

II. PARK PURPOSES

MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM

The North Carolina state parks system exists for the enjoyment, education, health, and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreation resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.

FORT FISHER STATE RECREATION AREA PURPOSE STATEMENT

A movement to conserve and restore the area surrounding Fort Fisher, the largest earthwork fort in the Confederacy and the site of key Civil War battles, originated with the citizens of New Hanover County in the 1930s. The movement died with the onset of World War II, when the fort site once again became an active military post. Near the end of the war, the Army abandoned the site. In the late 1950s, local and state forces revived the idea of restoring Fort Fisher, and shortly thereafter the area became a state historic site. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area was established in 1986 with the allocation to the Division of Parks and Recreation of 287 acres in New Hanover and Brunswick Counties south of the Fort Fisher State Historic Site.

Management of the lower Cape Fear Peninsula is shared among a variety of state agencies. In addition to Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, the NC Division of Parks and Recreation manages Bald Head Island State Natural Area to the south. The Department of Cultural Resources manages the Fort Fisher State Historic Site, which exists to protect and interpret the historic fort itself. The NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher occupies 29 acres adjacent to the state recreation area. The NC Division of Coastal Management manages Zeke's Island National Estuarine Research Reserve and Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission owns and manages the Federal Point Access Area, which provides a boat ramp and parking to allow boaters access to the estuary. NC Department of Transportation owns and operates the Fort Fisher- Southport ferry landing on the Cape Fear River.

The most popular recreational resource at Fort Fisher is the more than six miles of public beach. From the recreation area parking lot, an elevated boardwalk leads over sand dunes to the beach where walking, swimming, sunbathing, bird watching, fishing and other beach activities are all popular. A short trail meanders through the marsh, allowing hikers a chance to view sound-side flora and fauna.

Fort Fisher State Recreation contains a number of important biological resources. The loggerhead sea turtle, on the list of federally endangered and threatened species, uses the beach for nesting. The areas between and behind the dunes serve as critical nesting

habitat for many colonial nesting waterbirds and other shorebirds. The recreation area is also an important stopover and wintering site for many migrating birds, including the endangered Peregrine Falcon and Piping Plover. A wide variety of coastal natural communities are represented here, from the remnant maritime forest of live oak and yaupon, to tidal creeks and biologically productive salt marshes.

Fort Fisher is an awe-inspiring scenic resource. Visitors can escape the stresses of everyday life and relax and enjoy the natural beauty. Year round, visitors enjoy the aerial acrobatics of seagulls, terns and brown pelicans as they soar above the waves, or stroll along the beach and gaze upon the open ocean or miles of white sandy beach that make up this pristine shoreline. A short venture into the mudflats and marshes reveals sandpipers and other shorebirds as they search for food.

The geology in the Fort Fisher vicinity is characterized by deposits of the Pleistocene epoch, one to two million years old. Surface material consists of soils, sands and clays that overlie the much older Castle Hayne and Peedee formations. The beach sand found here is a very fine, porous soil normally associated with Newhan fine sand. This sandy soil is a major element in the dynamic dunes and inlets that are constantly shifting and changing. An outcrop of hard, indurated coquina, or shell limestone, is located at the northern end of Fort Fisher. This is the only natural outcrop of beach rock along the North Carolina coast.

Fort Fisher, built in 1861, served to protect the port city of Wilmington from Union ships during the Civil War. Wilmington was an important port of entry for the Confederacy, especially during the later stages of the war. When Fort Fisher was captured the Confederate supply line was broken, and approximately three months later the Civil War came to an end. Although what remains of the main fort site and surrounding bunkers and fortifications are located at the Fort Fisher State Historic Site, the fort was the namesake and impetus for the protection of the general area that includes the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area exists primarily for its outstanding recreational, biological, scenic and geological resources, and also for its archaeological significance. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of this natural heritage.

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