

University of North Carolina at Asheville

The Outer Banks: The People, Government and Change

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The people of the Outer Banks of North Carolina have a colorful history which included pirates and outlaws as well as heroic lifesavers. On Bodie, Hatteras and Ocracoke islands natives come from hardy, self-reliant stock. For nearly three hundred years they have endured hurricanes and nor'easters, storms which seasonally tear up the east coast, which occasionally rip the islands apart. Their reward for this has been to enjoy the stark beauty of the islands and to make a living from the bounty of ocean and sound. In the 1950's the federal government in the form of the National Park Service (NPS) told them that it was time to share their islands and in exchange they would reap the benefits of the tourism industry. Although they feared this radical change in their lives and the loss of their independence they bowed to the overwhelming force of the government as they would to the forces of nature. They adjusted and created an economy based on tourism. Later, the NPS and national conservation organizations informed them that tourism should not be the highest priority for the island, that it took too great a toll on the wildlife. Regardless of promises previously made, the residents of the Outer Banks adjusted to the environmentalist pressure. The shift in thinking after the Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CHNS) was created from a tourist oriented management policy to a more environmentally minded approach confirmed the early fears that the residents of the Outer Banks held about the uncertainty of living under a federal government agency.

The most sweeping history of the National Parks in America was written by Alfred Runte. In *National Parks: The American Experience*, Runte described the changing philosophy of the national park system in the United States.¹ Runte argued that the approach used to established the early national parks could no longer be applied. He outlined the shift in conservationist thinking from the preservation of monumental scenery, through alliances with the

¹ Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987).

tourism industry, to the more recent environmentally oriented stance. Runte's overarching narrative of the national park history is told from the modern environmental perspective. Much of the 19th and 20th centuries involved the slow transformation of early concepts of preserving monumental, but monetarily worthless, land into the recognition of the importance of preserving entire ecosystems. In order to pass legislation in the political arena some conservationists allied themselves with tourist industries to promote parks.² Later conservationists of the environmental movement in the 60's and 70's had difficulty breaking from these patterns. Runte clearly established that concepts of National Park management have consistently changed over time.

Most secondary sources which critically addressed the Cape Hatteras National Seashore did so from the perspective of policy change in regards to environmentalism. The following monographs cover the essential perspectives on the split between the environmentalist ideology and the proponents of development based on a tourist economy. Understanding the underlying issues of this fundamental division in National Park management policy and history is essential for constructing any argument about a particular park.

The recent debate over how the National Parks in the United States should be managed revolved around two ideas of conservation and active use. Wilderness preservationists and environmental conservationists generally hold that there should be places, such as National Parks, left unmarred by Man's touch. On the other side, pro-concessioners supported the economic developments from tourists visiting the National Parks and who benefited from increased traffic. *Mountains Without Handrails* by Joseph Sax described the American National Park history from the perspective of the conservationists. He argued that many conservation and

² Runte, 105

preservationists were concerned with how people perceived the purpose of the park.³ They wanted people to use national parks with a reverence for wilderness as opposed to thinking about parks as planned attractions like Disneyworld.⁴ He called it contemplative recreation versus planned or conventional recreation. *Stealing the National Parks* by Don Hummel told the National Park's history from the concessioners' perspective.⁵ Concessioners operate the facilities such as trains, hotels and restaurants that cater to park visitors. These people believe that the national parks were designated for use by the American people. They are generally opposed to the environmental movement, which they perceive as elitist groups trying to reduce access to the majority of people so that it can be more peacefully enjoyed by the elite minority.⁶

Though coming from different perspectives, there is room for compromise. Preservationists often argue that concessioners who are economically motivated are ruining the perception of the National Parks, even if they are not necessarily physically ruining them. Sax's ultimate conclusion was that compromise between the high traffic that a national park attracts and preservationist ideology was necessary. Concessioners are needed to provide basic services for people to access the national parks and can peacefully exist in many roles. Sax proposed that there are ways to both facilitate park use and create a sense of contemplative recreation in park visitors.

In many other recent National Park histories there is little credit given to individual entrepreneurs who provide services at the parks for profit. Hummel goes a long way toward explaining the concessioner's positions. The tendency of environmentalists was to demonize any

³ Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 16.

⁴ Sax, 13.

⁵ Don Hummel, *Stealing the National Park: The Destruction of Concession and Park Access* (Bellevue, Washington: Merril Press, 1987).

⁶ Hummel, 2-6.

economically motivated companies by connecting them with the image of greedy mining and lumber companies ready to rape the nation's land. Hummel effectively points out that the environmental movement is just as political and self-serving as other groups can be. However, Hummel makes the same mistake by using emotional language to create a negative image of the environmentalist movement.

Two sources covered the essential history of the CHNS from its inception in the 1930's to the mid 1970s. *The Creation and Establishment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore: The Great Depression through Mission 66*, by Cameron Brinkley covered the early years until 1966.⁷ *Termination II: How the National Park Service Annulled its "Commitment" To a Beach Erosion Policy at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore* by Robert Behn in many ways picked up where Brinkley left off.⁸ Brinkley's work, published in June 2008, was an administrative history commissioned by the National Park Service to present a comprehensive image of the park history to help park officials understand the park service past. According to the National Park Service Bureau Historian, Janet McDonnell, "they relate how particular parks and functions of the Service originated and how they evolved..." and are "used broadly to cover movements leading to park establishment, legislative background, and other contributing developments."⁹ In *Termination II* Robert Behn examined how the federal government discontinued beach erosion

⁷ Cameron Brinkley, *The Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore: The Great Depression through Mission 66*. (Atlanta: Cultural Resources Division, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, 2007).

⁸ Robert D. Behn and Martha A. Clark, *Termination II: How the National Park Service Annulled its "Commitment" To a Beach Erosion Control Policy at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore* (Duke University, Center for Policy Analysis, Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs: 1976).

⁹ *National Park Service Administrative History: A Guide*, U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service 2004. (Accessed through <<http://www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSHistory/guide.pdf>> on October 20, 2008.) 3.

control at the CHNS.¹⁰ Erosion control was essential because it allowed for roads to be maintained and protected the island's infrastructure, such as buildings and power wires, which supported tourism on the Outer Banks. He argued that the NPS made a commitment to a policy of beach erosion control in exchange for the land to create the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Behn examined how new scientific understanding led the NPS to abandon this commitment. These two sources cover the essential information about the beginning of the CHNS.

The Cape Hatteras National Seashore contains three islands: Bodie Island, Hatteras Island and Ocracoke Island.¹¹ It stretches 72 miles along the Outer Banks of North Carolina. These barrier islands are slender ribbons of sand off the eastern coast of North Carolina. Hatteras Island is the largest extending 33 miles from Oregon Inlet to Hatteras Inlet. Once connected, the divide between Ocracoke and Hatteras Island was created by a hurricane in September of 1846. Although at its widest it is only three miles across from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pamlico Sound, Hatteras contains a rich and varied environment which includes a maritime forest, salt marches, lagoons and tidal creeks in addition to miles of beautiful beaches. The eight northernmost miles are reserved as the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, a resting place for migratory birds on the Atlantic flyway. The Outer Banks at its furthest juts out into the sea approximately 30 miles from the mainland. Nestled within the National Seashore are eight small villages which are surrounded by park land. Running North to South, these villages are known respectively as Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo, Avon, Buxton, Frisco and Hatteras. Further south of Hatteras lies Ocracoke Island, with Ocracoke village near its southernmost point. Off the coast of Hatteras Island the warm waters of the Gulf Stream meet the cold waters of the Labrador Current. This

¹⁰ Behn, 6.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for maps and photos

clash results in rich fishing grounds, frequent dangerous storms, and has given rise to the hazardous seas of the Diamond Shoals. This deadly combination has caused the area to be known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic, for its frequent shipwrecks.¹²

The creation of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore was a process that spanned more than 20 years. The legislation that established the park was signed in 1937 by congress.¹³ Funds were made available in 1952 for the State of North Carolina working with the National Park Service to purchase enough land to create the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The money came mainly through a private donation from the Avalon and Old Dominion Foundations under the auspices of Paul Mellon, son of famed banker Andrew Mellon. His donation of approximately \$618,000 was anonymous and matched by the state of North Carolina.¹⁴ The park was formally dedicated on April 24, 1958, 21 years after the original legislation was signed.¹⁵

The exact nature of the NPS mandate was unclear. The NPS had to negotiate with the residents of the Outer Banks for land to create the CHNS and these residents had reservations about giving their land for a National Park. When the National Park Service was created by congress it was designed, “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means

¹² Impact Assessment, Inc, “Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage”, Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005. 23-5.

¹³ “An Act to provide for the establishment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore in the State of North Carolina, and for other purposes, 50 Stat. 669. Reproduced in, Cameron Brinkley, *The Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore: The Great Depression through Mission 66*. (Atlanta: Cultural Resources Division, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, 2007), 216.

¹⁴ Brinkley, 99.

¹⁵ Brinkley, 181.

as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”¹⁶ This phrasing would prove to be open for wide interpretations and would be at the core of many national park controversies. In the specific case of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore the shifting focus between wilderness conservation and economic interests based on tourism directly influenced the lives of the people of the Outer Banks. Just as National Park priorities changed over time, so too did the opinions of the local people of the Outer Banks about the Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the National Park service which operates it. Previous histories that have addressed these people’s concerns tended to downplay the early apprehension that these ‘Bankers’, as people of the Outer Banks are sometimes referred, had. The federal government in the form of the NPS was a new thing for the secluded people on the Outer Banks.

Before the CHNS was created the islands had little formal government. Jim Rush acknowledged this issue in an article for the *Coastland Times* about establishing town boundaries for the Park. “This will probably be more difficult than it appears because the towns on the Outer Banks have no municipal organization comparable to that of Winston-Salem. There are no mayors, for instance; and no city halls or police departments.”¹⁷ When the NPS approached the people of the Outer Banks about formally establishing the Park, representatives from the villages had to be elected because they had none.¹⁸ Furthermore, establishing property lines was very difficult because of a tradition of shared access and the shifting nature of the sand islands. “There is no more complicated titles than in Dare; this is due to typography, geography and tradition.”

¹⁶ Runte, 104.

¹⁷ Jim Rush, “What the Park Could Mean to the People of Ocracoke,” *Coastland Times*, Sept 26, 1952).

¹⁸ Preston Basnett, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, October 9, 1950, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

said William Dunn, lawyer involved with NPS land acquisition.¹⁹ The drifting stretches of sand that formed the islands were difficult to precisely measure without the aid of modern GPS. The relative isolation of this residential area meant that few things operated in an official manner.

The people of the Outer Banks were very independent and self sufficient. They came from an isolated part of the country, which was difficult to access until recently. The Herbert C. Bonner Bridge which connects Hatteras Island to the more populous Nags Head was not built until 1962. Prior to that ferries and boats were the only means on and off the island.²⁰ The first paved roads were built on the island in the late 1940's and in 1952 a road was completed from the northern tip of Hatteras to the southernmost village.²¹ The Bankers had been an isolated and self sufficient people for generations. As a confederate officer said of the Bankers during the civil war, "The islanders mingle but little with the world; apparently indifferent to this outside sphere, they constitute a world within themselves."²² Family names such as Midget, Baum, Balance and Austin, which are still very popular on Hatteras Island, appear in the Taxable records in Currituck County in 1755.²³ The relative isolation of the islanders led to the formation of a dialect known as the Outer Banks Brogue. Some consider the peculiar pronunciation to be a holdover from early Anglican speech because of its use of relic forms of English abandoned in

¹⁹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, "Bill about Land along Outer Banks runs into Stormy weather," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1953.

²⁰ John R Maiolo, *Final Report Using Socioeconomic Information to Assess the Impact of Surface Transportation in North Carolina Coastal Communities*. (The Center for transportation and the Environment, North Carolina State University: March 1995.) 9.

²¹ Brinkley, 131.

²² David Stick, *The Outer Banks of North Carolina: 1584-1958*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1958) 155.

²³ *Abstract of Wills and Other Records, Currituck and Dare Counties NC 1663-1850: Taxables of Currituck 1755* (North Carolina State Library No 105) 21-34.

other areas and its similarity to the English accent.²⁴ The island communities had a long and tight knit past, which was opened only recently.

When it came time for the State of North Carolina and the NPS to formally acquire land for the CHNS after the unexpected Mellon donation in 1952, they ran into considerable opposition. An early meeting held in Morehead city was protested by Bankers because it was held too far away and was not thoroughly announced. The protestors felt their opinions were not being taken seriously.²⁵ Bankers signed petitions against the creation of a park. One of these was signed by the entire adult population of Buxton in opposition.²⁶ As Banker Calvin Meekins said, residents feared that the government would “take all the land except their homes, and that their age-long fishing and hunting rights would be taken away from them.”²⁷ One opponent said that “acquisition of the Dare land... would reduce the county’s taxable property to the extent that the remaining taxpayers would be unable to stand the burden.”²⁸ The Bankers expressed opposition for a variety of reasons.

Part of the early opposition to the park stemmed from the recent road completion. As Calvin Meekins wrote to Congressman Lindsay Warren in June of 1952, “Ever since the people

²⁴ William C. Friday, “The evolving language of the people of the Outer Banks,” *Outer Banks Culture*, <http://www.outerbeaches.com/OuterBanksCulture>.

²⁵ Brinkley, 104-105.

²⁶ W.L. Scarborough, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, March 26, 1950, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

²⁷ *Norfolk Virginia-Pilot*, “Outerbanks reassured by Park Director” *Norfolk VA-Pilot*, Nov 1, 1952.

²⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, “Bill about land along Outer Banks Runs into Stormy Weather,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1953.

knew a hard-surface road was to be a reality there, they saw no need for a Park.”²⁹ With the establishment of a road some opponents argued that the park would stifle the growth of communities. As one petition against the park put it, should the park come to pass “all future prospects for development and progress would be killed.”³⁰ Some people saw that the road would bring economic development and questioned what more the park could offer.

Park Service public relations garnered opposition rather than support. The NPS failed to provide sufficient information such as maps to clarify property lines and proposed park boundary lines.³¹ When groups or individuals requested information from the NPS they were sent an outdated Q&A brochure which had been prepared in 1941. This brochure included a proposal for a much larger national park than was being considered at that time, along with other misleading information.³² In a visit to the islands in 1952, Congressman Herbert C. Bonner commented on the “miserable job of public relations,” by the NPS.³³

The state officials and NPS personnel involved with the CHNS came to understand that the general population of the Outer Banks was being influenced by a small core of park opponents. Resident historian and Seashore Commission member David Stick described the situation in 1952. He said, “A high-pressure campaign against the project has been waged by a

²⁹ Calvin Meekins, Letter to Lindsay Warren, June 17, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

³⁰ W.L. Scarborough, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, March 26, 1950, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

³¹ Theodore Rondthaler, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, September 26, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

³² David Stick, Letter to George Ross, Director of Department of Conservation and Development, July 3, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

³³ Herbert C. Bonner, Letter to Lindsay Warren, September 22, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

group of non-resident property owners and most of the information available to residents of the area has been supplied by this group of active and vociferous opponents.”³⁴ Congressman Herbert C. Bonner identified Andrew Austin and W.A. Worth as two individuals actively influencing the local opinion of the park in a letter to Comptroller General and previous Congressman for Dare County, Lindsay Warren.³⁵ Andrew Austin was a long time resident of the island who was opposed to the idea of the park and felt people were being tricked into agreement.³⁶ W.A. Worth was heavily invested in land on the Outer Banks and was a resident of Elizabeth City, some distance from Hatteras. He appeared to be one of the main individuals referenced when phrases such as “non-resident property owners” were used at the time and was perhaps involved with spreading misinformation.

Winfield, or W.A., Worth was among the group of large CHNS-area property owners who sued the government over land condemnation cases. Other parties included Samuel Jones, who owned a significant portion of Ocracoke, and Frank Britton, a land owner on Hatteras Island.³⁷ Worth himself owned a large land tract on Bodie Island, just north of Hatteras Island.³⁸ During this period the NPS condemned properties which did not have clear title to allow them to be passed to the state. The man in charge of land acquisition for the NPS, A.C. Stratton said the primary use of land condemnations by the NPS was “friendly” and was used to clear up land

³⁴ David Stick, Letter to George Ross, Director of Department of Conservation and Development, July 3, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

³⁵ Herbert C. Bonner, Letter to Lindsay Warren, August 1, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

³⁶ Robert H. Fowler, “Native of Hatteras Says Park Proposal Opposed,” *Greensboro Daily News*, January 2, 1952.

³⁷ *Coastland Times*, “Over Half of Ocracoke Value Owned by Jones,” *Coastland Times*, March 13, 1953.

³⁸ Brinkley, 125.

titles which were difficult to decipher because of uncertain land deeds.³⁹ However, Worth refused to allow his unclear land titles to be condemned peaceably until the courts ruled on June 25, 1953 to seize the lands in question. Worth subsequently fought the NPS through the court system to receive more money for his lands.⁴⁰ These large property owners could afford the legal costs associated with the protracted negotiations but most people could only take what the NPS offered.

Along with opposition to the park which was based on outdated or incorrect information, there was a concern among some people about living under the shadow of a government agency. These concerns were not grounded on specific issues but rather on the uncertain position of the villages soon to be surrounded by a National Park. As Hatteras resident Andrew S. Austin put it, “We don’t mind the idea so much but there is just no way of knowing what the restrictions will be.”⁴¹ Julian B. Gray, a resident of Salvo, expressed his anxiety very succinctly in a letter to Herbert C. Bonner in July of 1952. He said, “I do not like the idea...of having to live under any park rules and regulations.”⁴² Gray and other islanders were worried about what might happen to their lives once the Park was in place. Gray approached Bonner because he was concerned about his family. Gray wrote that one of his wishes was to be able to pass on his land to his children and that he would have little else for them if the government took his property. The tone of his letter was genuine and sincere, that of an older man faced with an uncertain future for his children. He seemed to have understood that perhaps there was more at stake than land but also

³⁹ *Coastland Times*, “N.C. Lands Given Monday to The Seashore Park,” *Coastland Times*, December 16, 1952.

⁴⁰ Brinkley, 125-127.

⁴¹ Robert H. Fowler, “Native of Hatteras Says Park Proposal Opposed,” *Greensboro Daily News*, January 2, 1952.

⁴² Julian B. Gray, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, July 22, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

a way of life.⁴³ This fear would eventually prove well founded.

On July 8, 1952, W.A. Worth wrote a letter to Congressman Herbert C. Bonner to voice his concern about the coming park. He spoke specifically of hunting and fishing rights but in so doing also illustrated his apprehension about the basic uncertainty of dealing with the government. In an examination of the act creating the park in 1937, Worth emphasized his unease that the rights of the people were at the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior and were “subject to such rules and regulations as the said Secretary may deem necessary in order to protect the area for recreational use as provided for in this Act.”⁴⁴ He further stressed that the law also empowered the Commission in charge of creating the park to condemn land and other property, which he saw as a nefarious but legal way to take land from people. He concluded that “the statute is all we have to go by as far as to the respective rights of the people and the Commission.”⁴⁵ He saw that though the NPS verbally expressed intentions, it also left itself legal room to change its actions.

In response to the “campaign of misinformation,” that Stick described, supporters of the Park called for government representatives to personally explain the plans for the CHNS. An article in the *Coastland Times* said that, “no less than the Director himself and others who will be working on the project should come down to the area, and confer with the people.”⁴⁶ The

⁴³ Julian B. Gray, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, July 22, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

⁴⁴ W.A. Worth, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, July 8, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

⁴⁵ W.A. Worth, Letter to Herbert C. Bonner, July 8, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

⁴⁶ *Coastland Times*, “What the park service might do to clear up misunderstandings,” *Coastland Times*, Sept 26, 1952.

attorney general Harry McMullen suggested to the Director of the Department of the Interior that “a more liberal view of the designation of land for the village,” would settle much opposition, if clearly presented to the residents of the Outer Banks.⁴⁷ Hatteras Seashore Commission member David Stick called for a series of meetings in each village along the proposed national seashore and for full information to be given to every interested person by a ranking official.⁴⁸ This recommendation was taken seriously and in October of 1952, a team of NPS representatives and government officials toured the islands to explain the details of the coming National Park.

After visiting with the people of Hatteras and Ocracoke, NPS director Conrad Wirth published “A letter to the People of the Outer Banks” on October 27, 1952 in the *Coastland Times*.⁴⁹ This letter became the cornerstone that Outer Banks residents cited in their relationship with the NPS. In this letter Wirth identified four major concerns about the coming park. These were boundary lines for community expansion, hunting and fishing rights, and beach access. He addressed these issues in a very straight forward manner. In order to protect the beaches the NPS planned to purchase all the beach front land, to quell opposition the NPS reduced the ocean front to include “only those lands which are necessary to protect and control the sand dunes.”⁵⁰ This part of his letter was understood by Outer Banks residents to be a commitment beach erosion control and would be consistently referenced when beach erosion control became an issue in the 1970’s. Wirth also guaranteed the protection of hunting and fishing rights and said “there will

⁴⁷ Harry McMullen, Letter to Hillory Tolson, August 6, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

⁴⁸ David Stick, Letter to George Ross, Director of Department of Conservation and Development, July 3, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

⁴⁹ Conrad L. Wirth, “Letter to the People of the Outer Banks,” *The Coastland Times*, October 27, 1952, 3.

⁵⁰ Wirth, “Letter,” 7

always be access to the beach for all people.” His only caveat was that there may be need for certain regulations such as specific beach accesses to prevent dune erosion.⁵¹ He closed his letter with a reminder that the government would provide no accommodations for the expected increase in tourism and that the people of the banks should be prepared to accommodate these people because the greatest value of the properties in the community “will be for use of taking care of the public.” He warned residents not to sell their land to property speculators who were already buying land. He told them the value of land will rise and to hold onto it as their own reward for having occupied the land so long.⁵² This letter was considered a cornerstone in ending widespread vocal opposition to the park.

The promise of growth from tourism was a part of the package that the Bankers welcomed when they accepted the CHNS. Newspapers and letters frequently cited the financial gain that the residents of Dare County would receive from tourist dollars. Cape Hatteras Commission member David Stick said in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, “Under the park plan the villages would be excluded from the park area, giving the people the advantage of thousands of tourists who would travel to the nation's only seashore park.”⁵³ In response to a letter from park opponent Preston Basnett, Congressman Bonner said, “The tourist trade of America is the largest cash business in the world and this park would bring more new money in the Outer Banks area than will ever get there in any other manner.”⁵⁴ Park officials frequently and explicitly

⁵¹ Wirth, “Letter,” 5.

⁵² Wirth, “Letter,” 8.

⁵³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, “Outer Banks Park Principles Explain Their Role in Issue,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, August 21, 1952.

⁵⁴ Herbert C. Bonner, Letter to Preston Basnett, October 16, 1950, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

touted the economic benefits of tourism.

The economic model of the Great Smokey Mountain National Park, which brought amazing growth to park gateway cities like Gatlinburg, Tennessee was used as an example of what people could expect from the park. In July of 1952, Congressman Bonner responded to a letter from W.A. Worth and concluded, "I am convinced now more than ever that the park will bring greater return in a monetary way to the people of Dare County and offer a greater opportunity to more people than anything that has happened in North Carolina since the creation of the Western Carolina parks."⁵⁵ Bonner had seen the effects of the Great Smokey Mountain National Park and had encouraged people to prepare for that sort of growth, with the assumption that the park service would support them in it. A.C. Stratton, the man in charge of land acquisition for the NPS at Cape Hatteras, argued to reporters that the NPS planned to encourage growth in the areas surrounding the park. One report from the *Raleigh News & Observer* said, "As examples of how national parks build up their sections, he (Stratton) pointed to the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Great Smoky Mountain National Parks."⁵⁶ The economic model of a National Park which supported and encouraged tourism was presented to the people of the Outer Banks as the future they should expect.

Before the National Park was created the population of the Outer Banks had been declining. In an interview after Conrad Wirth visited the Outer Banks, Victor Meekins, the editor of the *Coastland Times* estimated that the populations of Ocracoke and Hatteras had decreased by about one-third over the previous 25 years. His total for the eight villages along the 'Banks'

⁵⁵ Herbert C. Bonner, Letter to W.A. Worth, July 1, 1952, in Herbert C. Bonner Papers (3710), National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

⁵⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, "Bill About Land Along Outer Banks Runs Into Stormy Weather," *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 11, 1952.

was “about 2,800, 20 or 25 years ago, compared with 1,800 today.”⁵⁷ Historically the population had also been shrinking due to shifting commercial opportunity and beach erosion. The island of Portsmouth just south of Ocracoke was once a busy port town of over 500 which had virtually vanished due to erosion and decline in business.⁵⁸ The economic opportunity that the Park offered should not be underestimated.

For more than 15 years after the park was established the NPS supported infrastructure and growth. Almost immediately the Outer Banks began to grow.⁵⁹ Newspapers were full of articles proclaiming the new business growth. “Construction of the new all-paved highway between Nags Head and Hatteras and the establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore is resulting in much new building here... which until a few years ago was one of the most isolated residential areas in the nation.”⁶⁰ Traffic increased so dramatically that the ferry system, though twice improved, was chronically overworked.⁶¹ This led to the creation of the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge in 1962 to accommodate the increased traffic.⁶² However, the NPS policy which supported this increase in traffic was flawed.

The commitments the NPS laid out in Wirth’s “Letter,” of 1952 were based on the 1930’s assumption that beach erosion control would be a simple project. NPS officials believed it would beach control would eventually require minimum maintenance. As NPS Director Allyn Hanks

⁵⁷ *Norfolk Virginia-Pilot*, “Outer Banks reassured by Park Director,” *Norfolk VA-Pilot*, November 1, 1952.

⁵⁸ David Stick, *The Outer Banks of North Carolina: 1584-1958*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1958) 87, 89.

⁵⁹ *Norfolk Virginia—Pilot*, “Cape Hatteras Seashore Park Seen Booster of Carolina Tourist Trade,” January 11, 1953.

⁶⁰ “Building Booming on Hatteras With Establishment of Park,” Aycock Brown, 2/13/1953 *Norfolk, VA Pilot*.

⁶¹ Brinkley, 133-136.

⁶² Maiolo, 9.

said in 1957, the Park Service planned to “carry on the same type of protective work which was executed by WPA and CCC forces,” in the 1930’s.⁶³ This work involved the creation of artificial sand dunes covered in vegetation to act as anchors. These dunes prevented storm surge from covering the island entirely with water and protected houses, buildings and roads. Before the Park Service committed to maintaining the dunes, the Outer Banks residents built their homes away from the dangerous ocean front.⁶⁴ Hanks referenced a proposed erosion control budget when he said, “the continuing program, changing from construction to maintenance as time goes on, will eventually be accomplished almost entirely with maintenance funds.” Hanks believed that erosion control would be a simple and low-cost affair.⁶⁵ The ecological research of Robert Dolan and Paul Godfrey in the 1970’s exposed the error in that assumption and the subsequent change in NPS policy confirmed the fears of early opponents of the park.

During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, understanding about the science of beach erosion control changed. In a paper published in 1976 after the NPS had stopped funding beach erosion control, author Robert Behn examined how the National Park Service annulled its commitment to beach erosion control at Cape Hatteras. Behn examined the scientific and political steps which effected the change in NPS policy. The beach erosion research of scientists Robert Dolan and Paul Godfrey proved that scientific evidence did not support old thinking about erosion control. Behn said, “By 1972, not only had the scientists within the NPS accepted the work of Godfrey and Dolan, but their ideas were also having an impact on the leadership of

⁶³ Allyn F. Hanks, “A General Summary of Plans For Development of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area,” *The Coastland Times*, January 11, 1957.

⁶⁴ Robert H. Fowler, “Native of Hatteras Says Park Proposal Opposed,” *Greensboro Daily News*, January 2, 1952.

⁶⁵ Allyn F. Hanks, “A General Summary of Plans for Development of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area,” *The Coastland Times*, January 11, 1957.

the Park Service and Department of the Interior.”⁶⁶ Dolan and Godfrey’s work was powerful enough to cause policy change.⁶⁷

Armed with Godfrey and Dolan’s new ideas about beach erosion, the federal government found the commitment of Conrad Wirth no longer applicable. In a “Report to the Secretary of the Interior” in 1971 a three member board confirmed Dolan’s ideas about beach erosion and their policy implications. “The team is of the opinion that artificial dunes should be abandoned where N.P.S. owns land from ocean to inland waters. The team regards as most unfortunate the earlier N.P.S. commitment to provide access to beach, protection to private owners and agreement not to acquire additional land.”⁶⁸ Though it would take more effort and legislation to end the NPS beach erosion control project, it was only a matter of time until the program was finished in 1973.

When the Park Service announced its cessation of beach erosion control there was an outcry by Outer Banks locals but the environmental movement had been gaining momentum in the country at this time and the NPS was ready for this kind of change in management. As Alfred Runte put it, “more visitation, better roads, and improved accommodations – the traditional concerns of National Park management – were gradually challenged during the 1960’s and 1970’s by the need to address ecological issues.”⁶⁹ Behn also acknowledged increased environmental awareness as a major factor in media support for the new NPS policy, citing the

⁶⁶ Behn, 17.

⁶⁷ See Appendix 2 for damage caused by dunes. The sand dunes occasionally constrict the power of the ocean and cause new inlets to be formed, which cut the islands apart. This was from Hurricane Isabel in 2003.

⁶⁸ The Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Building and Monuments, “Report to the Secretary of the Interior, Rogers C.B. Morton: Inspection of Certain Field Areas of the National Park System” (Washington, D.C.: The Department of the Interior, 1971).

⁶⁹ Runte, 197.

inauguration of the first Earth Day in 1970 as a sign of the nation's "new ecological consciousness."⁷⁰ Whatever the causes, the NPS leaned more toward conservation than increased park use and the people of the Outer Banks were left to handle the changing tides without NPS funding. The people of the Outer Banks felt deeply betrayed by this change in policy and relations with the NPS after this point were strained.

In a series of oral histories conducted by the NPS and in conjunction with the Southern Oral History project at the University of North Carolina, residents of the Outer Banks who had seen the change from seclusion to National Seashore were interviewed. As Hatteras Island resident Dwight Burrus said, where once there had been a feeling of sharing the land, a "commonality," the park service felt it needed to police the land. "The reason that the Park Service doesn't, way down deep, get along with the local people, is that they (the locals) have a history of the way things were. And the Park Service has an agenda of the way things are supposed to be."⁷¹ Commercial fisherman, Joe Farrow, complained about restrictions on his fishing rights and said, "The Park Service has gone against their own agreement. They got it written down on paper, that they would run the park but not interfere with the local people's ability to make a living. Then they come back and say, 'Rules are made to be changed.' Well, I don't like that."⁷² William Hooper, long time resident of Salvo who left the island around 1950 and later returned, said, "We've lost a lot of our freedom, the native people have... It's not like

⁷⁰ Behn, 66.

⁷¹ Dwight Burrus, oral history interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," (Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005), 155

⁷² Joe Farrow, oral history interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, October 2002, "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," (Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005), 274.

the home I left; it's nothing like the home I left."⁷³ These residents seemed to lament the loss of their island culture in the change that the CHNS brought.

Many recent clashes between Outer Banks residents and the NPS stemmed from the change in thinking that occurred during the 1970's. Wirth's "Letter to the People" is still referenced. Chairman of the Dare County Commissioners Warren Judge quoted Wirth's letter in a senate hearing on access to the beach for off-road vehicles in June of 2008.⁷⁴ One environmental group which supported beach closures to protect endangered birds on the Hatteras Island mentioned a string of congressional acts which had come about during the 1970's and 1980's in response to the growing environmental movement in the country. "These statutes all require federal agencies to protect natural resources first, irrespective of... impacts on visitor use and experience or economic impact," wrote Jason Rylander in 2008, attorney for Defenders of Wildlife.⁷⁵ Many of the long term residents of the Outer Banks felt dissatisfied about the way they have been treated by the NPS. However, not all felt that way.

Some residents of the Outer Banks have expressed their endorsement of the park for having protected so much of the seashore from development. Most still had complaints about the bureaucratic nature of the NPS and disagreed with its general treatment of the local population. However, the long stretches of empty beach were worth it, especially when compared to the heavily commercialized and densely populated towns north of Hatteras. As Gaskill Austin put it, "I always say thank God that the park service is here, because otherwise we'd look like Kill

⁷³ William Hooper, oral history interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," (Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005), 576.

⁷⁴ Irene Nolan, "National Park Service Does not Support Interim Plan," *Island Free Press*, July 30, 2008.

⁷⁵ Irene Nolan, "National Park Service Does not Support Interim Plan," *Island Free Press*, July 30, 2008.

Devil Hills and Nags Head.”⁷⁶ Ellen Fulcher Cloud was born on Ocracoke. She said, “There is a lot of people that have hard feelings about the Park Service. To me, in my opinion, the Park Service is the best thing that ever happened to Ocracoke. Because if they hadn’t come there and taken all that land... It would be just like Nag’s Head.”⁷⁷ Ernie Foster of Hatteras was the son of Ernal Foster, credited with starting the charter boat industry on Hatteras Island. He saw that people don’t always have a long term vision. As he put it, “the Park Service saved us from ourselves.”⁷⁸ The sweeping beaches were protected from development.

Regardless of their ultimate opinion, the residents of the Outer Banks learned a lesson in working with the government. The very tight communities of the Outer Banks had little experience in large government affairs before the CHNS. Their government representatives had consisted of people they personally knew and felt they could trust. Early park opponent Winfield Worth saw that the language of the act creating the NPS left the government room to change its position. Despite the very personal approach of Park Service Director Conrad Wirth in convincing the residents of the Outer Banks, the NPS as a branch of the federal government is not bound as an individual would be. When the NPS management policy turned toward environmental conservation, there was little the Bankers could do. They had signed their land over to the NPS in the belief that the word of Conrad Wirth was their bond between them and the

⁷⁶ Gaskill Austin,, oral history interview with Jennifer Miller, September, 2002. “Ethnolohistorical Description of the Eight Villiages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage,” (Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005), 52.

⁷⁷ Ellen Fulcher Cloud, oral history interview with Julie Burke, “Ethnolohistorical Description of the Eight Villiages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage,” (Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005), 215.

⁷⁸ Ernie Foster, oral history interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, “Ethnolohistorical Description of the Eight Villiages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage,” (Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005), 364.

government. The residents of the Outer Banks were rightfully fearful of the government when they hesitated to give up their land for a national park. However, despite their anxieties they can take comfort in the long, undeveloped stretches of beach that will be a gift to future generations.

Primary Source Annotated Bibliography

Newspapers

Coastland Times, Manteo, NC September 1952- January 1957.

Raleigh News and Observer, August 1952- March 1953.

Norfolk Virginia-Pilot, November 1952- February 1953.

The preceding newspaper collections were taken from the tumultuous period from 1950 to 1957 when the issue of national park establishment at Cape Hatteras was most active. It started with the unexpected donation by Paul Mellon, which reinvigorated the park issue to shortly after Conrad Wirth's letter, when most active opposition settled. Concerns about land acquisition, park boundaries, and park opposition were some of the main topics.

Fowler, Robert H. "Native of Hatteras Says Park Proposal Opposed." *Greensboro Daily News*, January 2, 1952.

In this article, Hatteras Island Native Andrew S. Austin, of one of the oldest families on the island, explains his opposition to the coming park. He also explains some of his opinions about beach erosion. He represents a portion of the population which generally distrusted the government and felt the people of the Outer Banks did not need anything from outside.

Nolan, Irene. "National Park Service Does not Support Interim Plan." *Island Free Press*, July 30, 2008.

This article illustrated the difficult issues that the people living on the Outer Banks are having with the National Park Service. The National Park Service on the Outer Banks never firmly established an off road

vehicle policy. Currently the courts are dealing with suits against the Park Service by environmental groups who are opposed to the damage that beach driving causes. It goes to show the extent of the resentment that Outer Banks residents feel about the promises made to them when the park was created but which are now no longer in effect.

Letters

Bonner, Herbert C. *Herbert C. Bonner Papers*. Folder 3710, National Seashore Files, Box 47, UNC Special Collections, UNC.

These letters are a collection of the correspondence between National Park Service officials and congressional representative Herbert C. Bonner, or letters which he was party to. They are roughly from the period when land for the park was being acquired. These private letters give good insight into the impressions of the NPS because they were not intended to be published but rather were more informative.

Oral Histories

Austin, Gaskill. Interview with Jennifer Miller. "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage." Prepared for US Dept of Interior: November 2005. Interviewed in September, 2002.

Burrus, Dwight. Interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," Prepared for US Dept of Interior: November 2005.

Cloud, Ellen Fulcher. Interview with Julie Burke. "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage." Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005.

Farrow, Joe. Interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," Prepared for US Dept of Interior: November 2005. Interviewed in October 2002.

Foster, Ernie. Interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake. "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005.

William Hooper, Interview with Barbara Garrity-Blake, "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage," Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005.

The preceding oral histories were of people born before World War II who had memory of the dramatic changes that took place around 1950 with the creation of the CHNS. They saw the change from rugged isolation to modern tourism. Their perspectives provide an invaluable understanding of the way the CHNS has affected the lives of the people and the impressions the park made.

Other

US Congress. "An Act to provide for the Establishment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore in the State of North Carolina, and for other purposes." 1937, 50 Stat. 669. Reproduced in, Cameron Brinkley, *The Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore: The Great Depression through Mission 66*. Atlanta: Cultural Resources Division, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, 2007.

This was the initial legislation which established the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. However, it did not include any financial support for the purchase of lands. Funds needed to be provided by the State of North Carolina and by private donations.

Abstract of Wills and Other Records, Currituck and Dare Counties NC 1663-1855. *Taxables of Currituck 1755*. North Carolina State Library No 105. Reproduced on Ancestry.com.

This document lists the names of the residents of Currituck County in 1755, which included the Outer Banks region before Dare County was created. The names of prominent families on the island are listed on that record. For instance, the recent Commissioner of Dare county was a Midget, descendant of the Midget's on the *Taxables* record.

Secondary Source Annotated Bibliography

Monographs

Behn, Robert D and Martha A. Clark. *Termination II: How the National Park Service Annulled its "Commitment" To a Beach Erosion Control Policy At the Cape Hatteras National Seashore*. Duke University: Center for Policy Analysis, Institute of Policy Sciences and Public Affairs, 1976.

Behn examines the process by which the NPS stopped funding beach erosion control at the CHNS. He details the scientific and social trends which shifted to allow the government to change its agreement to the area.

Brinkley, Cameron. *The Creation and Establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore: The Great Depression through Mission 66*. Atlanta: Cultural Resources Division, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, 2007.

This is a guide to early administration by the National Park Service (NPS) at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CHNS). Chronologically ordered to present the key information about the creation of the CHNS, it illustrates the important people and events from the NPS perspective.

Hummel, Don. *Stealing the National Park: The Destruction of Concession and Park Access*. Bellevue, Washington: Merril Press, 1987.

Don Hummel is a pro-concession advocate. He attacks the environmental lobby's trend towards limiting park access and other concessions such as roads and overnight lodging. Hummel emphasizes the American people's rights to enjoy the national parks.

Maiolo, John R. *Final Report Using Socioeconomic Information to Assess the Impact of Surface Transportation in North Carolina Coastal Communities*. The Center for transportation and the Environment, North Carolina State University: March 1995.

The impact of the unique roads and bridges of the Outer Banks were addressed in this study. Things changed dramatically for the people of this region when the roads were built. The roads pose interesting problems because of the sandy nature of the Outer Banks.

Runte, Alfred. *National Parks: The American Experience*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

Runte organized this history of the National Parks through the changes in thinking rather than specific dates or periods. He describes trends such as early preservation monumentalism and complete conservation to the recent understanding about park ecology and management.

Sax, Joseph L. *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980.

Sax describes the preservationist movement which is generally opposed to concessions, roads and other objects which remove the sense of distance from the parks. Sax argues that conservationists many times are more interested in the park's image and the attitudes around it than how people are directly affected.

Stick, David *The Outer Banks of North Carolina: 1584-1958*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958.

This is a basic history of the early years of the Outer Banks. It is a good source of informative about this relatively undocumented period. It showed the decline in population over time as trade and commercial fishing changed.

Government Documents

The Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Building and Monuments, "Report to the Secretary of the Interior, Rogers C.B. Morton: Inspection of Certain Field Areas of the National Park System." Washington, D.C.: The Department of the Interior, 1971.

This advisory board was involved with establishing the validity of the claims of Robert Dolan and Paul Godfrey. They studied beach erosion and the effect that artificial dunes have had on the environment.

Other

Friday, William C. "The evolving language of the people of the Outer Banks," *Outer Banks Culture*, <http://www.outerbeaches.com/OuterBanksCulture>.

Professor William C. Friday of North Carolina State University examines the peculiar dialect of the Outer Banks, known as the Outer Banks Brogue. He explains the extensive use of relic English terms and similar pronunciation of the British accent. This helps establish the long isolation of the residents of the Outer Banks.

Impact Assessment, Inc. "Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage." Prepared for US Dept of Interior, November 2005.

This document was prepared for the National Park Service as a way to better understand the history and heritage of the Outer Banks. While generally useful, it is not primarily an historic document. It doesn't cite sources in the Chicago style and rarely explains the source of its information. Good for general information but hard to use in an argumentative paper.

National Park Service. *National Park Service Administrative History: A Guide*, U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, 2004. Accessed through <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSHistory/guide.pdf> on October 20, 2008.

This was a guide to the Administrative Histories that the National Park Service is in the process of requiring for all the National Parks. It details the purpose and frame work of the Administrative History project.