

**ITEM 10:**

Consider a Management Plan for Fort Pickens State Park Aquatic Preserve.

**LOCATION:**

Escambia and Santa Rosa counties

**APPLICANT:**

Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection

**DSL STAFF REMARKS:**

*Background*

Under the Aquatic Preserve Resolution of 1969 and then in Chapter 258, Part II, Florida Statutes, aquatic preserves are set aside to be maintained in essentially the natural condition for the benefit of future generations. Fort Pickens State Park Aquatic Preserve (FPAP) was designated in 1970. In 1974, Fort Pickens State Park was deeded to The National Park Service and became part of Gulf Islands National Seashore (GUIS). Much of the aquatic preserve is now co-managed with GUIS.

FPAP comprises more than 30,000 acres immediately south of Pensacola, including portions of Big Lagoon, Pensacola Pass, Santa Rosa Sound, and waters surrounding east Perdido Key and west Santa Rosa Island. Approximately two-thirds of the acreage is in the Gulf of Mexico. FPAP includes seagrass beds and salt marshes which provide nursery and foraging habitat for roughly 70% of marine and estuarine species, while its coastlines include essential nesting sites for sea turtles and shorebirds.

The Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources has identified numerous archaeological and historical sites within and near FPAP, including Fort Pickens and associated batteries, and several shipwrecks including the USS Massachusetts, a popular diving site.

*Management Plan Overview*

The hallmark of Florida's Aquatic Preserve Program is that each site's natural resource management efforts are designed in direct response to unique local and regional issues. In this management plan, FPAP characterizes its issues and delineates the unique goals, objectives, and strategies that will set the framework for meeting the challenges presented by these issues. The goals, objectives, and strategies employed to address issues of FPAP are specific to the ecological and socioeconomic conditions present within and around this site.

The management plan identifies the following issues and objectives:

**Water Quality**

- Implement research, restoration and enhancement projects throughout FPAP and adjacent bays (where needed and appropriate), that focus on improving water quality.

**Addressing Habitat Loss and Decline**

- Continue the restoration of lost submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) within FPAP.
- Address species decline for indicator species, such as scallops and horseshoe

- crabs.
- Implement additional signage at all access points to understand importance of the habitat in FPAP.
- Share knowledge and tools with public on habitat preservation and improving water quality.
- Educate and inform public regarding marine debris impacts and effects to wildlife and environment.
- Work with stakeholders to develop a Disaster Response Plan to address areas of concern, develop proper procedures to protect species, and to minimize damages to the natural communities.

**Improving Information about Submerged Resources**

- Conduct and maintain a record of submerged and emergent resources, including SAV, algae, marsh grasses, and archaeological and historical resources.

**Public Awareness**

- Coordinate with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as the community to promote awareness of the aquatic preserve and its significance to users.
- Educate visitors, residents and users about actions they can take to conserve and restore resources in FPAP.

**Sustainable Public Use**

- Address recreational safety for FPAP and Gulf Islands National Seashore patrons, as well as protect SAV and salt marshes.

*Public Involvement*

Public meeting and advisory committee meetings were held on Aug. 28 and Aug 29, 2019 in Pensacola to obtain public input about the FPAP draft management plan. Top concerns at the meetings were about water quality, including increased monitoring and sharing data, and disaster response.

**DSL STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

Approve the management plan.

**ARC RECOMMENDATION:**

- APPROVE**
- APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_
- DEFER**
- WITHDRAW**
- NOT APPROVE**
- OTHER:**

















