The National Park Service is seeking public comments on

# Beach Management at Padre Island National Seashore

Padre Island National Seashore (the Seashore) is considering developing a Beach Management Plan to protect beach resources and guide the many and varied uses of the beach.

The Seashore is the largest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the United States and is home to a rich and diverse array of over 150 special-status species. The Seashore also has important cultural resources, including underwater archeological sites associated with the Spanish shipwrecks of 1554, which are the oldest excavated shipwreck sites in the United States and Gulf of Mexico.

Natural resources at the Seashore include:

- more than 400 species of flowering plants
- more than 50 species that are state or federally listed or are Migratory Bird Treaty Act species of conservation concern
- amphibians, reptiles, crustaceans and mollusks, insects, mammals, fish, and more than 380 species of birds

The beach also provides extensive recreation opportunities for visitors, including swimming, fishing, beach driving, camping, shell collecting and other forms of recreation. Visitors access the Seashore primarily by driving on the beach, an activity that affects Seashore resources and visitor experience.

NPS management activities occur regularly on the beach. These include sand movement to maintain access for park and visitor vehicle access; clean-up of debris that washes ashore; removal of hazardous materials with other federal agencies; law enforcement operations, primarily with US Customs and Border Protection; beach patrols; marine mammal stranding response; and inventory and monitoring research.

The Seashore would benefit from management planning to provide guidance on these different and sometimes conflicting uses.

We invite you to participate in the planning process by submitting your ideas to help inform beach management at the Seashore. We would like to hear any thoughts and ideas you feel are relevant and important for this planning process. There are many ways to be involved, including attending an in-person public meeting and submitting electronic or written comments.

## OPEN HOUSE MEETINGS

Please join us for one of three in-person, open house meetings to to share your comments on beach management.

**Meeting #1:**

Texas State Aquarium
2710 N. Shoreline Boulevard
Corpus Christi, TX 78402
Tuesday, February 21, 2023
6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

**Meeting #2:**

Texas State Aquarium
2710 N. Shoreline Boulevard
Corpus Christi, TX 78402
Wednesday, February 22, 2023
6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

**Meeting #3:**

San Antonio Missions
National Historical Park
Mission San José
6701 San José Drive
San Antonio, TX 78214
Thursday, February 23, 2023
6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

The same information will be presented at each open house. Participants will have an opportunity to speak with NPS staff and provide written comments.

# Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program


## History of Sea Turtle Work at the Seashore

- In the 1970s, the Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) was on the brink of extinction.
- In 1974, the first plan was implemented at the Seashore to establish a secondary Kemp's ridley nesting population.
- In 1978, the first bi-national action plan was implemented to protect Kemp's ridley populations in Playa de Rancho Nuevo, Mexico, where 99% of Kemp's ridley sea turtles nest, and the Seashore, which is the primary nesting area for Kemp's ridley in the United States.
- The bi-national plan was last updated in 2011, and today the program continues to carry out many of these recovery tasks that started over 30 years ago.

## Current Management of Sea Turtles at the Seashore

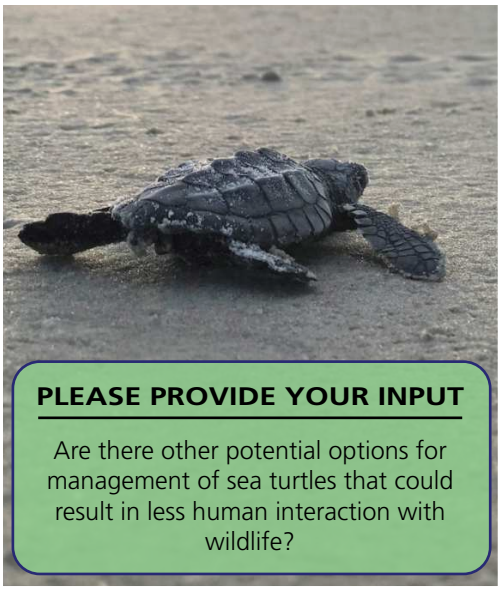
The work of the Sea Turtle Science and Recovery program is inside and outside the Seashore, studying and protecting all five species of sea turtles that nest here: Kemp's ridley, loggerhead, green, hawksbill, and leatherback. Efforts include:

- Turtle patrols and partners locate nesting turtles and collect eggs
- Staff at the corral and incubation facility care for turtle eggs until hatching
- Staff and volunteers release hatchlings, including at events open to the public
- Stranded turtles are taken to rehabilitation facilities
- Staff conduct research on sea turtles
  - Nesting (mark-recapture tagging, genetics, disease occurrence)
  - Stranding (necropsies, disease, entrapment, etc.)
  - Authored and co-authored almost 200 research papers over the past 30 years.

# Sea Turtle Science and Recovery Program

The Seashore is considering potential options for sea turtle management, including:

- Vary sea turtle patrols, including the timing, frequency, and methods
- Limit egg collection to within the park boundary
- Adaptively manage corral location to provide for hurricane resiliency
- Hold fewer public hatchling releases and/or limit crowd size; focus releases on public education
- Adjust research and operations (e.g., do not relocate every nest)
- Alternative incubation facility(s): in-park facility may not survive direct hit from hurricane
- Strandings / rehabilitation / release of juvenile and adult rehabilitated turtles – redefine extent of Seashore involvement and release locations



**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR INPUT**

Are there other potential options for management of sea turtles that could result in less human interaction with wildlife?

**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR INPUT**

Are there other potential pilot studies or sea turtle management options the Seashore should explore?

## Ideas for Pilot Studies

To understand how we might manage sea turtles in the future, the Seashore is considering pilot studies. A goal of the Kemp's ridley bi-national action plan is for sea turtles to exist without human assistance. Currently, sea turtle eggs are reared at the incubation facility or corral so that natural processes like predation, inundation, and other threats are eliminated. Pilot studies can help us understand if we can protect against predation, inundation, and other threats with less human intervention.

***Potential Pilot Study 1: In-situ nesting – can predation be reduced without moving eggs?***

Test predation mitigation measures for effectiveness in the protection of Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests at the Seashore. Study areas would be Malaquite Beach and/or near the research cabin (40 MM).

***Potential Pilot Study 2: Does moving nests protect them from inundation, or flooding?***

Inundation, or flooding, of nests can kill the eggs, depending on how long the nest is under water. Would relocating the nests higher on the beach improve chances for survival? This measure has been successful elsewhere for other sea turtle species. Study areas would be Malaquite Beach and/or near the research cabin (40 MM).

***Potential Pilot Study 3: Remove or reduce NPS vehicles from Malaquite Beach, except for emergency use.***

Malaquite Beach is closed to visitor driving. NPS staff drive here, potentially impacting wildlife and visitor experience. Would reducing NPS vehicle use improve the visitor experience and better protect sea turtles, in-situ nests, and other wildlife? Exceptions would be allowed for emergencies.

***Potential Pilot Study 4: Would unmanned aerial vehicles or other video technology be effective monitoring for nesting sea turtles?***

# Sand Management

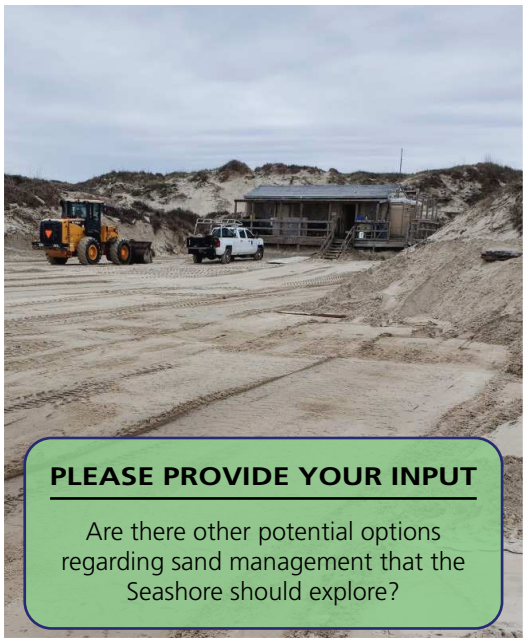
Being a barrier island, sand is constantly shifting, impacting access to Seashore roads and facilities. The Seashore moves large quantities of sand. This requires effort and heavy construction equipment that can impact resources and visitor experience. The Seashore may explore options for sand management.

***Potential option: North Beach Access Improvements***

North Beach Access requires regular maintenance to keep access open. Erosion causes holes, ponding, and other problems. Improvements to the South Beach Access improved similar issues there. Improvement measures could similarly improve North Beach Access.

***Potential option: Adjust current sand management to be more protective of sensitive habitats.***

Currently, sand management does not specifically address habitat protection. Integrating maps of sand management activities with maps of sensitive habitats could enable the Seashore to better protect these resources.



**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR INPUT**

Are there other potential options regarding sand management that the Seashore should explore?

# Beach Driving

**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR INPUT**

Are there other potential options regarding beach driving that the Seashore should explore?

The Seashore's Gulf beach is divided into three areas:

- North Beach
- Malaquite Beach
- South Beach

Driving allows visitors access to opportunities for beach recreation, such as beachcombing, swimming, picnicking, camping, sunbathing, fishing, and bird and other wildlife watching, in a comparatively pristine and solitary environment; but can also impact visitors' experience if they prefer a non-motorized experience.

As visitation increases, the number of vehicles can also be expected to increase. The National Park Service is obligated to assess visitor capacity to protect resources and visitor experience. Once capacity is determined, if visitation exceeds capacity, the Seashore may need to take action.

Would changes to the current driving program better protect visitor experience and Seashore resources?

***Potential option: Assess visitor capacity at the Seashore to determine the need for beach driving permits to protect Seashore resources and visitor experience.***

***Potential option: Create a new road for thru traffic allowing a bypass of the first five miles (0MM – 5 MM) to improve visitor experience and reduce delays for vehicles traveling down island.***

- Moving vehicles headed down island to a back road could improve visitor experience and safety for visitors recreating in the first five miles of the Seashore and for visitors traveling down island.

***Potential option: Consider having vehicle-free pedestrian areas to enhance visitor safety and experience.***

# Hurricane and Storm Recovery Related to Closures

The Seashore's Hurricane Response Plan provides direction for closures before a hurricane but does not provide guidance for re-opening. Options for managing the Seashore after hurricanes include varying levels of documentation and recovery before re-opening to ensure staff and visitor safety and to protect resources. If facilities are damaged or destroyed, the park will assess whether to repair, rebuild, or permanently remove them.

***Potential option: Initial resource check and basic visitor safety only***

- Re-open the Seashore after an initial safety and resource check and basic visitor safety is provided.
- Limited facilities would be available as repairs and clean up continue.

***Potential option: Similar to the Hurricane Hanna response***

Keep the Seashore closed until staff records the conditions of infrastructure, facilities, and resources (closure time would depend on the severity of impacts). Open facilities in the following order:

- Front country, visitor center, and boardwalk (beaches remain closed).
- Other facilities as storm impacts are documented.
- Criteria for opening areas include safety, resource protection, and public preference.

***Potential option: Similar to Hurricane Hanna response, but areas would open earlier.***

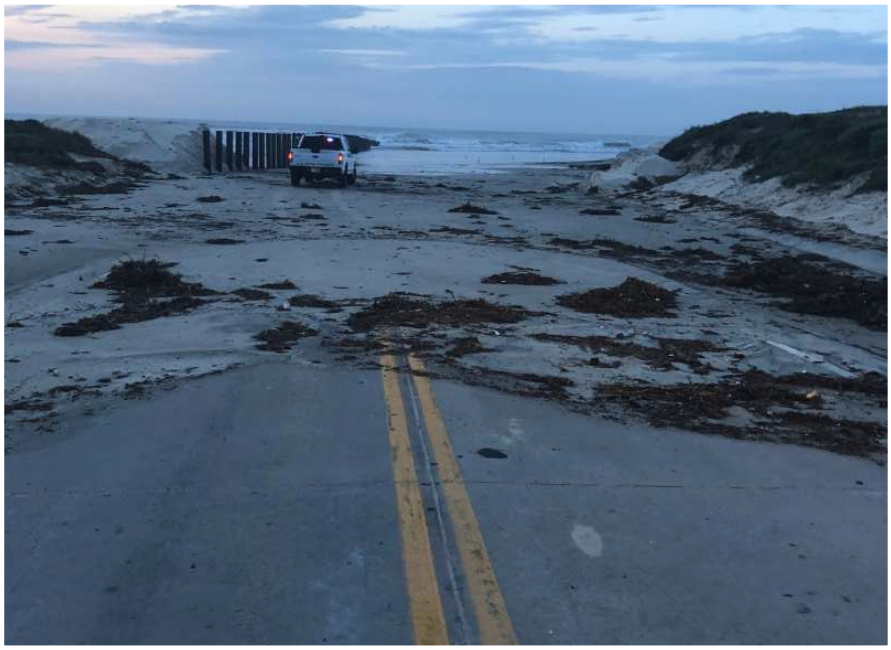
- Record damage in front country, then open (beaches may remain closed).
- Document damage at other areas, then open other facilities as work continues.

***Potential option: Remain closed until all facilities and infrastructure are repaired, clean-up is completed, and resources are surveyed.***

**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR INPUT**

Are there other potential options regarding storm recovery that the Seashore should explore?





# Marine Debris

The Seashore is located where two currents within the Gulf of Mexico converge, bringing large volumes of marine debris to the shores of Padre Island. These currents carry debris until they collide with opposing currents, often offshore of Padre Island, pushing marine debris onto the beach.

Large marine debris that washes onto the beach includes buoys, drums, boats or boat pieces, and tanks. Removal of large debris is usually completed by park maintenance staff. Several annual and on-going volunteer efforts help reduce small- and medium-sized debris.

***Potential option: Increase beach clean-up activities with local organizations.***

- Coordinate volunteers
- Coordinate removal of collected garbage

***Potential option: Consider ways to market trash cleanup and reduce trash left by visitors.***

***Potential option: Consider bi- or multi-lateral agreements at both the state level and the international level to address the source of marine debris, as most of the marine debris that washes onto the Seashore comes from offshore.***


**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR INPUT**

Are there other potential options for managing debris that the Seashore should explore?

# How to Comment

Public participation is an important element of the planning process. We welcome your ideas, concerns, suggestions, and potential topics for consideration.

You can provide input in several ways:

Submit comments electronically at:
https://parkplanning.nps.gov/Padre_beach_comments
(Preferred method)

Submit comments in person at any of the public meetings.

Submit written comments by hand delivery:

PAIS Superintendent
Attn: Beach Management
Malaquite Visitor Center
20420 Park Rd 22
Corpus Christi, TX 78418

Submit written comments by mail:

PAIS Superintendent
Attn: Beach Management
PO Box 181300
Corpus Christi, TX 78480

**Please submit your comments by March 14, 2023.**

*Comments will not be accepted except as specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.*

*Please note that your entire comment, including your personal information, may be made publicly available at any time. You can request that we withhold your personal identifying information from public view, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.*