

III. SUMMARY OF INTERPRETIVE THEMES

The 1987 State Parks Act defines the purposes of the state parks system. It establishes that:

The state of North Carolina offers unique archaeological, geologic, biologic, scenic and recreation resources. These resources are part of the heritage of the people of this State. The heritage of a people should be preserved and managed by those people for their use and for the use of their visitors and descendants.

It further provides that:

Park lands are to be used by the people of this State and their visitors in order to promote understanding of and pride in the natural heritage of this State.

One of the best methods of meeting these purposes is through environmental education. The definition of environmental education as set forth in *The North Carolina Environmental Education Plan* is given below.

Environmental Education is an active process that increases awareness, knowledge and skills that result in understanding, commitment, informed decisions and constructive action to ensure stewardship of all interdependent parts of the earth's environment.

According to the State plan, a central theme in environmental education is balancing recreational and economic concerns with quality of the environment. At Fort Fisher State Recreation Area this balance is often precarious. Park staff is required to manage the ocean front beach for colonial nesting seabirds and sea turtles, while at the same time, providing opportunities for various recreational pursuits. A major focus of the Interpretation and Education program at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area is to raise visitor awareness of resource management concerns and enlist visitor cooperation.

Fort Fisher State Recreation Area has four primary themes and eight secondary themes. In priority order, the primary themes are coastal waterbirds, sea turtles, barrier spit ecology, and recreation. Note: Cultural history information is available to visitors at the adjacent Fort Fisher State Historic Site. The neighboring North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher provides educational displays and programs on marine ecology.

PRIMARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

COASTAL WATERBIRDS

This theme focuses on the myriad species of waterbirds that use the barrier spit in the park during different seasons. Major concepts for interpretive programs, exhibits and signage include colonial nesting waterbirds, solitary nesting waterbirds, migration patterns, endangered species, bird identification, birds of prey, and park resource management efforts. The Environmental

Education Learning Experience (EELE) investigates colonial nesting waterbirds active in the park during the summer months.

SEA TURTLES

The park also protects threatened loggerhead and green sea turtles, which nest along the ocean front beach from April through September. Interpretive programs and exhibits in this theme area include sea turtle nesting, life history, migration routes, threats to the turtle's survival, and protection efforts.

BARRIER SPIT ECOLOGY

Fort Fisher is a barrier spit, a place of ever-changing sand and water. Programs and other interpretive products in this theme area describe the dynamic geology as well as the plants and animals that have adapted to, and thrive in this constantly shifting environment. Topics include migrating inlets, sand movement along the beach, beach front erosion, human impacts on barrier spit ecology, dune development and successional vegetative communities.

RECREATION

This theme focuses on safety, beach access points and the main user activities: swimming, walking, nature study and fishing. Through exhibits and programs, visitors are encouraged to minimize their impacts on this fragile area.

SECONDARY INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Secondary themes for the park support and embellish the primary themes, and are listed below.

- Astronomy
- Beachcombing
- Coastal Birds
- Crabs of Fort Fisher
- Hurricane History of the area
- Marine Mammals
- Saltwater Fish (Seining)
- Tracks in the Sand

01/07