

Fire Island National Seashore Off Road Vehicle Management

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



You're Invited!

The National Park Service (NPS) is requesting your input on the Off Road Vehicle Management program for the Fire Island National Seashore. Your participation is vital to the success of our planning process. There are many ways to be involved, including attending an in-person or web-based public meeting and submitting electronic or written comments.

Background

The Seashore encompasses 19,580 acres of upland, tidal, and submerged lands along a 26-mile stretch of the 32-mile barrier island. It contains nearly 1,380 acres of federally designated wilderness, an extensive dune system, centuries-old maritime forests, solitary beaches, and the Fire Island Lighthouse.

Interspersed among the federal lands within the Seashore are 17 residential communities that predate the Seashore's authorization. No hard-surfaced roads connect the communities either to each other or the mainland of Long Island. Without paved roads and with limited traffic, the communities have retained much of their original character. Vehicle use is restricted within the boundary of the Seashore, and the communities on Fire Island are accessible mainly by passenger ferry or private boat.

During the summer season, the population of Fire Island swells to approximately 30,000 with a total of two to three million visitors each year within the park boundaries. The Seashore's primary visitor facilities located on Fire Island are the Fire Island Lighthouse, Sailors Haven, Talisman/Barrett Beach, Watch Hill, and the Wilderness Visitor Center.

The Seashore's ORV driving regulation (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] § 7.20(a)) allows for driving access on NPS lands and it is managed through the Seashore's permitting system. The regulation was intended to protect the natural and cultural resources and a safe visitor experience while allowing access to privately owned properties within the Seashore.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Begins with a 15-minute presentation followed by an open house with NPS staff about any issues or ideas regarding Off Road Vehicle Management on Fire Island.

VIRTUAL MEETING

Thursday, May 5, 6:30 pm:

Access the website at:

https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FIIS_ORV

IN-PERSON MEETING

Friday, May 6, 6:00 pm:

Ocean Beach Community House

625-632 Bayberry Walk

Ocean Beach, NY 11770

(Fire Island)



Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of updating the special regulation for the ORV driving program at the Seashore include the following:

- **Support a roadless character**—for the long-term sustainability of the Seashore’s natural and cultural resources, while providing essential access to communities.
- **Protect visitor use and experience and visitor safety**—to provide a safe experience for Seashore visitors, especially during periods of high visitor use.
- **Update and clarify the permitting process.**



Preliminary Purpose and Need

The purpose of this effort is to evaluate ORV use at the Seashore and to review the existing ORV regulation to allow for appropriate vehicular access while protecting park resources and a safe visitor experience, consistent with the Seashore’s enabling legislation. The ORV driving program is first and foremost supplemental to the premise that waterborne transportation is the primary means of transport to Fire Island and the communities in accordance with the Seashore’s General Management Plan (2016).

The NPS seeks to revise the regulation to address changes to resources and use on Fire Island since the regulation was implemented in 1987. Vehicle access and use patterns have changed as a result of the dynamic nature of this barrier island, such as the wilderness breach caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and may be affected further over time by sea level rise. The updated regulation should provide future flexibility as conditions continue to change. Revisions are further needed to update and clarify the process for obtaining driving permits. Applicants, especially residents with two or more working adults in the household, are concerned that there are not enough permits, and that confirming residency status can be problematic. Revisions should address these and other issues with the current process.

Preliminary Proposed Action

Under the Preliminary Proposed Action, all eligible applicants would obtain a driving permit for when waterborne transportation is not adequate. The permit categories would include year-round residents, part-time residents, essential services, construction and business, recreation, and temporary (under the Superintendent’s discretion). There would be no cap on the number of permits (except for part-time residents – 50 permits), and each residential permit holder would be allowed two roundtrips through the east or west gate per day. All other permit holders would be allowed one round-trip through either gate per day. Permits would be limited to one per household and one per contractor/business owner.

Definitions for current categories would remain the same with two clarifications:

- Documents required to demonstrate year-round residency would be identified in the permit application. The residential status will be determined in coordination with the towns.
- Essential services are any motor vehicle, whose use on Fire Island is essential to the continued use of residences. This may include vehicles actively used for (1) transporting heating fuel and bottled gas, (2) removing sanitation or refuse, not including construction refuse, and (3) supporting public utilities.

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Residents and essential services would be permitted to drive from the day after Labor Day until the weekend before July 4. Essential services that cannot otherwise be accomplished by waterborne transportation during no-driving summer months may qualify for a driving exception. Construction vehicles would be allowed to drive from the day after Columbus Day until April 30. Recreational permits would be allowed from September 15 until March 15. The Superintendent would retain the ability to close the beach to recreational driving to protect resources and public safety.



All motor vehicles must have four- or all-wheel drive, must be permitted, and are subject to the ORV regulation. Permits would continue to be required for access at these NPS locations:



Piping plover

- Burma Road at the Lighthouse tract
- All Atlantic Ocean beaches
- Sailors Haven/Sunken Forest
- Talisman/Barrett Beach
- Watch Hill
- Beach off Otis Pike Wilderness area between Watch Hill and Smith Point

Driving would remain prohibited in these areas:

- Bayside beaches
- The William Floyd Estate
- Burma Road within the Carrington Tract (between Fire Island Pines and Cherry Grove), except for public utility companies with an active right-of-way permit
- Interior of Otis Pike Wilderness area
- Fire Island Lighthouse Driveway

Resources for Consideration

The NPS plans to analyze potential impacts of any alternative on resources that include the following:

- Visitor Use and Experience
- Human Safety
- Climate Change and Sea Level Rise
- Dune Vegetation and Beach Invertebrates
- Burma Road
- Wildlife
- Socioeconomic Resources

The Planning Process

The public is encouraged to provide suggestions on the Preliminary Proposed Action for the Off Road Vehicle Management Plan.

Once we have gathered public input on the Preliminary Proposed Action, and refined a proposal and a range of alternatives, the NPS anticipates moving on to the next phase of the project by initiating NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) and drafting proposed changes to the regulation. There will be additional opportunities for public involvement as part of NEPA public scoping and review, along with a public comment period on the proposed rule. Public involvement for the next phase is currently planned to be announced in early 2023.



How to Comment

The NPS is seeking substantive comments that describe why parts of the Preliminary Proposed Action may not work, provide new ideas or factual information, or present reasonable alternatives other than what is described in this newsletter. Comments that merely support or oppose the proposed action are not considered substantive. Commenters may wish to consider the following questions:

- What elements of the Preliminary Proposed Action are most important and why?
- What other information should the planning team consider when developing alternatives?
- Are there other elements or ideas that should be considered and analyzed?
- What is missing, and why should it be considered?
- Are there other NPS resources or impact topics that should be considered in the analysis?

Please provide comments in one of the following ways:

1	Submit comments electronically at the link: https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FIIS_ORV (<i>preferred method</i>)
2	Submit written comments at the in-person public meeting on May 6
3	Submit written comments in person to the NPS headquarters in Patchogue, NY, or by mail to: Off Road Vehicle Management Plan Superintendent Alexcy Romero Fire Island National Seashore 120 Laurel Street Patchogue, New York 11772

This public comment period ends on **MAY 20, 2022**.

Notes: Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Please also note that your entire comment—including personal identifying information such as your address, phone number, and e-mail address—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Comments submitted by individuals or organizations on behalf of other individuals or organizations will not be accepted.

PROJECT WEBSITE

For more information on this project or to submit public comments, please visit the Project Website at

https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FIIS_ORV

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Source: Volpe Center



Source of map: Volpe Center (with modifications)