

Conclusion

It is obvious that the conflict over Cumberland Island will continue. Nevertheless, the past affords a perspective on the conflicts that have shaped the island's management. Cumberland Island National Seashore has existed for thirty-two tumultuous years. During that time a succession of superintendents, rangers, resource managers, and regional office specialists have struggled to accomplish the three missions of the National Park Service. Protection of natural resources has perhaps fared the best. Threatened and endangered species are protected, and some, like the loggerhead sea turtle, are making a satisfying comeback. Natural vegetation has reclaimed formerly disturbed areas such as Charles Fraser's airfield and North Cut Road. Although the island suffers from erosion, especially along its southwestern shore, the agency and its allies have staved off serious threats to reroute the Intracoastal Waterway and dump spoils at Raccoon Keys and Drum Point Island. The Park Service has made significant progress in dune protection, eradication of exotic tung trees, and reintroduction of a native predator, the bobcat.

Not every natural resource issue has gone well, though. Feral pigs continue to present an almost intractable problem because they seriously harm the programs for protection of native species. Some exotic plants will be nearly impossible to eradicate. The Park Service is unlikely to remove feral horses in the foreseeable future despite their destruction of marsh vegetation and dune stability. Fire management remains trapped in a complete suppression mode despite evidence that fire is a natural feature in most island communities. A rapid rise in the population of armadillos promises more problems for future island managers.

Historic preservation on Cumberland Island has been an amazingly expensive and controversial process. The agency has protected more than 100 historic structures and adapted more than a dozen for modern use. Key features such as the Plum Orchard mansion, the Dungeness ruins, the Dungeness Tabby House, and The Stafford Chimneys have been protected at enormous cost to the Park Service. Interpretive and landscape management plans have been developed to guide further action on these popular re-

sources. Thousands of curatorial items are now stored in one of the finest museums in the entire park system. The island boasts seven separate archaeological or historic areas with dozens of individually protected places.

Nevertheless, criticism and controversy have plagued the preservation process. The Park Service argued with the state historic preservation office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for years, engendering a suspicion that still flares up from time to time. An inability to secure adequate funding doomed several significant but heavily damaged structures, such as the Recreation House, to collapse rather than preservation. This in turn fanned the flames of Carnegie heirs' anger at what they perceived as a capricious dereliction of duty. Their influence over congressmen and senior government officials ultimately secured extraordinary attention and funding for some of the resources they left behind. However, that attention and those funds were diverted from critical projects around the nation into a grand house, a collection of outbuildings and shacks, and a museum full of objects that the Park Service continues to identify as insignificant.

Public use of Cumberland Island has perhaps been the most contentious of the agency's missions. The seashore was originally designated as a recreation unit with plans to satisfy 10,000 visitors per day with trams, horseback riding, and more than a dozen interpretive sites. Within a decade environmental groups, residents, and the public had battered these plans down to an unscientific 300-person daily limit with no special recreation facilities and little in the way of interpretation. At the same time, the Park Service unsuccessfully sought to manage retained rights of use as it did in other park units. New houses and driving on the roads and beaches were only a part of the agency's concerns. The residents also used their influence to modify plans and actions the agency undertook anywhere on the island.

Initiation of wilderness designation on the northern half of Cumberland Island only exacerbated the management problems. Historic preservation, standard Park Service ranger patrols, ecological research, and fire management have all become exponentially more difficult. Suddenly seashore rangers face the prospects of patrolling on horseback, carrying tools and building materials on foot to the Settlement, and myriad other complications that attend the wilderness status. Perhaps worst of all, the Carnegie-Candler rights and their sense of history collided directly with a powerful wilderness lobby. The latter seeks uncompromising purity of the type only found in the most far-flung western mountains. The furious debates, recriminations, and lawsuits of these two factions have drastically prolonged

every planning and decision-making process for the Park Service. One of the most difficult and expensive planning efforts ever mounted by the agency finally resulted in a draft wilderness plan nearly nineteen years after the legislation that created the wilderness. Some 3,500 letters representing all the polarized camps in this battle promise that this plan, like all the others, will undergo substantial changes before it is finalized.

The history of Cumberland Island is truly four discrete stories, one affecting only the idyllic island itself and three with implications for the entire national park system and public lands management in general. First, the story of Cumberland Island is one of increasing human modification and then a long return toward its primeval character despite a number of close calls from major development schemes. Native Americans left only a slight impact as they and the few Spanish who sought to convert them disappeared from the scene. The English made only minor improvements, and the island primarily served as a source of valuable ship timbers. Plantation development commenced with the arrival of American sovereignty, rapidly escalated during the Greene-Miller period, and reached its apogee immediately before the Civil War. At that time natural vegetation had been reduced to isolated patches between broad fields of sea island cotton and other crops.

After the war human manipulation declined despite the construction of five mansions, dozens of outbuildings, and a hotel complex on the island. Native vegetation reclaimed many of the cotton fields, and animal life proliferated in the new areas. The legacy of earlier development remained, however, in the form of several extinctions, feral animals, and exotic plants. As the Carnegie family fortune shrank, its rich infrastructure too became a legacy of the past. Establishment of Cumberland Island National Seashore and wilderness designation for the northern half of it further entrenched the process of natural reclamation.

Yet many schemes arose during this postbellum period that could have dwarfed even the modifications of the cotton era. Developers tried to establish large subdivisions on the north end of the island in the late 1890s and on former Carnegie lands during the 1960s. NASA briefly considered turning the island into a space base. Titanium miners nearly gained rights to gut some 7,000 acres in the center of the island. Carnegie heirs also considered conversion of the island to a cattle ranch or a pine plantation. Finally, the Park Service itself nearly turned the quiet retreat into a massive recreation complex with thousands of visitors crammed onto three strips of beach. Over the decades since 1916, the Cumberland Island that the visitor sees to-

day has survived due to a combination of Lucy Carnegie's legal cunning, her heirs' love for its landscape and resources, vigorous public action, and a belatedly protective mantle of Park Service control. The island's biography is indeed a tale of change, adventure, and perilous escapes.

A second story from the saga of Cumberland Island is the tale of conflicting laws and policies. The National Park Service, like all government agencies, is bound by a complex web of regulations affecting its every action. With its multiple missions and resources, these regulations are bound to clash. The intent of the Wilderness Act was to lay aside areas with no roads, no structures, and no use of mechanical devices. Coupled with the Endangered Species Act and other laws, this seems to give preeminence to natural resource protection and ecological processes. The intent of the National Historic Preservation Act and subsequent amendments and executive orders was to study, classify, and protect historic structures and objects. It seems to give preeminence to the cultural resources of the island. Finally, many public laws protect the sanctity of contracts, including those for real estate and reserved rights of use. Most Americans hold a legal contract to be inviolate.

On Cumberland Island all these laws affect the same property. The results are befuddling and infuriating to the various parties affected by and trying to administer these different pieces of legislation. Hence, people with retained rights drive on roads and live in houses within the wilderness area. The Park Service is currently trying to determine if every rights holder has every right that he or she claims. This infrastructure and these activities clearly dilute the wilderness as envisioned in the 1964 act.

Numerous historic resources lie within or nearly surrounded by the wilderness on Cumberland Island. The Park Service must maintain them to the degree financially possible. However, their upkeep requires labor and materials. Resolving to use only animals, boats, or humans to transport these items and hand tools to do the job will exponentially increase the cost of accomplishing the required maintenance. This in turn will leave more resources untreated, exposing them to deterioration that is unacceptable according to historic preservation legislation. What is the agency to do? Which law is to be compromised: the wilderness one or the historic preservation one? A compromise that bends both laws might be possible at other parks or protected areas but not at emotionally charged Cumberland Island. Only a court or Congress will be able to decide the final course for seashore officials to follow legally.

A third story is one of conflict between and influence by a variety of special-interest groups. The National Park Service has often been called the most popular agency in the federal government. Stephen Mather and Horace Albright engineered it that way, and it has become an axiom of Park Service training and culture. Hence most park personnel are quite sensitive to public opinion. No other federal resource agency listens to interest groups and the general public more than the National Park Service. The divisiveness and political clout of various interest groups at Cumberland Island has made this a difficult reality. The only plan the agency submitted that had no public input was the original 1971 master plan. It did not survive the first public meeting. Interest groups and island residents shaped every decision and project the Park Service undertook. Looking back over the seashore's history, the environmental groups, working through the National Environmental Policy Act, probably exerted the greatest cumulative influence on management of Cumberland Island National Seashore. The Georgia Conservancy, especially Hans Neuhauser, and the Georgia Sierra Club led the pushes for fewer visitors, less development, minimization of the area devoted to historic districts, and the wilderness designation. They also contributed their support to natural resource and interpretive programs.

The Carnegie heirs and other island residents also profoundly shaped the seashore and its policies. Of course, they sold the land to the National Park Foundation and then blocked state condemnation efforts to ensure the legislative establishment of the unit. No national seashore would exist to be fought over were it not for their efforts. But in the process they exacted a cluster of rights that have dramatically shaped resource management. Some argue that these rights suborn the seashore's purposes, especially those in the wilderness. Yet historic preservation on the island owes a great deal to the residents, especially at the Settlement and at Plum Orchard. They also succeeded in shaping interpretation of the island to emphasize the Carnegie-Candler period. And they too were instrumental in the campaign to limit visitor capacity and tourism development. Although the residents unsuccessfully opposed reintroduction of the bobcat, they used their influence to stymie Park Service horse management.

Beside these two powerful entities, other interest groups pale by comparison. Nevertheless, the Park Service adapted its plans in accordance with other views. St. Marys succeeded in holding the Park Service headquarters at its waterfront amid a number of competing sites, some of them unques-

tionably superior. Camden County complaints led the state to withhold donation of the tidal and offshore lands, which considerably complicates resource management. The state's historic preservation office, while it failed to achieve an islandwide historic district designation, provided a critical influence in improving early historic resource planning by the National Park Service. Finally, the general public, especially in Atlanta, periodically arose to destroy certain Park Service plans and programs, coupling with one or more interest groups to bury the obnoxious schemes in floods of outraged letters.

A last story from Cumberland Island is that of national parks as venues for competing visions. The introduction asked what Cumberland Island should be: a recreation playground, a historic landscape, or an ecological wilderness. For most of the twentieth century, the National Park Service wrestled with this three-part mission. Just before the establishment of Cumberland Island, the agency even tried to sort all the system's units into natural, historic, or recreation categories wherein management priorities would be clearly established. It failed miserably because most units had all three types of resources. For Cumberland Island this is especially true.

However, this is only part of the complexity faced by resource managers. Different natural resources have different, occasionally conflicting, needs. The island holds too many cultural resources, and they are too expensive for all of them to be saved. Which ones are most important? At the same time, national seashore recreation can encompass bird watching, backpacking, beach driving, and jet skis. The Park Service must decide which are appropriate.

If these decisions were not already complicated enough, each resource and each use has its advocacy group. From these groups at Cumberland, three main visions of the island dominate. Residents want the island to stay the same as it was in 1970. Furthermore, they want to have the same rights and much of the same influence over its future as they enjoyed with ownership. Their vision is a quiet island where they continue to live and enjoy traditional uses. They seek careful preservation of the buildings, roads, animals, and forests of that time. They often quote an early promise from Stewart Udall that the government would take a snapshot of the island and keep it that way. Visitors may come in small numbers to visit the historic districts at the south end, Plum Orchard, and the Settlement. However, theirs should be a light, transitory presence that in no way affects the residents.

Environmentalists envision a different scenario. Most will allow that historic preservation should occur at the south end of the island but balk at such features in the legal wilderness. They believe the wilderness should return completely to forest and marsh. Roads, retained estates, driving, and the trappings of post-nineteenth-century America should be present only from Stafford southward. They long for the time when a hiker can walk along a trail or the beach, set up camp in the silent forest, and occasionally see an archaeological site or a decaying historic building. In answer to those who complain that this restricts older and disabled visitors, they point out that the south end of the island is available for them.

Camden County residents and advocates of specific forms of recreation espouse a third vision. Many of these people originally wanted a bridge and were quite comfortable with the 1971 master plan. Today they want a higher visitor limit, lodgings and restaurants on the island, and the right to land motorboats and bring jet skis, bicycles, automobiles, and horses to any part of the national seashore. Some merely want these changes to benefit trade in St. Marys. Others want to enjoy their vision of recreation in a public park over which they feel considerable proprietorship. After all, they argue, Camden County lost a good deal of tax revenue when the federal government bought the island.

These visions, of course, represent the public's interest in the three missions of the National Park Service. Clashes between interest groups, confusion over management priorities, public pressure, and an apparently contradictory body of legislation and policy occur at many units of the national park system. Yet on this small 16,400-acre island (the national seashore includes marsh and water and is officially 36,506 acres), the tug-of-war over protection of endangered species, enforcement of wilderness law, proper care for cultural resources, compliance with legal contracts, adherence to Park Service policy, and sensitivity to the public reaches its most intense and virulent level. The history of Cumberland Island National Seashore is riddled with controversy and punctuated by failed attempts to seek compromise and amity. The future no doubt will bring more conflict and almost certainly congressional or court action to settle various disputes. Perhaps when outside forces have solved these issues, all the combatants and the Park Service can collectively enjoy the serenity and beauty of this special island.