



False Cape State Park
4001 Sandpiper Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23456

False Cape State Park

Master Plan Executive Summary 2020 Update

Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
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FALSE CAPE STATE PARK

MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 UPDATE

Presented for review at a public meeting on September 25, 2019, then recommended for adoption by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on January 6, 2020, and then reviewed for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly.

Adopted:

 /S/
Clyde E. Cristman, Director
Department of Conservation and Recreation

 March 2, 2020
Date



FALSE CAPE STATE PARK
MASTER PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Park Purpose Statement

“The primary purpose of False Cape State Park is the protection of Virginia’s last undeveloped barrier spit, while providing appropriate opportunities for low impact outdoor recreation and a strong program of environmental education.”

Introduction

The False Cape State Park Master Plan Executive Summary is an update to the official unabridged master plan document adopted on October 29, 1998, by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Director David G. Brickley. An updated master plan was approved on December 16, 2004, by DCR Director Joseph H. Maroon. The most recent update to the master plan was approved on June 16, 2010, by DCR Director David A. Johnson. This 2020 executive summary represents the most recent ten-year review described in §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. It outlines the desired future condition for False Cape State Park when it is fully developed.

False Cape State Park consists of some 4,321 acres of maritime forests, dunes, marshes, shrub areas, and several islands. It is located in the southeast corner of Virginia, within the jurisdiction of the City of Virginia Beach. The park site is bordered by the state of North Carolina to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, Back Bay to the west, and Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge to the north. The park is in the Hampton Roads Planning District, Region 23; this area is home to more than 1.4 million people.

In 1966, the General Assembly appropriated funds to match federal funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire False Cape State Park. In 1980, the park opened with trails, boat docks, and primitive camping. In 1983, plans for the Wash Woods Environmental Education Center were developed to serve as a model environmental education facility for the public. The center is used primarily for overnight or day-use groups conducting environmental education studies.

The original master plan called for False Cape State Park to become an intensively developed facility, attracting an estimated 60,000 visitors on peak days, and as many as 25,000 on an average summer day. Concerns over environmental impacts, limits to park access through Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and questions about the level of development appropriate for one of the few remaining unspoiled coastal spits along the Atlantic Coast, led to a much more

conservative Development Plan.

The concept for future developments at False Cape State Park is based on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) reached with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife for access through Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Development will be limited to ensure the current character of the park remains unchanged. The park offers a unique opportunity to explore nature in an unspoiled coastal environment. Due to the natural diversity, the large number of rare plant species, and the uniqueness of the barrier spit, the primary purpose of the park must be to protect the environment. This is done by careful routing of trails, restricting pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and carefully developing facilities. The secondary objective of the park is to provide environmental education and low impact or passive recreational activities.

Future development will take place in areas already containing facilities or areas that have been previously disturbed. Existing roads and dune crossovers will be used to the greatest extent possible to reduce the impact of any facilities on the park. A large percentage of the park's acreage has been designated as a state Natural Area Preserve in recognition of the unique natural systems in the park.

The State of North Carolina has made the decision to build a new bridge over Knott's Island Bay that will bring visitors to the outer banks very close to the southern boundary of False Cape State Park. This creates the need for enhanced visitor access and control functions at the southern end of the park. Construction on the bridge is expected in the spring of 2022.

The Wash Woods Environmental Center presently accommodates 20-22 individuals; and it would remain as the main programming area of the park for groups. The adjacent pier/deck space will provide space for water-based programs to expand the reach of the education at the site.

To meet demand for access, DCR provides a visitor transportation system, both to limit impact to wildlife and to promote a high quality experience for all visitors. This visitor transportation system, as required in the 1996 MOU with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been incorporated into Park and Refuge management plans. The large capacity vehicles used to bring visitors through the Back Bay Refuges and into the park reduce the frequency and duration of disturbances to wildlife. Other visitors come to the park by boat or by walking or riding a bicycle.

Presently, overnight guests leave their vehicles in the Little Island Park parking lot, which is owned and operated by the City of Virginia Beach, when visiting False Cape State Park. A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the City of Virginia Beach, Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and False Cape State Park was signed on June 12, 1998. This MOU designated an area for state park visitor parking and outlined the corresponding rules and regulations for use.

Park Resource Management Plan

The resource management plan consolidates all known resource information for a park and
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provides management direction for maintaining and enhancing those resources. The plans identify the physical, abiotic, and biotic characteristics of the park, and historic and archaeological resources, as well as a description of the legal constraints and limitations of the property. The park is delineated into undeveloped areas based on the ecosystems found in these areas; unique management areas, which are undeveloped areas with a specific purpose or function such as a historic battlefield or open field; and developed areas where park facilities are located yet have natural and cultural resources requiring specific management. The plan has defined management objectives and action recommendations that guide resource management and allow for continuity over time.

False Cape is located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain Physiographic Province. The park is comprised of five different maritime ecosystem types along with interdune swales and ponds, and wind-tidal oligohaline marshes along the western boundary in Back Bay. The Maritime Dune Woodland ecosystem is approximately 300 acres and is primarily located in the southern half of the park. This ecosystem is globally and state significant (G1G2/S1S2). The Maritime Upland Forest is the most abundant ecosystem in the park with approximately 1200 acres located throughout the park. Within this ecosystem are several state significant species and the globally and state significant Maritime Live Oak Forest (G2/S1). The Maritime Dune Grassland ecosystem is approximately 150 acres and occupies the foredune and adjacent portions of the backdune system along the entire length of the park. There are several state significant species found in this ecosystem type. The Maritime Dune Scrub ecosystem is approximately 350 acres and is generally located along the inland edges of the dune systems in areas sheltered from constant ocean spray. This ecosystem is considered state significant (G3/S1). The Maritime Swamp is approximately 430 acres of the park. This ecosystem extends the entire length of the park and occurs as open swamp forest on the bayside, varying in structure from shrubland to closed forest. In addition to several rare species found in this ecosystem, the Maritime Swamp Forest component is globally and state significant (G2/S1). The Wind Tidal Oligohaline Marsh is almost 1,000 acres and is extensive occurring along the entire extent of the bayside of the park. There are numerous state significant species with the greatest threat being the invasive non-native plant species, common reed (*Phragmites australis*). The Interdune Swale/Pond ecosystem occurs as a patchwork along the entire length of the park interspersed in the Maritime Dune Scrub, comprising approximately 120 acres. This ecosystem also supports several state and globally significant species. Each of these ecosystem types is subject to various management concerns and threats, possibly the greatest being sea level rise.

There cultural resources on the site are limited in part due to the physiography of the area. Two archaeological sites have been identified on Cedar Island and Little Cedar Island and are thought to be from the Archaic, Middle, and Woodland periods. The islands are highly susceptible to erosion. One historic structure of significance is the monument located on the Virginia / North Carolina border that was erected in 1887 to settle a dispute over where the boundary line was located. There are remnants of the Wash Woods Methodist Church, which include the foundation, the steeple and graveyard. False Cape had also been the location of a lifesaving station and crew. The original station was completed in October 1874. The US Coast Guard decommissioned the station in 1937.

Park Visitor Experience Plan

The park visitor experience management plan (VEP) is a companion document to the park resource management plan. Together they describe how the Division of State Parks will achieve its dual mission: “To conserve the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources of the Commonwealth (resource management plan) and provide recreational and educational opportunities (visitor experience management plan) consistent with the good stewardship of these lands, waters, and facilities that leaves them unimpaired for future generations”.

The visitor experience management plan provides a park-wide vision for the future of interpretation, education, recreation and other visitor experience opportunities. The plan addresses all elements of a park that affect visitor experiences, including personal services, media, facilities, and landscapes. It is a conceptual document that lays a foundation for subsequent phases of comprehensive interpretive planning: facility and media planning, design and production; organization of staff and activities into annual visitor experience implementation plans.

The plan consists of three parts; the foundation, the experience areas, and the desired future. The foundation presents information needed to make decisions concerning how visitor experience opportunities will be planned, developed and managed. It identifies essential stories and experiences of the site, specific audience types and their wants, needs, and expectations, interpretive themes (essential messages), issues and influences, goals and objectives as well as park purpose and mission of the agency. Experience areas are delineated, mapped and name geographic visitor experience areas based on distinct resource character and interpretive opportunities. Experience areas are categorized by resource type or condition, social environment, type and extent of park development, level of management, or kind and density of visitor use. The desired future section of the visitor experience plan describes the mix of personal service, media, facility, and landscape conditions that can effectively communicate park significance to guests and facilitate established visitor experience objectives.

Planning sessions for False Cape State Park were some of the first to be done by our state park system. While a formal plan was never created, an exhibit concept plan was drafted, and used to create in house exhibits in the Visitor Center. This park is due for a new round of planning workshops.

Park themes are centered on the significant resources that can be found at the site. The main draft theme focuses on False Cape State Park as a reflection of the timeless dynamic relationship between the diverse natural and cultural resources on a fragile Atlantic coast barrier spit. Secondary themes focus on the constant influences of wind and salt spray from the Atlantic Ocean shaping an ever-changing landscape as well as addressing a rich cultural history that has helped shape regional heritage: Native American, shipwrecks/lifesaving/World War II coastal defense, waterfowl hunting, and watermen culture were communities shaped by the elements.

Identified action items were comprehensive and broken out by experience area. A few of those include:

- Develop a park wide wayside exhibit plan

- Kiosks at access points
- Demonstration planting areas
- Redesign physical “arrival” at transition from refuge to park
- Orientation map
- Increase transportation trips

Master Plan

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Planners and State Park Staff conducted this master plan update in accordance with §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park during a 30-year planning horizon. As required by the *Code of Virginia*, it must be revisited every ten years to ensure that the development objectives outlined in the plan continue to meet the recreational and conservation needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

While preparing the original 1998 False Cape State Park Master Plan, meetings were held with DCR staff and an advisory committee comprised of area citizens, local government officials, and representatives of interested organizations to assist with the development of the plan. The committee helped formulate a park purpose statement as well as park goals and objectives, which will guide future park operations and development. Public input was solicited at the beginning and at the end of the process to ensure that plan recommendations were understood and accepted by the community. Following the development of the master plan, it was recommended for approval by the Board of Conservation and Recreation and then adopted by the DCR Director.

As a part of the 2020 master plan process, the original 1998 master plan, as well as the 2004 renewal and 2010 park master plan update, were reviewed. Planning staff met with park staff and conducted a site visit to the park to gather information for this plan update. A public meeting was held on September 25, 2019 to share the draft plan and receive public input. Following the public meeting, the phased development plan and estimated costs were revised, as were the staffing and operational costs for the park for each phase of development. The final draft of the executive summary and map were also developed.

The draft 2020 executive summary and map were presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation at their January 6, 2020 meeting and were recommended for adoption. The documents were then placed on the DCR website for a 30-day review by the Virginia General Assembly. Following that review, the updated plan was presented to the DCR Director Clyde E. Cristman for adoption. Following adoption, the updated executive summary and map were placed online <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/masterplans> for the public to access.

Attendance, Economic Impact and Park Revenues

The following table depicts park attendance during the period 2009 to 2018.

Park Visitation – False Cape State Park (Calendar Year¹)

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
34,346	39,652	51,362	65,368	64,154	65,497	66,075	61,757	49,882	57,269

¹Note that the calendar year ends 6 months after the fiscal year.

False Cape offers visitor’s miles of undisturbed beach for fishing, picnicking, shell collecting, and dolphin watching. Hikers and bikers can journey through the Back Bay Wildlife Refuge and see multiple species of birds, turtles, and amphibians. There is also a tram tour that offers the opportunity to visit the park and see the ocean, maritime forest, and visitor center. Historical park attendance from 2009 – 2018 represents a 66% increase in visitation over a ten year period.

Economic Impact – False Cape State Park

Economic activity is created by the park from three sources: Park visitation, the park operating budget (but only to the extent that it was not funded by park visitor revenues in order to avoid double counting), and park construction projects. The following table summarizes this economic activity for 2018:

Total Economic Activity including Visitation, Park Budget, and Construction (Adjusted to local economy)		Visitor Spending	Spending on Park Budget (excluding portion derived from visitation)*	Spending on Park Construction	State and Local Taxes Created
Dollars	Jobs	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars
\$ 2.3 million	23.4	\$ 1 million	\$ 495 thousand	\$ 280 thousand	\$ 127 thousand

In most parks overnight visitors create the greatest amounts of economic activity but this park does not have typical park cabins so day use accounts for the majority of economic activity. A majority of the 23.4 jobs that are created by the park’s economic activity are local jobs that benefit the local community. It is also notable that this park generates state and local taxes in excess of \$127k. Master plan recommendations designed to increase visitation and improve the visitor experience, once implemented, should have a further positive impact on the region’s economic vitality.

The following table depicts park revenue in fiscal years 2013 to 2019:

Park Revenues – False Cape State Park

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
\$59,953	\$69,845	\$66,296	\$68,147	\$64,622	\$64,530	\$81,283

In FY 2019 Virginia State Parks generated \$24,678,607 in total revenue. False Cape State Park contributed \$81,283 to the revenue total from camping, tram and bus tours, and rental of the environmental education building, program fees, and merchandise sales. Revenue generated by

Virginia State Parks is reinvested in the state park system to maintain and operate the parks. In FY 2019, 58% of the state park budget came from revenues generated in the parks.

Existing Facilities

Administration Area

Park Office
Visitor Center
Park Tram Staging Area

Park-wide Facilities

16 Miles of Trails
6 Miles of Beaches

Barbour Hill Beach

1 Campground
2 Pit Toilets
1 Shelter

False Cape Beach

1 Campground
1 Storm Shelter
2 Pit Toilets

Barbour Hill

1 Campground
1 Staff Residence
1 Storage Shed
2 Pit Toilets
Boat Dock
Boathouse
Well house
Observation Tower

False Cape Landing

Campground

Storm Shelter
Boat Dock
Pit Toilet

Wash Woods

Environmental Education Center
Boat Dock
Staff Residence (1)
Maintenance Shop/Pole Shed
Support Shop
Gasoline Tanks
Boat Shed
Shelter
Well

Dudley Island

Boat Dock
Boat Shed

Connectivity

This 2020 update places value on connecting False Cape State Park to other resources in the community. A critical segment of the Atlantic flyway, the adjacent Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge harbors snow geese and a large variety of ducks and other waterfowl during the peak of fall migration. Aside from Back Bay, the park is in close proximity to North Bay and the Inter-coastal Waterway and its Southeast Coast Saltwater Paddling Trail. The area offers many other water trails on creeks and rivers for paddling and fishing. The area is rich in museums, golf courses, breweries and diverse forms of entertainment. The East Coast Greenway follows the eastern side of the Great Dismal Swamp along the Dismal Swamp Canal Trail. The developing South Hampton Roads Trail, part of the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail, will connect coastal cities with the western part of the state. Sites along the Birding and Wildlife Trail in the area offer recreation, local history or marine science. The False Cape State Park regional connectivity map is an attachment to the full master plan document.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

False Cape State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1967 for land acquisition. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain the park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Land Acquisition/Viewshed Protection

Additional land acquisition is recommended to enhance park offerings, establish connective trail easements/corridors, buffer the park from inappropriate development and/or protect valued viewsheds. Future land acquisitions will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property to preserve the natural resources, cultural landscapes, and scenic resources in close proximity to the park will be encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the park will be enhanced and protected over time.

Environmental/Design Guidance

This 2020 master plan update describes both proposed facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park, and in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan, when available. New facilities at this park should be designed and built with consideration to the park's natural setting. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views in the park and of the park from adjacent lands and water bodies. Consideration will be given to eliminate excessive, misdirected or obtrusive artificial light in the park in order to maximize the dark sky effect and encourage astronomy and night-sky viewing.

Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. Green design initiatives will be considered during the design process for park renovations and new construction. Development activities will comply with requirements set forth by the Department of Environmental Quality's best management practices for erosion, sediment control and storm-water management in order to protect water quality. A setback guideline of 100 feet from the shoreline has been established by DCR, and trails and water dependent facilities such as fishing stations, piers and other water access facilities will be the only developments permitted within the 100-foot setback.

Special Issue: Sea Level Rise/Storm Surge

DCR must keep a close watch on changing projections for both sea level rise and storm surge impacts on False Cape State Park. There are challenges at this park involving storm surge and sea level rise which will require management actions to protect the resources and the quality of the park experience. These issues and impacts will require hard decisions and long term planning prior to developing new facilities or making the choice of maintaining or abandoning existing facilities.

Gateway exhibits for orientation to False Cape

Dudley Island

Pier repairs

Upgrade Road (1.2 mile road from Washwoods to Dudley Island - sand to gravel)

Estimated cost to complete Phase II: \$2,430,718

Phase III

Dudley Island

Small shelter

Upgrade Road (1.2 mile road from Washwoods to Dudley Island – sand to gravel)

Estimated Cost to complete Phase III: \$1,005,575

The total cost to bring False Cape State Park to its desired future condition is \$5,565,338

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at False Cape State Park are presently budgeted at \$683,000 annually, including salaries and benefits for 5 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 3 additional position and \$272,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, an additional \$297,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park requires the existing staffing and operating costs and the projected costs for the 3 development phases. The total budget for False Cape at full build out is projected to be \$980,000 with 8 staff positions.

EXISTING (FY 20)	STAFFING MATRIX*	<u>PHASE 1</u>	<u>PHASE 2</u>	<u>PHASE 3</u>	FULL BUILD OUT
STAFFING					PARK STAFFING
Park Manager					Park Manager
Asst. Park Manager					Asst. Park Manager
Chief Ranger					Chief Ranger
	Chief Rgr – Visitor Exper				Chief Rgr – Visitor Exper
Park Ranger	Park Ranger (2)				Park Ranger (3)
Office Manager					Office Manager
<u>SALARY TOTAL</u>					SALARY TOTAL
\$471,000	\$272,000				\$743,000
WAGE TOTAL					WAGE TOTAL
\$86,000		\$6,000	\$8,000	\$1,000	\$101,000
OTPS TOTAL					OTPS TOTAL
\$126,000		\$4,000	\$5,000	\$1,000	\$136,000
<u>TOTAL BUDGET (FY20 dollars)</u>					<u>TOTAL BUDGET (FY20 dollars)</u>
\$683,000	\$272,000	\$10,000	\$13,000	\$2,000	\$980,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY20 budget projections.

* The state park staffing matrix identifies the staffing complement of a park based on size and resources, number and type of facilities, as well as types of programming and activities. The staffing complement will be re-evaluated with the addition of new facilities.

LEGEND

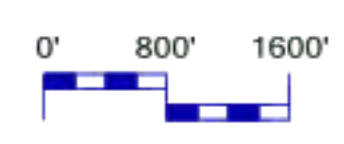
- PROPOSED FACILITIES
- EXISTING FACILITIES
- PARK BOUNDARY
- PARK PROPERTY
- HIKING TRAILS
- MULTI-PURPOSE TRAIL
- NWI WETLANDS
- SEA LEVEL RISE (1.5 FEET)
- STORM SURGE (4.5 FEET)



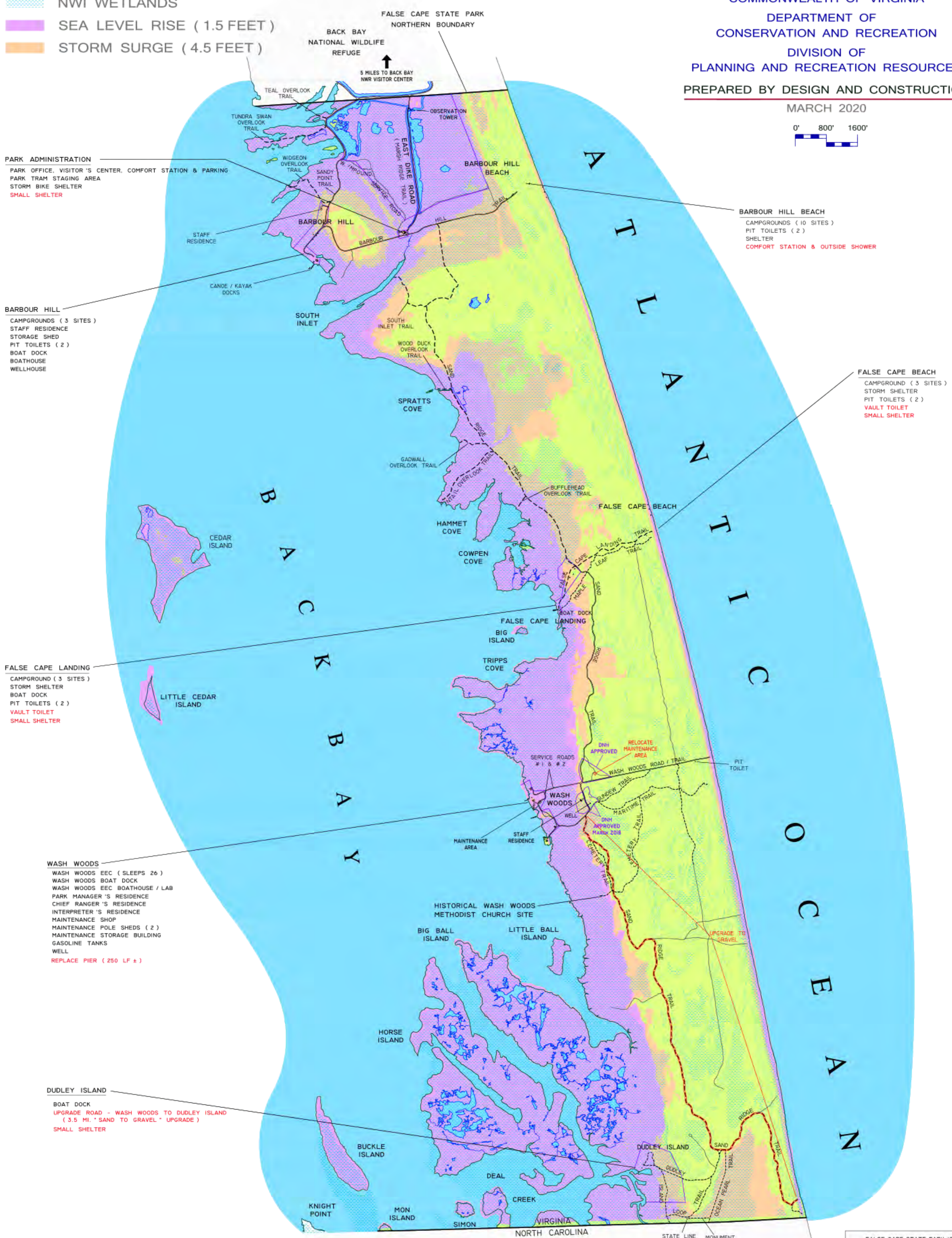
MASTER PLAN FOR FALSE CAPE STATE PARK

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
 DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION
 DIVISION OF PLANNING AND RECREATION RESOURCES
 PREPARED BY DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

MARCH 2020



LITTLE ISLAND GATEWAY EXHIBITS FOR ORIENTATION TO FALSE CAPE



PARK ADMINISTRATION
 PARK OFFICE, VISITOR'S CENTER, COMFORT STATION & PARKING
 PARK TRAM STAGING AREA
 STORM BIKE SHELTER
 SMALL SHELTER

BARBOUR HILL
 CAMPGROUNDS (3 SITES)
 STAFF RESIDENCE
 STORAGE SHED
 PIT TOILETS (2)
 BOAT DOCK
 BOATHOUSE
 WELLHOUSE

FALSE CAPE LANDING
 CAMPGROUND (3 SITES)
 STORM SHELTER
 BOAT DOCK
 PIT TOILETS (2)
 VAULT TOILET
 SMALL SHELTER

WASH WOODS
 WASH WOODS EEC (SLEEPS 26)
 WASH WOODS BOAT DOCK
 WASH WOODS EEC BOATHOUSE / LAB
 PARK MANAGER'S RESIDENCE
 CHIEF RANGER'S RESIDENCE
 INTERPRETER'S RESIDENCE
 MAINTENANCE SHOP
 MAINTENANCE POLE SHEDS (2)
 MAINTENANCE STORAGE BUILDING
 GASOLINE TANKS
 WELL
 REPLACE PIER (250 LF ±)

DUDLEY ISLAND
 BOAT DOCK
 UPGRADE ROAD - WASH WOODS TO DUDLEY ISLAND (3.5 MI. SAND TO GRAVEL UPGRADE)
 SMALL SHELTER

BARBOUR HILL BEACH
 CAMPGROUNDS (10 SITES)
 PIT TOILETS (2)
 SHELTER
 COMFORT STATION & OUTSIDE SHOWER

FALSE CAPE BEACH
 CAMPGROUND (3 SITES)
 STORM SHELTER
 PIT TOILETS (2)
 VAULT TOILET
 SMALL SHELTER

FALSE CAPE STATE PARK IS 3,844 ACRES LOCATED IN THE CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA.