

Sea Otter Island National Park

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN



[DRAFT TRAINING DOCUMENT]

Sea Otter Island National Park is a fictitious park developed specifically for training National Park Service employees.

This case study was created by the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands of Indiana University for the NPS Facility Management Program.

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I. PARK DESCRIPTION AND CONDITION

Park Purpose and Significance

Sea Otter Island National Park was established to preserve for the benefit of the American people certain historic properties, important Indian sites and traditions, natural resources such as diverse wildlife populations and their habitats. Those resources held special and unique to current and future generations of the American people. Included is the dynamic natural process of this coastal environment as an extraordinary example of geological and human changes; the scenic beauty and unique geologic features; and the vista of panoramic cliffs, fossil deposits, and brilliantly colored strata.

The park's enabling legislation (Appendix A) directed the park to preserve archeological features that pertain to the prehistoric races of ancestral American Indian tribes, as well as successive European immigrants to this island. The park is tasked with managing this unique island area intact for the purpose of scientific research and the enjoyment and enlightenment of the public. The park provides a variety of opportunities and a range of experiences, from solitude to high use, to assist visitors in learning about and enjoying park resources—without degrading those cultural and natural resources for which the park was established—thereby fostering an appreciation of Sea Otter Island and its resources.

Background

Sea Otter Island Natural History

Sculpted by dramatic tectonic forces as well as by slow, gradual erosion from wind, and water, Sea Otter Island National Park formed over millions of years. The defining features of the landscape are products of the head-on collision between two large tectonic plates. Part of the Dothan Formation, the island's rock consists primarily of greywacke, a slightly metamorphosed sandstone. At one time, Sea Otter Island was a rocky headland jutting out into the ocean from what is today Sphagnum, Oregon. Subsequent to the formation of Sea Otter Island's rocks, the combination of coastal erosion and sea-level rise over the past 100,000 years has detached the island from the coast of Oregon. The high sea level stands have been increasing over the last 15,000 years with the passing of the last Ice Age.

The natural resources of Sea Otter Island are impressive and continue to offer a strong draw to visitors: dramatic sea cliffs on the western coast, densely wooded temperate rainforests at the southern end of the island, spectacular views from the high, scenic ridgeline of the Otter's Back Trail, and the intricacies of the numerous inter-tidal pools and coves along the island's rocky shore. The island is home to a number of threatened and endangered species as well as more established and stable populations of native flora and fauna. The reintroduction and establishment of a sea otter population, however, remains a primary concern for the park management, given the high profile of this species with the general

public and the association of both the history and geology of the park with this species. After a release of 10 breeding pairs in 1994, the sea otter population expanded to 70 individuals but a combination of severe weather and poaching by local sport fishing interests has resulted in the reduction of the population to 13 individuals. A second release is under consideration.

Human Influences on Sea Otter Island

At 21 miles long and 8 miles wide, Sea Otter Island's 168 square miles of secluded beaches, rocky coasts, dense forests, and lush, open meadows have drawn visitors since ancient times. American Indian tribes from up and down the Pacific coast shared the use of Sea Otter Island for thousands of years. These tribes called the island Elakha (sea otter) since sea otters had once been numerous both on the island and along the nearby coastline. The physical shape of the island also resembles a swimming sea otter. The American Indian peoples of the area considered the island a particularly special place since Sea Otter Island offered both sacred sites for performing ritual ceremonies as well as productive food and material resources from both the land and sea.

In 1868, Russian trapper Anton Lukanin brought his family to the island, established a farm and homesteaded 160 acres on the central east coast. The Lukanin family shared the island with the American Indian peoples who continued to live on Sea Otter on a seasonal basis; they engaged in limited trade of apples for smoked fish as well as tools. Lukanin and his sons built a church on the island in 1869 so that his family could continue to practice their Russian Orthodox faith. The maintenance of the church by the family was abandoned after the deaths of several members of the Lukanin family from tuberculosis in 1871 and 1872. The ruin of Saint Grigorii church is a popular site for visitors today. Farming, logging, fishing, and keeping the lighthouse are just some of the roles members of the Lukanin family performed over the ensuing years on the island.

The American Indian population on Sea Otter Island was never very large, but by the mid-nineteenth century the several tribes who used the island had been reduced to 10% of their pre-European contact numbers. Disease and increased competition for the island's limited food supply from both the Lukanins and from fishing towns up and down the coast had weakened the tribes. By the middle of the nineteenth century, American Indian peoples had little ability to resist relocation by the U.S. government to reservations further north on the coast. In 1855, the U.S. and seven American Indian tribes on the Oregon coast concluded a treaty under which the tribes relinquished their interest in their lands in the Oregon Territory. In exchange, the tribes received a small reservation on the mainland and other privileges. Among the privileges was the ability of the seven tribes to take fish and game on certain ancestral lands. The treaty is known as the Treaty of Point Elliot (12 Stat. 927).

Some tribal members who had intermarried with European settlers did remain in the area. The seven tribes who shared the use of Sea Otter Island for centuries consolidated their numbers in 1927 and are now known as the Confederated Tribes of the Oregon Coast.

Sea Otter Island's Northern Coastline

Recently featured on a U.S. postage stamp, Rocky Point Lighthouse draws thousands of visitors to the park every year. For over a century, this Edwardian-style lighthouse served to warn wayward ships away from the treacherous rocks of Skull Shoals. The United States gained title to all of Sea Otter Island, including the lands on which the lighthouse stands, as a result of the 1846 Oregon Treaty with Great Britain that confirmed American ownership of what was then called Oregon Country. In 1848, the United States constituted this new land that included what is now Oregon, Washington, Idaho and western Montana as the Oregon Territory.

In 1849, the United States reserved a site at Rocky Point, along with adjacent submerged lands, for a possible future lighthouse. Because the U.S. reserved the lands prior to Oregon statehood (1859), the lands are under exclusive federal jurisdiction. State laws do not apply to park visitors on the lighthouse-reserved lands nor do state or local agents have any powers over park visitors on these lands.

Rocky Point Lighthouse was built in 1894 by the Lighthouse Service, which retained control of the lighthouse at the time of the park's founding in 1933. It was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1939. In that same year, and pursuant to the park enabling act, the Coast Guard transferred to NPS administration the lighthouse structure, the submerged lands, as well as the .5-acre upland site on which the lighthouse and its associated outbuildings are situated, but it retained responsibility for operating the light. The lighthouse was automated—and the classical Fresnel lens removed—in 1947. When Department of the Interior staff came to the island in 1932 to define and record assets for this new national park, Rocky Point Lighthouse was overlooked because the Lighthouse Service still administered the lighthouse. As a result, the Rocky Point Lighthouse does not appear in the park's enabling legislation.

Just to the north of Skull Shoals lies the submerged wreck of the *U.S.S. Dircksen*. The *Dircksen* has strong archeological connections to the park as well as the mainland. In 1898, the *Dircksen* was bringing much needed medical supplies to the area during a cholera epidemic when it foundered on the treacherous rocks off the island's northern tip. Most of the crew was lost, but the medicines were saved and the community overcame the ravages of the epidemic. The *Dircksen* rests on submerged lands in 200 feet of water within the underwater boundary of the park.

Land Use and Jurisdiction on Sea Otter Island

Although the United States gained title to all of Sea Otter Island under the Oregon Treaty of 1846, the federal government allowed the lands (other than the reservation for a potential lighthouse) to be open to disposal under the Homestead Act of 1862. Only one settler established a homestead (Lukanin) before the United States transferred the rest of the island to the State of Oregon in 1870.

Reacquired from the State of Oregon and the Lukanin family by the War Department in 1931 as a potential military base, Sea Otter Island soon attracted the interest of Eleanor Roosevelt. Following an appeal by the American Indian peoples who had once lived on the island, Mrs. Roosevelt was committed to help preserve the culture of the American Indians as it had been manifested on the island. A handful of American Indian elders had vivid memories of what it was like to have lived on the island before 1850s. Since 1915, ethnographers from the University of California, Berkeley, had been interviewing these elders to collect descriptions of American Indian ceremonies and rituals before they were lost as faded memories. During these years, the scientists also acquired a number of American Indian artifacts, which were identified, cataloged, and sent to the Smithsonian Institution. The detailed ethnological records of the island's American Indian inhabitants helped determine the area's value in being made a national park.

The State of Oregon ceded to the United States concurrent jurisdiction over the lands on Sea Otter Island in 1935, shortly after the United States acquired the island as a site for a possible U.S. Army Air Corps airfield. The base was never constructed. Thus, other than for lands in the Rocky Point Lighthouse Reservation (which are under exclusive federal jurisdiction), state and county laws not in conflict with federal laws and park regulations govern the conduct of park visitors on Sea Otter Island. Pursuant to the park enabling act, the War Department transferred control of its lands on the island to the NPS in 1938.

Established by Congress as a national park on July 27, 1933, Sea Otter Island National Park was created in large part to preserve the cultural history of thousands of years of human activity on the island. The Confederated Tribes were a force in persuading President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to establish this park. The researchers who had been working with the Sea Otter Island elders were invited by Mrs. Roosevelt to continue their work. These researchers documented the traditional spiritual and harvest sites on the island in black-and-white photographs, as well as locations of former temporary settlements and villages. Congress further recognized the purpose of preserving the Indian's cultural history in the 1994 amendment to the park enabling act. That amendment authorized members of the Confederated Tribes to gather plant and mineral materials in the park. Sea Otter Island National Park is one of a handful of national park system areas with similar special provisions.

Sea Otter Island National Park Built Resources

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) helped build many of the buildings and roads on the island as well as all the bridge masonry on the island. In the course of building and excavating, the CCC workers unearthed a large number of American Indian artifacts, which were also sent to the Smithsonian but only haphazardly cataloged. No graves were found or excavated. Repatriation of these artifacts to the Confederated Tribes is under discussion at present.

CCC workers spent two years building the stone causeway that links the island to the mainland to facilitate improved access to the park. Their primary directive in building the causeway was to anticipate the stresses wild Pacific seas and weather would have on the structure; however, the planners did not account for tectonic forces on the stability of the causeway. While the stone causeway appears strong above the surface of the ocean, underwater inspections have revealed some potentially hazardous stress fractures.

Construction of park facilities halted during World War II, but by 1949 the basic infrastructure of the park had been built. Sea Otter Island National Park became one of the first Federal units to embrace alternative energy sources. In the 1970s, the park acquired several solar collectors that were considered state-of-the-art at the time they were installed. Sets of these solar panels are installed on the roofs of the visitor center and the maintenance building. The new constructed wetlands wastewater system furthers this tradition of environmentally sensitive operational systems at Sea Otter Island National Park.

From the 1950s to the 1980s, Sea Otter Island National Park offered visitors an excellent natural history experience; however, interpretation of the human history of the island had not been well developed. More attention to the cataloging, organizing, interpreting, and displaying of American Indian artifacts occurred in the late 1980s. In the 1990s, new leadership at the park initiated the development of a joint agreement between the Confederated Tribes of the Oregon Coast and the national park. The draft agreement specifies terms of NPS and tribal consultation as mandated by several statutes and a memorandum issued by President William Jefferson Clinton of April 29, 1994, and Executive Order 13175 of November 6, 2000, entitled "Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments." The draft agreement also addresses how the NPS and the Confederated Tribes would implement the special provisions of the 1994 amendments to the park enabling statute.

Stemming from the 1994 amendment to the Indian Self Determination Act (P.L. 103-413), the Confederated Tribes seek to assume responsibility for all maintenance and interpretive functions in the park. At this time, the NPS is considering whether to transfer only certain park maintenance functions, such as

road and trail maintenance and revegetation and thus reduce the NPS maintenance and staff.

The majority of Sea Otter Island National Park is located on a 21-mile long x 8-mile wide-island just off the coast of southern Oregon. A historic stone causeway connects the island to the small town of Sphagnum, Oregon, 0.125 miles across the channel. The park boundaries also consist of seven acres of acquired lands on the mainland; the entrance station is located on this land parcel. Additional staff housing and a museum collections storage building are also located on the mainland portion of the park. The park's boundaries extend seaward for .25 miles from the mean high tide line and incorporate submerged lands that extend to that limit. However, the State of Oregon holds title to most of the submerged lands pursuant to the Submerged Lands Act of 1953. The sole exception is submerged land extending north from the mean high tide line at Rocky Point to the southerly side of Skull Shoals (approximately 800 acres). These submerged lands were reserved as part of the lighthouse reservation prior to Oregon gaining statehood in 1859. They remain as federal lands. Except for the vast majority of the submerged lands, the United States holds title to all the lands within the park. The park contains no private or state mineral or water rights.

Wilderness on and around Sea Otter Island

In 1984, Congress designated 42,000 acres of the park as wilderness. The wilderness portion of the park encompasses the uplands in the northern third of the island. The wilderness is pristine, containing no roads or structures. Traversed by trails only, the wilderness is accessible only to hikers and possible horseback riders. The NPS is required to administer these lands under the provisions of the Wilderness Act of 1964. The NPS is also governed by the provisions of the Wilderness Act that prohibit use of motor vehicles, mechanical transport, motorized equipment, landing of aircraft, structures and facilities except as necessary to meet the minimum requirement for administration of the area for the purpose of wilderness preservation.

The park's marine waters are closed to commercial fishing. This contentious issue was not always so clear. Congress included marine waters for 0.25 miles (seaward from mean high tide line) within the park boundary at its inception. Commercial fishing continued in these waters until 1983 when the NPS adopted new regulations at 36 CFR 2.3(d)(4) that prohibit commercial fishing except where specifically provided for in law. The statutes governing Sea Otter Island do not so provide. Nonetheless, disputes continued over the issue because there was some uncertainty over the extent of NPS control on marine waters in the park that overlie submerged lands owned by the State of Oregon. That uncertainty was resolved in 1996 when the NPS adopted clarifying language that makes NPS rules applicable to all waters within park boundaries of all parks, without regard to ownership of the submerged lands. 36 CFR 1.2(a)(3). All

commercial fishing ceased, although some abalone divers still persist in poaching.

The current administrative and support facilities are located on the mainland and the island. At park headquarters on the mainland, the park operates a storage facility for cultural items as well as 10 trailers for overflow staff housing. The park is planning on building a new curatorial facility on the mainland section of the park. This facility would be built on the mainland near the park's administrative offices and headquarters.

Sea Otter Island Concessions and Allowed Commercial Activity

As of Jan. 1, the concessions on the island consist of a fuel station at Fisherman's Dock, vending machines at Fisherman's Dock and a snack bar at the Sea Otter Island Visitor Center. A single concessionaire—Confederated Tribes Enterprises—operates all concession facilities. The concessionaire possesses a twenty-year contract with the NPS issued in 1994. The concessionaire both operates and owns the fisherman's dock, vending machine and the fuel station. A small fee is levied by the concessionaire for launching boats and use of the dock. Revenues are small, approximately \$75,000 per year.

The NPS has issued one commercial use license for guided recreational services. A kayaking tour company—Pacific Tides—offers guided kayak trips around the island, complete with overnight camping. The trips are from one to four days. Wild Oats Stables wishes to offer guided day-long horseback rides on certain of the island's trails and beaches but has thus far been refused.

The cooperating association for the park is the Sea Otter Island Natural History Association. The association operates a bookstore at the Sea Island Visitor Center and also sells other park-related and outdoor items. Annual receipts from sales have averaged about \$215,000 over the period from 1998-2002.

Summary of Natural Resources

Vegetation

- The park contains both forest and meadow wildflowers and shrubs typical of the Pacific Northwest. The majority of flowering plants bloom in June, and ranger-led wildflower walks occur throughout the month. Some varieties include: Sitka trillium, Oregon columbine, sand verbena, maidenhair fern, lady fern and the Oregon grape.
- While evergreens predominate in Sea Otter Island's forests, Western serviceberry, California black oak, bigleaf maple and other deciduous trees provide color throughout the month of October.
- An inventory of the fungus species on the island is underway.

A complete list of Sea Otter Island's vegetation species is located in the appendix of this document.

The vegetative community is wet Pacific Northwest coastal forest. This community is not a fire dependent community. Historically, natural fires burn in this community only after prolonged droughts. Tree ring research shows that after such a period, fires can be intense and widespread but they occur only centuries apart. The last major fire in the park occurred in the late 1700s. The forest has recovered into mature stands of Sitka spruce and western red cedar in the wettest areas while Douglas fir and western hemlock have grown up in the drier portions of the island.

The island has never been subject to intensive logging because of the difficulty of transporting logs from an island unconnected to the mainland. The forest is what some call "old-growth" virgin forest. The mature forest is essential habitat to spotted owls and marbled murrelets. Lack of deep soil and high soil pH have produced a few open prairies or meadows on the island. The fringes of these prairies are dominated by deciduous species. Some steep hillsides on the ocean side of the island are unforested, dominated instead by grasses and forbs. Although the island is 80% forested, these natural processes have thus produced a mosaic of vegetative types. The small offshore islands in the park are rocky seastacks with steep cliffs and narrow ledges.

Wildlife

- A Roosevelt elk herd roams Sea Otter Island, although the elk prefer to graze in the Pacific Meadows area, a popular site for visitors to see them.
- Mountain beavers are found in the streams; their dams create small lakes and wetlands that are fringed with alder. Trappers brought these animals to the island in the nineteenth century when the sea otter population declined.

- Many species of birds live on Sea Otter Island, including the endangered Marbled Murrelet, Northern Spotted Owl, California Brown Pelican and Western Snowy Plover. A colony of Rhinoceros Auklets nests on the rocky islands near Skull Shoals.
- Along with the Great Smoky Mountain region in Tennessee, the Pacific Northwest region is one of the two richest habitats for salamanders in the U.S. A small population of rare and unique Pacific Giant Salamanders lives on Sea Otter Island, along with two other salamander species. A rich variety of insects also inhabit the island. An inventory of the invertebrate species on the island is pending.
- In the winter and spring, visitors may catch a glimpse of migrating pods of grey whales off the west coast of Sea Otter Island. Stellar sea lions and harbor seals can also be seen on the rocky shoals that surround the island.
- Sea otters are the symbol of the park, although they were extirpated during the intense fur trade in the mid-1800s. The NPS, in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oregon Division of Wildlife, has reestablished a population of the species in the waters on the west (ocean) side of the island. These animals are listed as endangered and have the full protection of the Endangered Species Act.
- Predator species on the island include the pine marten, mink, weasel bobcat and coyote.

A complete list of Sea Otter Island's wildlife species is located in the appendix of this document.

Coastal and Marine Resources

- The park manages 73 miles of coastline around the island as well as 1.5 miles of coastline along the mainland. The park boundary extends up to .25 miles off shore of managed lands but the State of Oregon owns most of the submerged lands. The park owns 800 acres of submerged lands that lie off the north and east coasts of the island.
- The coastline, especially the northwest coast of Sea Otter Island, is particularly vulnerable to erosion from wind and water during fierce Pacific winter storms.
- The coastal hill slope on the southwest side of the island between West Campground and Mariner's Memorial Vista is unstable and prone to landslides. Landslides affect Island Loop Road in this area of the park.
- Potential future sea-level change may affect park infrastructure and developments.

Water Resources

- Three perennial water sources can be found on the island: Salmon Leap Creek, Fish Hatch Creek, and the Elakha River (a National Wild and Scenic River).
- Given Sea Otter Island's fragile, limited fresh water sources, water conservation is extremely important. In order to reduce and/or eliminate the need to import fresh water supplies to the island, efficient and wise use of water resources on the island remains a perennial management objective for the park. The park is in the process of determining the visitor carrying capacity of this island for long-range planning.
- The island's three estuaries and two wetland regions are also important areas of high biodiversity and are sensitive to disturbance by human activities.
- Potential oil spills from boat traffic around the island may impact park water quality and coastal habitat.
- The U.S. possesses a federal reserved water right to all of the flow of the island's three natural streams, confirmed in a McCarran Act adjudication in 1978.

Air Resources

- Given the prevailing westerly winds from the Pacific, the existing air quality at the park has tended to be good. Sea Otter Island National Park is a Class I area since the Clean Air Act of 1977 designated all parks in existence as of 1977 as Class I. During summer months when prevailing winds sometimes shift to the south, mainland power plants and mill operations have contributed to the minor pollution levels affecting the park. The normally excellent visibility (of from 80 to 100 kilometers) declines under such circumstances.