

National Seashores Fighting the People Problem

May it NEVER Happen AT Lookout

By Bayard Webster

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ASSATEAGUE ISLAND, Md. — "This place already gets so jammed in summer that there are days when we can't cope with all the people," the park ranger said as he drove a visitor along the bumpy beach road at Assateague Island National Seashore, the country's newest

federally operated coastal recreation site.

The ranger was 29-year-old Leonard W. McKenzie, a National Park Service naturalist based at Assateague, off Maryland's Eastern Shore, and he was discussing a problem that in recent years has come to plague the Park Service, which operates the nation's seven national seashores.

The problem is how to maintain and preserve the quality of one of the country's greatest recreational assets — its seashores — in the face of increasingly heavy use by the nation's growing population.

Fewer Camp Sites

"Last year we prepared for 800 campers on July 4th," said McKenzie, "but 1,400 arrived on Memorial Day. We're going to have to reduce the number of our camping sites. We hate to do it but we can't preserve the environment and provide a quality camping experience with such large crowds."

From Cape Cod, Mass., to Point Reyes, Calif., members of national seashore supervisory staffs report overcrowding, lack of facilities, littering and erosion by man and nature as threatening large sections of the 600-odd miles of federally controlled coastal recreation preserves on ocean and bay front.

At the same time the few shoreline areas still available are being snapped up for industrial and private development at a record-breaking rate.

As a result, federal officials, conservationists and marine

biologists agree, the importance of preserving and enlarging the public recreational resources of the country's littoral zone increases with each passing summer as more and more persons and interests compete for less and less available land.

There are seven national seashores along the rim of the continental United States. Besides those at Assateague Island, Cape Cod and Point Reyes, they are located at Fire Island, N. Y.; Cape Hatteras, N. C.; Cape Lookout, N. C. (not yet open); and Padre Island, Tex.

National seashores are established by acts of Congress after consultation by the Interior Department with the state or states involved. The National Park Service administers them and determines the restrictions and regulations governing their use.

Hatteras the First

The first national seashore was Cape Hatteras, authorized by Congress in 1937. Today, its 70-odd miles of ocean front and relatively well-established barrier dunes are a monument to the millions of dollars and thousands of man-hours spent on their preservation.

Kittridge A. Wing, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras Seashore, said as a chill wind whistled through the loblolly pines outside his office at Manteo, N. C.:

"We lose anywhere up to six feet of beach a year. And so far it's cost more than \$5 million to keep the dunes here." He explained that extensive use of sand fences to entrap sand and the planting of beach grasses to consolidate it had helped to save the beach.

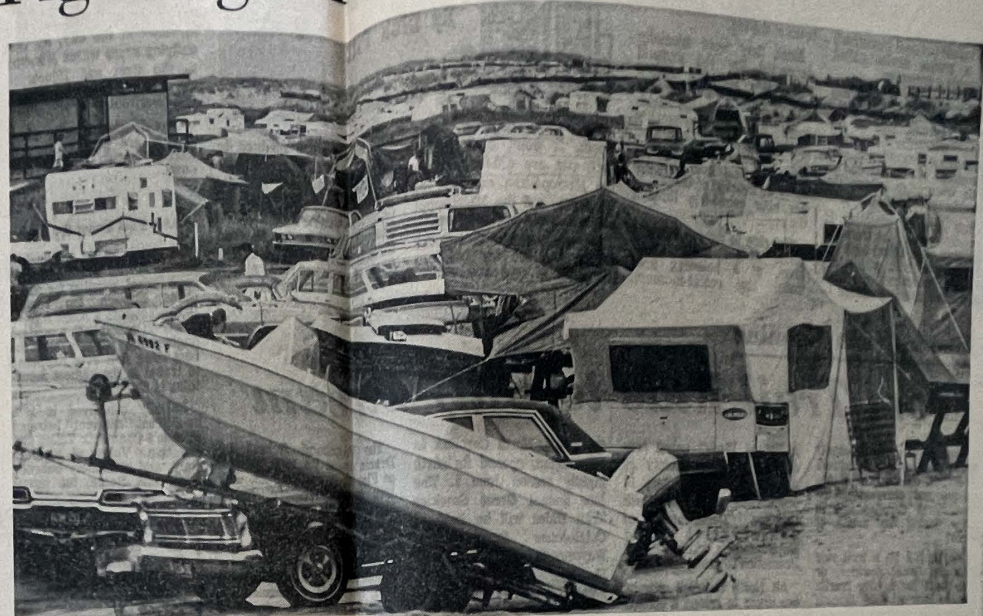
"There are other problems," he went on. "Last year we had 1,120,000 visitors here — a 5 per cent increase over the previous year. We have trouble with the dunes but it's even tougher to keep up with the increased need for recreation facilities — our needs are just monstrous."

Several hundred miles to the north in South Wellfleet on Cape Cod, James H. Bowman, a 39-year-old civil engineer on the staff of the National Seashore there recited a similar litany.

'Reached the Limit'

"We've reached the limit of development," he said of the 35-mile-long 44,000-acre federal preserve that was authorized in 1961 and formally established four years ago.

"We had four million visitors last year and the total has been creeping up about 10 to 15 per cent a year," he went on. "One of our main problems is the impact of peo-



Holiday campers pack Hatteras National Seashore near Pea Island

ple on the dunes — even a foot-print can lead to a deep ravine in a dune if the wind comes up and blows the sand away."

In addition to the national seashores there are innumerable state and local parks, mostly small ones, along the coast. Although no accurate compilation of statistics on these parks is readily available, it is estimated that approximately 500 miles of public but non-federal seashore parks are in operation.

These parks also suffer from the ills that plague the federal preserves.

In Torrey Pines State Park, on a high bluff along the Southern California coast, signs warn visitors that selected paths in the park are closed off for several years, to "rest" them and to permit nature to restore the worn-out earth and vegetation that walkers had unwittingly destroyed.

One of the largest state parks on the Atlantic Coast is Jekyll Island off the Georgia coast near Brunswick. It has eight miles of beaches, three golf courses, an indoor swimming pool, a marina and a fishing pier.

But huge signs advertising its gas stations and motels

and its pastel-colored, quonset-hut architecture in a sort of avocado-crate style have led Mrs. Betsy Fancher, an Atlanta author and authority on Georgia's coastal islands, to describe it as "honky-tonk with a touch of suburbia."

Although many conservationists feel that state and local parks can help alleviate the burden on the federal system, they are also aware that the high level of appearance standards and restrictions on visual pollution in federal parks can be difficult to achieve by provincial governments pressured by local business interests. Opportunities for simpler

solutions have slipped by.

In 1935 a National Park Service survey of undeveloped seashore areas recommended that 12 areas with a total shoreline of 438 miles be preserved as national seashores.

Only one of these areas — Cape Hatteras — was set aside. The major portion of the other areas were eventually acquired by private and commercial developers.

Twenty years later, in 1955, a more extensive seashore recreation area survey of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts was made for the National Park Service. It said that the

highest priority should be given to the acquisition of 16 areas.

The report also recommended that "prompt action be taken to acquire available beach sites before the best of the remaining areas are acquired for private or commercial development."

Today, 15 years later, only three of these areas — Cape Cod, Fire Island and Padre Island — have been or are being acquired. One other — Cumberland Island, Ga. — is being sought by the Parks Service. Many of the remaining areas on the list have gone the way of industry and the private developer.

sections of Emerald Isle prop
On May 22, 1959, Hira
total approximate acreage of
were marsh land and 260 acres
for \$10,000 cash and a deed
\$77,500 for a total of \$87,500
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