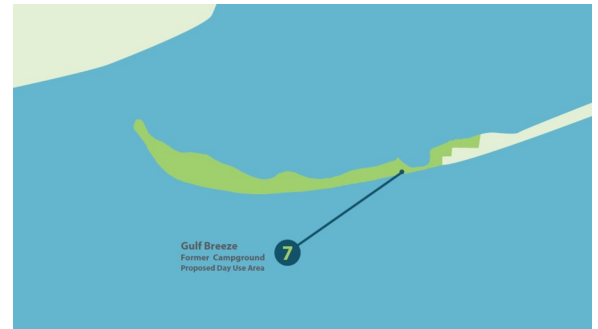




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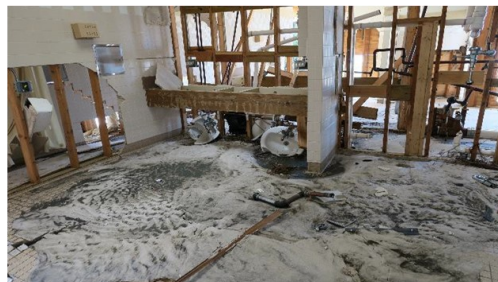
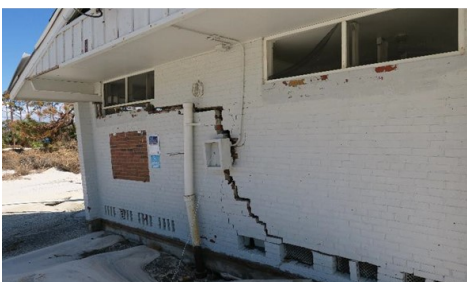
Former Gulf Breeze Campground

Before the hurricane, the Gulf Breeze area held a 59-site standard facility campground that featured two bathhouses. It was known for sunshine, sea breezes, and very convenient access to the Gulf, as the name might imply. For a campground, however, it was also precariously situated.



Over the decades of its existence, the Gulf Breeze Campground experienced multiple inundations. These sites, desirable for their near Gulf-front location and shielded only by a single dune ridge, were ultimately too vulnerable and faced frequent closures due to storm impacts.

The bathhouses, depicted below, had their foundations under-washed, fractured, and irreparably damaged. All campsite utilities (water and electrical lines) were ruined. The dunes were dissipated and the surrounding scrub habitat was unrecognizable.

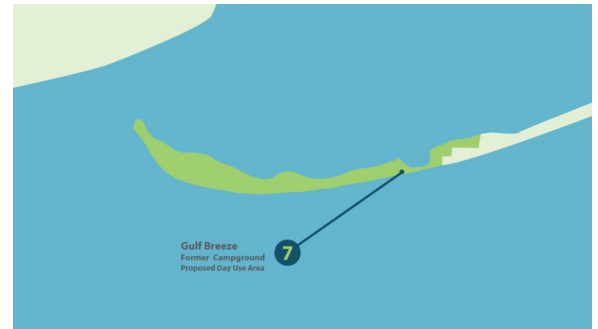




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

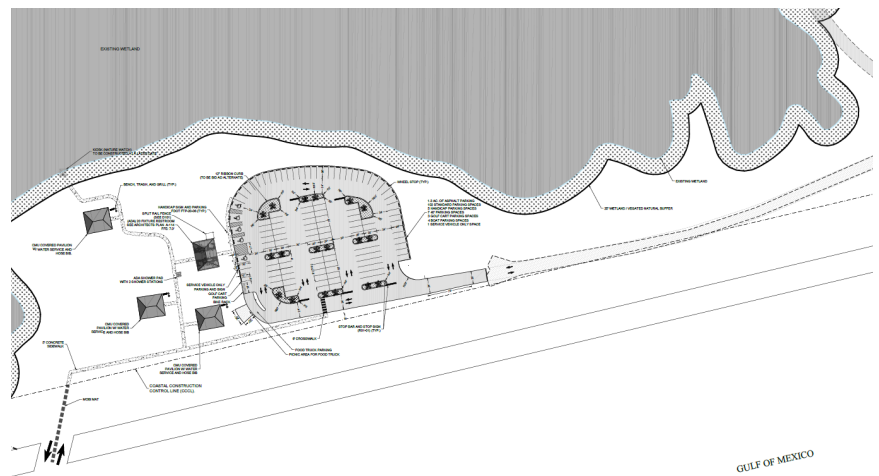
Former Gulf Breeze Campground

The photo on the left below depicts the beginnings of a new dune ridge where sea oat saplings were installed. The photo on the right depicts the sparsely vegetated open space behind the dune where campsites were previously located. Given the newly clear landscape of Gulf Breeze and recognizing the ongoing threats that this site will face with climate change, a planning decision was made to convert the site to a beach access day use area so that it can continue to be used for recreational purposes but with potentially less infrastructure.



By constructing a smaller and simplified type of use area, the site will be less vulnerable to catastrophic damages from future storms. The future Gulf Breeze Day Use Area will entail:

- A short segment of new road that will bring visitors to a parking area with access to the Gulf beach where previously the park only offered overnight facilities.
- An opportunity for visitors to explore an area of beach north of Eagle Harbor with a scenic backdrop of piney flatwoods and open marsh that provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife.
- Opportunities for passively viewing and interpreting this interior landscape may be provided by short walking paths and a potential observation platform.
- Additional amenities at this location will include overflow parking for vehicles with boat trailers, a restroom, and covered pavilions.

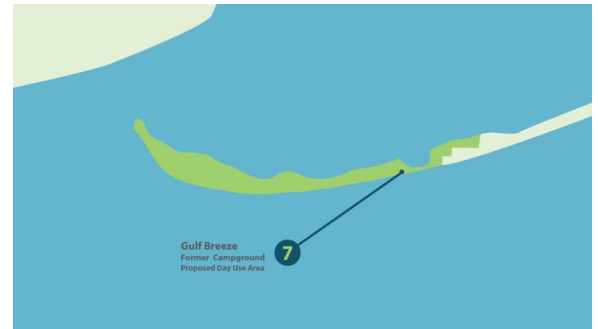




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Former Gulf Breeze Campground

The photo below captures the complex interior scenery behind Gulf Breeze where a trail and potential observation platform are proposed. As depicted in the photo, this landscape consists of a wet prairie-like area surrounding a brackish depression marsh and salt marsh with a flatwoods treeline visible in the background.



Although the beach proximity of the Gulf Breeze Campground will be missed by visitors, a new campground at an alternative location is now being planned. The alternative location, while resulting in a net loss of total campsites, will qualitatively compensate for that loss with reliability, modern utility connections, and a comparably beautiful waterfront proximity – this time overlooking the protected waters of St. Joseph Bay.

The preliminary artistic rendering of the future Gulf Breeze Day Use Area shown at right depicts the proposed restroom building with adjacent parking and distant pavilions. Similar to the above photo, the tall pines of the flatwoods and redeveloping dunes are also visible in the background.

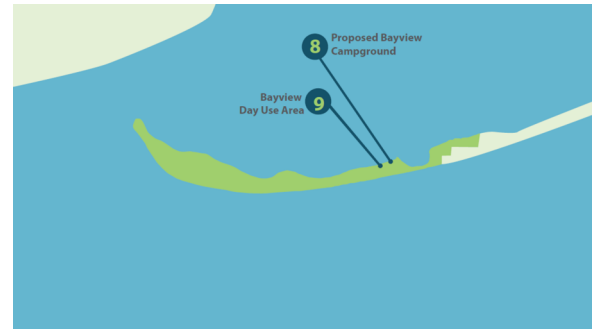




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Bayview Day Use Area & Campground

Bayview has always served as a small waterfront day use area, geared toward launching small watercraft, especially kayaks and canoes. Prior to the hurricane, it offered three pavilions, a restroom, stabilized parking for 24 vehicles, a hiking trailhead, and several related amenities – all of which were irreparably damaged. Now, in the post-hurricane redevelopment efforts, the DRP is designing not only a reconfigured and optimized new version of the day use area, but also an adjacent campground.



The photo on the left shows the cove that was severely eroded and filled with debris after the hurricane, with one of the damaged pavilions in the background. The more recent photo on the right

(taken June 2021) shows the regeneration of healthy saltmarsh around the perimeter of the use area. A kayak fisherman visible in the background exemplifies typical use of this area.

The new campground concept is proposed for a small (3.5-acre) area of altered scrubby flatwoods, located just south of the day-use area. Although a picturesque wooded area, the natural conditions of this site do not preclude the construction of facilities. Given the existing paved road that surrounds the entirety of the scrubby flatwoods, it has long been disconnected from the more expansive and fully-intact natural areas in the vicinity.

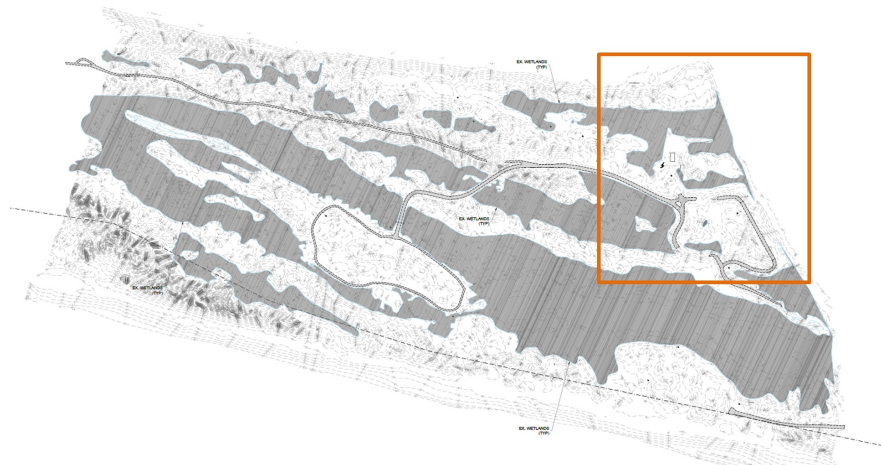
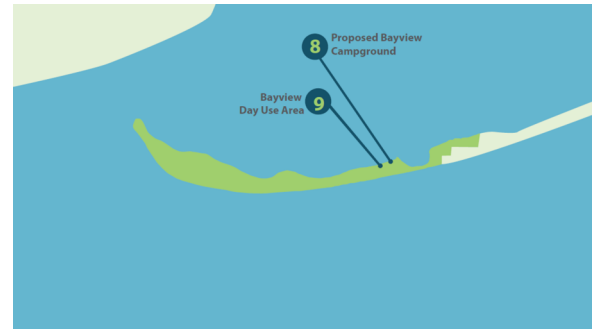




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Bayview Day Use Area & Campground

The wide spacing between the pine trees in the Bayview area may allow for campsites situated between the existing trees. The surrounding road, although in poor condition, and nearby utilities of the neighboring day-use area offer the essentials of what's needed to develop a campground without need of clearing for an altogether new road and utility lines. The future campground loop road is clearly captured near the center of the photo on the left below. In the photo on the right, looking east, the Bayview Area is shown in the background. The former Gulf Breeze Campground – the facility to be replaced by the proposed Bayview Campground – is captured in full view in the foreground.



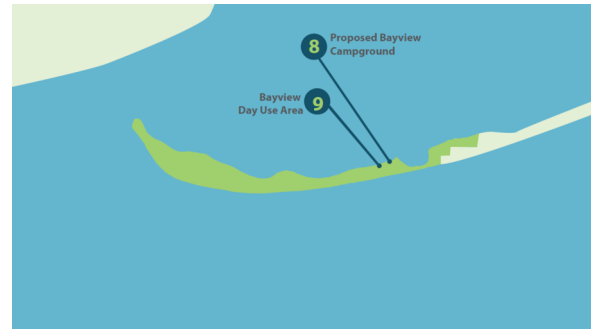
This CAD image above shows the project area. The orange rectangle frames the specific area where the Bayview redevelopment is proposed to take place.



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

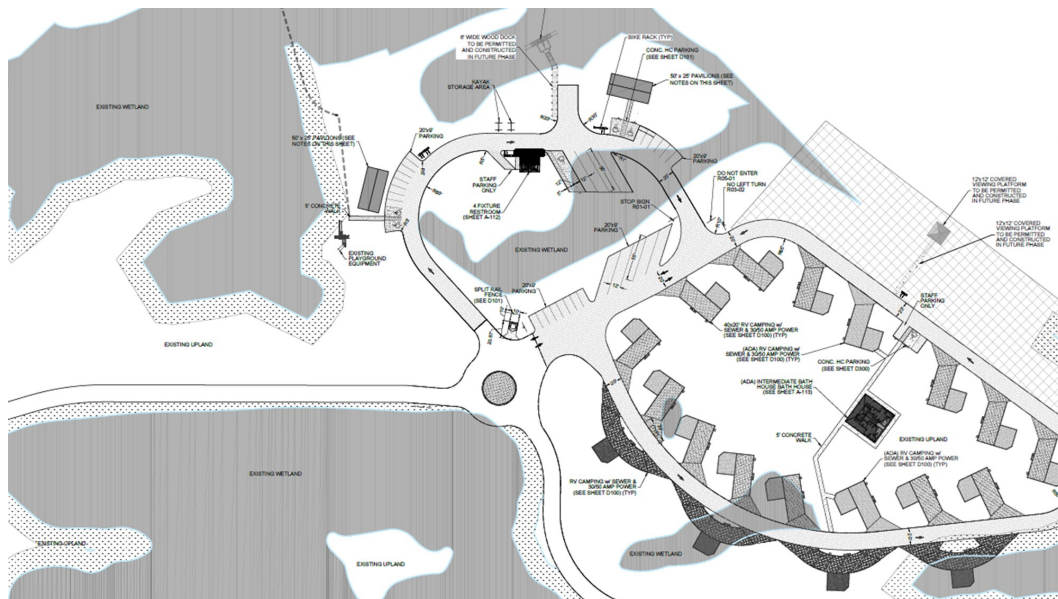
Bayview Day Use Area & Campground

This CAD image below brings us closer to the Bayview project area, identifying natural and manmade debris to be removed and structures to be demolished and also marks wetlands and other sensitive features that require protection.



Major design elements for the day-use area include regrading and restoring the original terrain (to be completed where deep soil erosion occurred), reestablishing the Bayview Hiking Trail stemming from this day use area, continuing to utilize this site for launching paddlecraft and other small

watercraft (recognizing that Eagle Harbor is optimally suited for the larger motorized boats), and constructing new shade pavilions for picnics and use by hikers and paddlers at the front and back ends of their excursions.

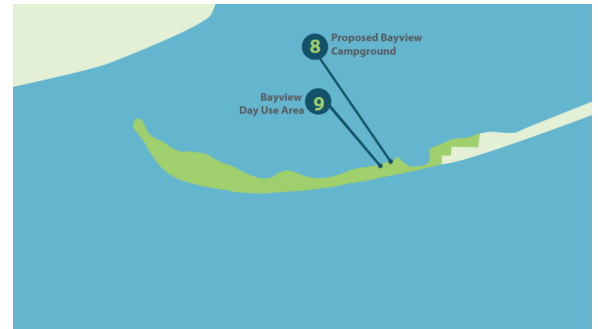




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Bayview Day Use Area & Campground

Another preliminary artistic rendering – shown below – loosely depicts the potential arrangement of the Bayview Day Use Area (on the left) and Campground (on the right).



Major design elements for the Proposed Bayview Campground include the new loop road (on the footprint of a former boat trailer parking area), a scenic viewshed over the waters of St. Joseph Bay, and approximately 19 standard-facility campsites proposed within interior of this loop.

Other potential design elements may include a partial tree canopy of the scrubby flatwoods, a footpath with a centrally located bathhouse that traverses the interior of the campground loop, and an observation boardwalk with a covered platform extending from the camping area over the bay.



BAYVIEW DAY-USE AND CAMPGROUND – LOOKING SOUTHEAST

DAI P



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Shady Pines Campground

Shady Pines was perhaps the most well known of the two campgrounds prior to the hurricane, nestled in the woodland interior of the peninsula.

During Hurricane Michael, Shady Pines Campground lost the majority of the maritime hammock and flatwoods canopy that gave it the namesake shade and reputation for avoiding the intense sunlight of this harsh coastal environment. As depicted in the photos below, the campground was in severely damaged condition and required substantial debris removal.



Many of the trees that remained standing were, unfortunately, dead or declining such that they had to be fully cut. As the photos indicate, the result is a much sunnier version of Shady Pines – a

characteristic that will be reversed after the new construction is complete by planting trees – eventually restoring the desirable tree canopy. In the distant background, is an eagle's nest perched high in a snag tree at the end of the path in the center photo. When this nest became active shortly after the hurricane, we had to modify our debris removal and demolition activity to avoid disturbance.

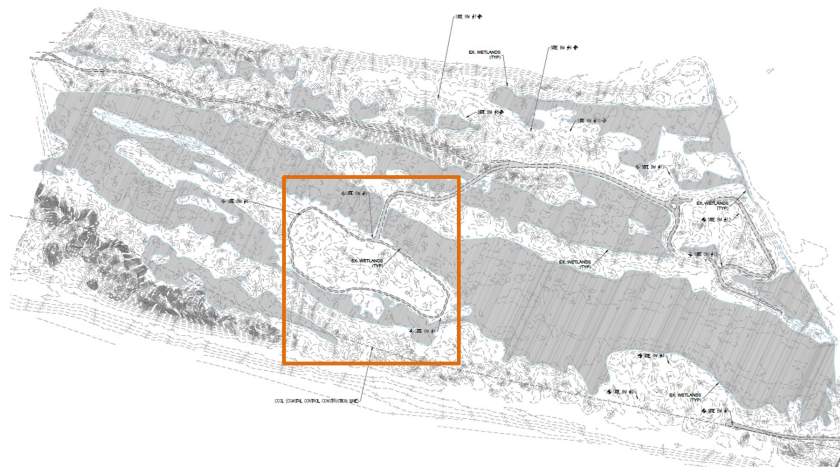




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Shady Pines Campground

The orange box in the rendering below frames the specific project area for redevelopment of Shady Pines Campground. It is significant to note the location of this site in relation to other features and facilities in this portion of the park. The loop road is depicted with the surrounding wetlands that define the shape and size of Shady Pines Campground. Pre-hurricane, Shady Pines held 60 campsites.



In redeveloping the campground, major design elements will include:

- Complete redesign and reconstruction, including realignment and reconfiguration of the campground road away from the natural wetlands to maximize use of dry terrain for campers
- Reestablishing access to the Gulf beach directly from the campground

- Approximately 36 standard facility campsites and 10 tent campsites
- Potential small observation decks for campers to interpret the surrounding landscape,
- Two new bathhouses (to replace the old structures) that will be centrally located within the campground

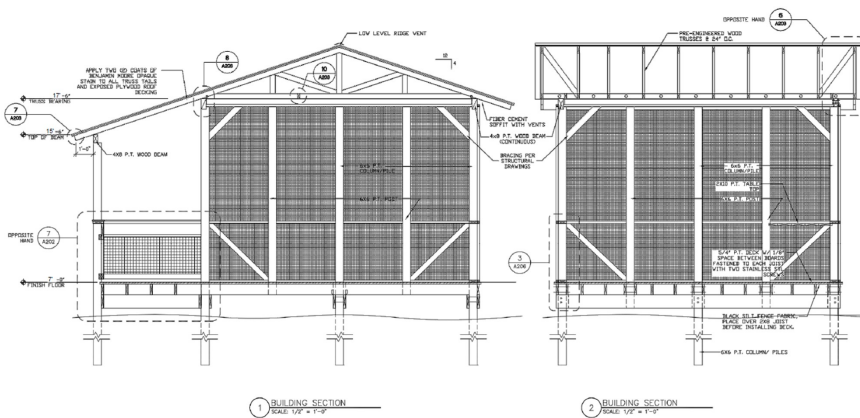
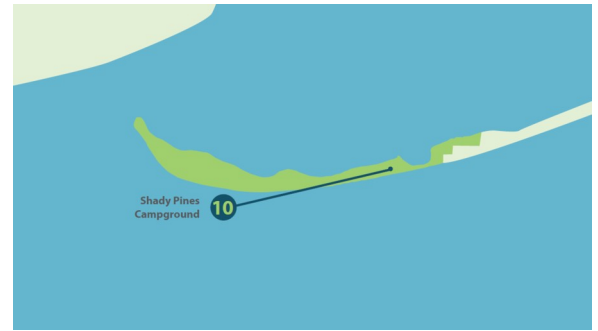




T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Shady Pines Campground

In evaluating options for the redevelopment of facilities on St. Joseph Peninsula, the park planning team researched national and regional trends in outdoor recreation – particularly trends in the most popular modes of camping. One of the findings included the growing popularity of elevated camping platforms.



As depicted in the draft CAD renderings to the left, the redevelopment plan calls for a few camping platforms overlooking the scenically forested interior of the peninsula. This particular design compares well to the screened huts found along the Suwannee River Wilderness Paddling Trail in northeast Florida.

This preliminary artistic rendering offers a northwest perspective into the presently sparsely treed campground with a central bathhouse.



SHADY PINES CAMPGROUND – LOOKING NORTHWEST

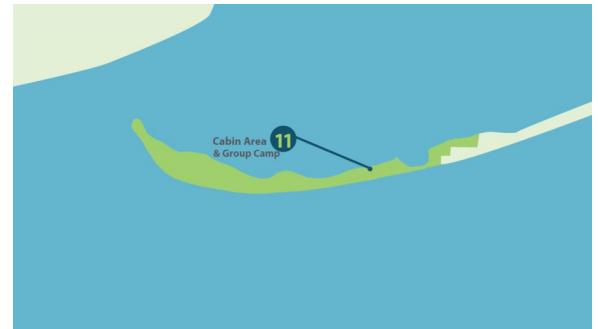
DAI P



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Cabin Area & Group Camp

The cabin area and group camp are the northernmost of the developed facilities in the park. Also hard hit by Hurricane Michael, the few amenities of the semi-primitive group camp were destroyed. The basic utilities of this site, including potable water and an outhouse, will be restored.



Located only a short distance farther north beyond the group camp, the eight park cabins were also heavily damaged by wind and flooding. Fallen trees and storm surge wrecked



the boardwalks that linked the cabins to the small parking area and the bayshore.



In the near future, each of the eight cabins will be renovated or reconstructed as necessary to bring back this highly popular overnight accommodation within the park.

The Gulf access trail from cabins will also be reestablished for cabin guests to reach the beach within modest walking distance of the cabins themselves.



© DeBals Hopper Photography 2019



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Wilderness Preserve

The wilderness preserve of St. Joseph Peninsula is one of the most impressive conservation attributes of the park. It is one of eight wilderness preserves in the Florida State Park system and carries a particular set of management expectations, modeled after the Federal Wilderness Act. The preserve contains 1,946 acres, or 72% of the total park. It has no built infrastructure and is instead defined purely by its tall dunes, interdunal swales, and dense scrub forest.



The natural features were significantly affected by the hurricane, though somewhat spared from the most severe impacts due to its multi-layered, mature, and heavily vegetated dune series. Large swaths of dead or damaged scrub oak and pine turned brown and grey, losing much of their otherwise green foliage. The understory was left quite tangled. The seven remote primitive campsites are temporarily inaccessible, but will be re-established when conditions are safe.

Despite heavy wind damage and inundation by saltwater, the wilderness preserve is already starting to show its resilience by the remarkable signs of



ecological recovery where fresh green growth is emerging in the scrubby canopy and along the dunes – optimistic indications that some vegetation wasn't dead but merely stunned by the passing trauma of the hurricane. Given the rigid protections of its special designation, the Park Service will not be extracting natural debris from the wilderness preserve. Fortunately, however, such intervention seems unnecessary where natural processes are at work – uncomplicated by the needs of human access infrastructure.



T.H. STONE MEMORIAL ST. JOSEPH PENINSULA STATE PARK Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan

Resilience Planning

Resilience Statement

“Climate related shocks and stressors present new challenges to the Florida Park Service mission of providing resource-based recreation while preserving, interpreting, and restoring natural and cultural resources. Parks will adapt to climate threats with prescriptive strategies to minimize and manage the impacts of more severe storms and droughts, sea-level rise, invasive organisms, and other emerging environmental disturbances. Resilience strategies will be incorporated in all park plans and resources management decisions.”

In response to the multiple tropical storm and hurricane impacts between 2016 and 2018, the Florida Park Service developed a mission statement to guide its efforts in preparing for and recovering from natural disasters.

Recovery planning tends to be very involved and requires not only the rescue and triage component, but the planning and foresight to make parks better. But, how do we make parks better; not simply fixed, but actually more functional, stronger, and even more consistent with the Park Service Mission?

The very nature of recovery planning is the act of re-construction – building back from damages. But, what if we didn't even need to re-construct or build back? What if state parks – the resources and infrastructure – were maintained, organized, and developed in a way that greatly reduced the extent of damages suffered in the first place?

While achieving complete impact avoidance may be impossible – recognizing the inevitability of at least some damages – we may, over time, develop strategies and invest in methods to avoid some of the heaviest setbacks. With the resilience statement firmly in mind, the Florida Park Service is confident that it has achieved at least part of that goal in the redevelopment plans presented in this summary report.

Interagency Review
Letters of Support and ARC Process Comments
December 2021

- Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources
- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
- Florida Forest Service
- Florida Natural Areas Inventory



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

RON DESANTIS
Governor

LAUREL M. LEE
Secretary of State

Daniel Alsentzer
Planning Manager, Office of Park Planning
Division of Recreation and Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

December 22, 2021

RE: DHR Project File No.: 2021-7527, Received by DHR: December 6, 2021
Project: *T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park: Post-Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan*
County: Gulf

Mr. Alsentzer:

Our office reviewed the referenced project in accordance with Chapter 267, Florida Statutes, and implementing state regulations, for possible effects on historic properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), or otherwise of historical, architectural or archaeological value.

Thank you for providing our office with the opportunity to comment on the referenced report and proposed recovery plan. Based on the information provided, we have no objections or other comments at this time. However, as T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park contains numerous historic and cultural resources which have not been evaluated for NRHP eligibility, we request that our office be provided the opportunity to review and comment on individual projects prior to any ground disturbing activities, at which time our office may recommend that the project area be subjected to archaeological monitoring or a cultural resource assessment survey.

If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Kelly L. Chase, Compliance and Review Supervisor, by email at Kelly.Chase@dos.myflorida.com, or by telephone at 850.245. 6344 or 800.847.7278.

Sincerely,

Kelly L. Chase
For

Timothy A Parsons, Ph.D.
Director, Division of Historical Resources
& State Historic Preservation Officer



**Florida Fish
and Wildlife
Conservation
Commission**

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Thomas H. Eason, Ph.D.
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Division of Habitat and
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800 955-8770 (V)

MyFWC.com

January 10, 2022

Mr. Daniel Alsentzer
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks
Office of Park Planning
3800 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399-3000

RE: St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, Post-Hurricane Redevelopment – Summary Report for February 2022 ARC Meeting

Dear Mr. Alsentzer,

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has completed their review of the proposed St. Joseph Peninsula State Park (SJPSP), Post-Hurricane Redevelopment Plan. The following are comments and suggested revisions prepared by the FWC for the SJPSP. The Redevelopment Plan will be submitted by the Department of Environmental Protection-Division of Recreation and Parks (DEP-DRP) to the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) for consideration at the February 2022 ARC meeting:

- Page 4, Main Gulf Beach Access:** *The FWC recommends that before replacing boardwalks through vegetated dune areas, construction areas should be defined with silt fence or similar to limit the area disturbed during that work. Trapping for beach mice should be done before the taking or removal of any vegetated areas. Stacking, piling, storing, or placing of materials in vegetated areas should be avoided and the FWC recommends it occur outside designated construction areas.*
- Page 19, Eagle Harbor Marina:** *The FWC suggests the [Standard Manatee Conditions for In-water Work](#) (2011) should be followed for all in-water work associated with re-dredging the boat basin. Additionally, if applicable, the FWC suggests manatee exclusion devices (such as grating) be installed and maintained over any existing or proposed pipes or culverts greater than 8 inches, but smaller than 8 feet in diameter that are submerged, or partially submerged, and reasonably accessible to manatees. If horizontal or vertical bars are used, no more than 8-inch gaps should occur. Grates should be in place at the accessible end(s) during all phases of the construction process and as a final design element to restrict manatee access. This will reduce the risk of entrapment and drowning of manatees in these pipes/culverts.*
- Page 31, Former Gulf Breeze Campground:** *The FWC strongly recommends before proceeding with the redevelopment plans for this project to communicate and coordinate with the U.S Fish and Wildlife*

Service (USFWS) regarding the potential impacts of this project to the population of imperiled beach mice on the area. The contact information for the USFWS is below:

*Kristi Yanchis
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Panama City Field Office
1601 Balboa Ave.
Panama City, FL 32405
Email: kristi_yanchis@fws.gov
Phone: 850-769-0552*

- 4. Page 31, Former Gulf Breeze Campground:** *In addition to coordinating with the USFWS, the FWC encourages reduction of the east-west footprint of the parking lot to minimize loss of beach mouse habitat. If excessive habitat is lost to the east and west of the parking structure, it may result in a barrier to beach mouse movement. Additionally, the FWC would recommend this facility be open between sunrise and sunset, with all lighting being disabled outside of those times. All beach access would preferably be roped to minimize disturbance to the dune system and associated vegetation. It would further benefit imperiled beach mice if the landscaping around the parking area included a diversity of vegetation.*
- 5. Page 40, Wilderness Preserve:** *The FWC recommends that park staff commit to regular assessments of ecosystem conditions within SJPSP, including in the wilderness area, to determine the rate and extent to which natural restoration processes are occurring. The FWC recognizes the hurricane caused significant loss of dunes throughout the SJPSP. Evidence from other sites indicates that in some cases natural restoration may not lead to complete restoration of vegetation. In some cases, such surveys may indicate that targeted, strategic restoration activities within the wilderness area may be warranted.*
- 6. Marine Turtles:** *The FWC recommends for the construction of the boardwalk walkover structures on the beach, the work take place outside marine turtle nesting season of May 1 through October 31, no temporary lighting of the construction area be used, all activities avoid marked marine turtle nests including those that may be on the beach before or after the marine turtle nesting season, and all temporary disturbances in the sand (e.g. ruts, depressions, mounds, etc.) resulting from work activities should be filled in and raked smooth after project completion. Lastly, to reduce the risk of marine turtle entrapment, walkover structures should have three (3) feet of vertical clearance beneath them and at least five (5) feet of horizontal clearance where they meet the beach. The vertical clearances include support bracing, as well as stairs. The horizontal clearances include support pilings and stair blocking and pilings. Where these clearances cannot be met (such as under the stairs), blocking with*

appropriate materials should be used to preclude marine turtles, including hatchlings, access.

7. **Gopher Tortoise:** *The FWC recommends conducting a gopher tortoise burrow survey within the footprint of the proposed projects, and, if necessary, submitting a gopher tortoise relocation permit application to relocate tortoises out of harm's way if burrows are found to occur within 25 feet of the proposed projects.*

8. **Shorebirds:** Please note, FWC staff have been in communication with DEP park staff on this project regarding shorebird protection. Below are the recommendations that have been made:

- *Since the area along the former breach filled in in 2019, this area has been used by shorebirds for nesting (2020 & 2021) and has become an actively used shorebird breeding area. To maintain this location as a beneficial area for shorebirds, the FWC recommends the use of symbolic fencing for shorebirds and/or post and rope along the roadway to minimize the likelihood of disturbance to birds during the breeding season. In addition, given that shorebirds are likely to cross the road, it is recommended that the park maintains low speed limits and installs shorebird crossing signs and speed attenuation devices to help minimize the likelihood of vehicle strikes with shorebirds in this area. Finally, it is recommended that the area between the roadway and reconstructed dune ridge be allowed to revegetate naturally to help minimize the loss of shorebird nesting habitat at this location. If planting or landscaping is planned for this area, please consult with FWC Regional Shorebird Biologist on planting strategies to help minimize impacts to nesting habitat. FWC Regional Biologist contact information:*

Nick Vitale

NW Regional Shorebird Biologist

[Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#)

3911 Hwy. 2321

Panama City, FL 32409

Phone: 850-630-3480

- *Known shorebird nest and chick predators, such as raccoons and opossum, are attracted to areas of high public visitation. The use of wildlife proof trash receptacles throughout the park will benefit many species by decreasing the availability of food and attractants to predator species.*
- *FWC staff recommend dune walkovers, and any other tall structures, near shorebird nesting habitat to be constructed in a manner that does not create avian predator perches.*
- *The FWC notes, that the area of the proposed Gulf Breeze Day use area is currently used by shorebirds during the nesting season.*

- *FWC staff recommend all construction that occurs near shorebird nesting areas occur outside of the breeding season (February 15th – September 1st) to avoid potential impacts to shorebirds. If construction is planned to occur within the nesting season, we recommend contacting the Regional Shorebird Biologist as soon as possible for technical assistance.*
 - *FWC staff recommend continued coordination with FWC biologists to avoid impacts from recreational activity near beach-nesting bird habitat.*
9. The FWC recommends the use of management guidelines in the FWC's published Species Action Plans for the management of imperiled and locally important bird species found on the area. The FWC Species Action Plans provide beneficial resource guidelines for habitat management and monitoring of the respective species. For your reference, the FWC Species Action Plans can be accessed at this web address:
<http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/imperiled/species-action-plans/>.

The FWC sincerely appreciates the opportunity to review the SJPSP Post-Hurricane Redevelopment Plan. Please contact Dylan Haase at Dylan.Haase@MyFWC.com or at 850-487-9102 should there be any questions.

Thank you for allowing the FWC to review and make recommendations for this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Houston", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Houston, Land Conservation and Planning Administrator
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

From: [Fugate, Brian](#)
To: thomas.houston@myfwc.com
Cc: [Allen, Shauna R](#); [Burr, Deborah](#); [Singleton, Keith](#); [Alsentzer, Daniel](#); dylan.haase@myfwc.com
Subject: St Joseph Peninsula State Park
Date: Wednesday, January 26, 2022 11:49:00 AM
Attachments: [St Joseph Recovery Plan Response to FWC Comments.pdf](#)

Mr. Houston,

Thank you for commenting on the T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, Post Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan. We did want to take the time to address some specific areas and how we plan to incorporate FWC comments to manage for imperiled species. Please find the attached letter. Thank you.

Brian

Brian Fugate, Chief
Office of Park Planning
Division of Recreation and Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Brian.Fugate@floridadep.gov



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF Environmental Protection

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Jeanette Nuñez
Lt. Governor

Shawn Hamilton
Secretary

January 25, 2022

Tom Houston
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Dear Mr. Houston

Thank you for providing comments on the T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park Post Hurricane Michael Recovery Plan in preparation for consideration at the February 2022 Acquisition and Restoration Council meeting.

All comments are being taken under advisement to be incorporated into any future design, construction or management actions with regards to imperiled species management as approved in the draft plan.

The overall planning and resource management goals of the recovery plan is to make improvements for resiliency, resource management, and visitor experience.

The discontinuation of the former Gulf Breeze Campground with conversion to a day use area with a smaller footprint is designed to meet all of these goals. Specifically, in regard to comments received, the day use component will eliminate the lighting affects that overnight campgrounds have, in addition to limiting the amount of at night visitation on the beach. This will improve conditions for beach mice and sea turtles.

DEP will communicate and coordinate with USFWS and FWC. This process gives us the opportunity to improve upon the design elements of any previous facilities in order to incorporate the best practices and guidelines of imperiled species management for manatees, beach mice, sea turtles, gopher tortoise, and shorebirds. DEP will take into account the use of fencing to limit disturbance, placing work materials in appropriate areas, proper trapping prior to removal of vegetated areas, landscaping with a diversity of revegetation and buffers, and proper visitor exclusion where appropriate. Gopher tortoise surveys are conducted as standard DRP practice on all projects and will be incorporated for these recovery projects as well. During the construction process DRP will work to

limit impacts through scheduling that minimizes nesting season interaction. DRP will also incorporate the Standard Manatee Conditions for In-Water Work (2011) for work performed in the boat basin into contracts.

Thank you again for the comments and guidance as we work towards the recovery of this outstanding Florida State Park

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Fugate". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name "Brian" written in a larger, more prominent font than the last name "Fugate".

Brian Fugate
Chief, Office of Park Planning
Division of Recreation and Parks
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

From: [Alsentzer, Daniel](#)
To: [Alsentzer, Daniel](#)
Subject: St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, Post-Hurricane Redevelopment - Florida Forest Service review note
Date: Wednesday, January 5, 2022 1:17:11 PM
Importance: High

From: Ingram, Catherine <Catherine.Ingram@fdacs.gov>
Sent: Thursday, December 16, 2021 8:52 AM
To: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>
Cc: Rowell, Keith <keith.rowell@fdacs.gov>
Subject: FW: St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, Post-Hurricane Redevelopment - Summary Report for February ARC
Importance: High

Good morning Dan,

Thank you for the opportunity to review this summary report. We asked our folks in our Forest Management bureau to review what you all put together, and the feedback included the following:

“This report is largely focused on rebuilding infrastructure”..... And, “their strategy for their wilderness area is sound. Overall an impressive comprehensive project.”

We appreciate DRP’s efforts to redevelop state parks after the upheaval caused by Hurricane Michael, as well as the opportunity for commentary on the hard work you all have put forth to rebuild.

Thank you.

From: Alsentzer, Daniel <Daniel.Alsentzer@dep.state.fl.us>
Sent: Monday, December 6, 2021 4:58 PM
To: tom.houston@myfwc.com; Haase, Dylan <Dylan.Haase@MyFWC.com>; timothy.parsons@dos.myflorida.com; Goodwin, Joshua M. <Joshua.Goodwin@dos.myflorida.com>; Ingram, Catherine <Catherine.Ingram@fdacs.gov>; fprice@fnai.fsu.edu
Cc: Burr, Deborah <Deborah.Burr@FloridaDEP.gov>; Cutshaw, Steven <Steven.Cutshaw@dep.state.fl.us>
Subject: [External] St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, Post-Hurricane Redevelopment - Summary Report for February ARC
Importance: High

For our agency partners,

Please see the attached summary report of the DRP’s redevelopment planning and implementation efforts for T.H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park following the extensive damages incurred during Hurricane Michael. This summary report will be conveyed to DSL and ARC for

consideration on the February 2022 ARC agenda prior to the DRP moving forward with the remainder of the projects.

The details of the report distinguish between projects already-completed (by way emergency order) and those that are conceptual (designed and recommended). Consistencies with and departures from the 2014 approved management plan are also noted. The introduction lists the phases of this redevelopment effort, including all public process/stakeholder engagement.

Overview of Contents

- Timeline of events, recovery actions, planning process, and stakeholder engagement
- Scope of impacts incurred by Hurricane Michael
- Recovery accomplishments to set context for pending projects/plan proposals and explain how the DRP has utilized the past three years post hurricane
- Sequence of operations to demonstrate task prioritizations (e.g., initial triage, opening park for basic public access, strategic land use planning, and resource protection considerations)
- Descriptions of redevelopment accomplishments/objectives that adhere to original footprints and/or match land use proposals approved in the 2014 plan
- Descriptions of new land use concepts and resource management objectives that differ from previous footprints and/or the 2014 approved plan
- Emphasis on resilience planning and natural resource protection/restoration

The DRP is now seeking FWC, FFS, DHR, and FNAI review to ensure that we have comprehensively considered all major implications of the given land use proposals are consistent with best practices in resource protection.

If feasible by December 31, please send a letter to confirm review. Please also advise if there are any questions or concerns.

Regards,
Daniel



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Florida Natural Areas Inventory
Review of St. Joseph Peninsula State Park Redevelopment History and Plans

Daniel:

Thank you for receiving these comments. The plan is excellent, thorough, and well written. We support the efforts made to minimize impacts on fully-intact natural areas by developing campgrounds and day-use areas in areas disturbed prior to hurricane impacts, as well as the efforts to encourage natural growth of coastal vegetation.

While the redevelopment plan generally avoids impacts to natural communities, some incidental impacts to rare species are possible during construction. The following species are documented in the FNAI database and impacts to these species should be avoided if they are encountered in the project areas:

- Eastern diamondback rattlesnake—documented onsite and could be encountered during work in uplands (particularly the old and new campgrounds and any future work on the multi-use trail between the gate and eagle harbor).
- Saltmarsh snake –documented onsite and could be encountered during improvements to the Eagle Harbor area and the proposed marsh observation platform.
- Santa Rosa wolf spider and underfoot tiny scarab beetle—have been documented in dune areas and should be avoided to the extent possible.

pg 27: Dune reconstruction and revegetation efforts along the breach appeared to be coming along nicely in November 2021 when we last visited the property.

pg 29: We support the relocation of the Gulf Breeze Campground to the bay side. In addition to the structural advantages of being in a more protected location, this will minimize light and sound pollution on the primary dunes in the area. This could have a positive impact on sea turtle and shorebird nesting sites.

Pg 30: Providing a parking area slightly north of where day-use access has formerly been available may increase the density of beach use in that area, with increases in occasional dune impacts and potential disturbance to snowy, piping, and Wilson's plovers, terns, and black skimmer. In order to avoid these potential impacts, you may wish to consider sizing the parking area to ensure that the density of daily beach users from the day-use area is no larger than the amount that resulted from the former campground.

pg 36: Will this snag remain in place? If consideration is being given to removal due to potential threats to the visitors or campground infrastructure, we recommend mentioning precautions that will be taken to avoid disturbing the nesting eagles.

Sincerely,

Camille Eckel
Field Biologist
Florida Natural Areas Inventory