

BRIEF SUMMARY

Permits, passes, fees Subcommittee
July 15, 2008

The below is a brief summary of the discussion of the Subcommittee's call on this topic. This is not meant to be a comprehensive summary. Please also note that discussion of ideas is BY NO MEANS an endorsement or agreement to any or all ideas included herein.

Possible Intent or Purpose: The participants discussed what intent or purpose some kind of permit, pass or similar system might serve. They identified the following:

- **Education & Training-** A permit, pass, or similar system would provide information on relevant facts and expected behaviors. Some stated it should focus on non-obvious behaviors and the specific context of driving at CAHA. Some state that it ought to include driver ethics, including interacting with other vehicles, pedestrians, dogs, or others. Some stated it should focus primarily on natural resource education/awareness. Some stated education might help reduce violations due to lack of education/information.
- **Enforcement** – A permit, pass, or similar system would allow the pass or permit to be revoked and would thus allow an effective means to sanction repeat violators.
- **Overall management** – A permit, pass, or similar system, some noted, would be part of a systematic approach to overall management of ORV use
- **Data collection** – A permit, pass, or similar system would provide data over time about usage and possibly where usage occurs, depending on how the permit or pass is issued.
- **Funding** - A permit, pass, or similar system would allow NPS to collect fees, a kind pay-to-play. Some stated that any funds collected from a particular kind of access, like ORVs, ought to be directly returned to supporting/managing that access and not for general Park purposes. NPS noted that under a permit system, they are able to retain 100% of the fees collected. Under a pass system, they are currently allowed to keep 80% of fees collected.

Information and Data Discussion

The NPS noted the following data for 2006.

- At Cape Cod National Seashore (CCNS), there were 59 violations, 19 of which were for those driving without a permit. For CAHA, there were 378 violations.

Discussion included:

- CCNS has some 3,700 total permits at any one time, including short-term and annual permits. As closures have increased in the last few years, it was reported the demand for permits has fallen. CCNS has generally much smaller beaches available for ORV access in terms of length and width.

- Participants asked questions seeking to place these numbers in context. What are the numbers of visitors at each Park? The numbers of ORVs using or seeking access? Campgrounds? The NPS agreed to seek to provide more context for these numbers.
- Commercial permits are currently granted for commercial fishermen. Permittees must be a resident of one of the villages and have a NC commercial fishing license. A concern was expressed that these permits ought to reflect the number of actual commercial fishermen and not those who have taken out a permit but do not use it as such in order to have accurate information about the number of active commercial fishing enterprises within the Park.

Possible Approaches

The participants discussed the form some kind of permit, pass or similar system might serve. Please also note that discussion of ideas is BY NO MEANS an endorsement or agreement to any or all ideas included herein. Comments were as follows.

- Issue a general beach use permit for all kinds of users and means of access.
- A permit system should begin with an educational film. Permits might be issued by section of sector of the beach in order to manage use in different parts and to at least initially determine use (density, frequency, trends over time) in these various sections. Permit system should be capable of dealing with growth and may at some point have to be used to limit use, at least in some areas or at some times. They should be issued for specific period of time (i.e. daily, monthly, annual). There should be a charge and the dollars might be used simply for recovering administrative costs or also improving infrastructure (like providing air by some ramps).
- A system ought to have some type of mandatory education component prior to receiving. One can confer with other Seashores to see what methods work best. Some consideration to number of permits that would be issued, how that could be approached, between sporadic visitors and local, long-term residents, annual versus sporadic, temporary on weekly, versus annual. Some allocations would be fair and appropriate between resident users and visitor users with some special consideration for Commercial fishermen. Fees should be plowed back into the activities permitted such as management, education, etc. The more dollars that stay within the Park from such fees the better.
- If you go on the beach, should get a permit. If driving through on the road, you should get the pass. Need to generate money for the Park.
- The system should not impede use by lack of capability of NPS to process permits or passes (i.e., if there's a educational video component and that takes time to watch and creates a delay for those trying to get the permit or pass). Educational messages should be those not getting elsewhere (i.e., driving with open alcohol containers is a requirement across states).
- Beach access permit: you pay to play, whatever user you are, across the board. If you want user statistics, not just particular users, would need this kind of approach.

- If there is to be a system of some kind, no cap on the number of permits for sale. Capacity or limitations should not be managed through permits, but rather through other means (counts at ramps, etc.). Availability ought to be via Internet, which in turn could be available at home, in tackle shops, hotels, motels, etc. Education should focus on natural resources. Permit or pass should be aimed at operators not vehicles (i.e., a different driver in the same vehicle can lead to very different kinds of driving). This can be accomplished through a hanging tag of some sort. There should be an annual and weekend or week kind of availability. Enforcement has to be related to what is done: issuing all the permits in the world without necessary enforcement personnel does not accomplish a key goal.

Questions asked or comments made included the following.

- Why have permits for different sections of the beach? Purpose is to determine use. However, even if begin without limits, specific days, locations, or over time, use may need to be managed in total numbers if too many, particularly in some areas. The only grounds for turning down are more about capacity at specific locale/time, and not the permits themselves. Dividing beach into some kind of sectors, might allow permits to be used to limit use, by stopping permits on X area, but continuing to use on Y.
- The experience at CCNS and Assateague is that they have visitors who get out onto the beach even though their site capacity limits have not been reached because permit numbers are limited. By setting numbers by actual use/location, a separate “capacity” system, you wouldn’t have fall fisherman, for example, not being able to come when all the open beach is not being used.
- The system should be adaptable. At Cape Cod, because numbers set in regulation, now have to go through a six-year process to redo even when everyone is in agreement to change the numbers. The final rule needs to be adaptive so can change and adapt without having to go through lengthy administrative process.
- Hard to imagine that permits sold implies that X users at section Y. Hard to correlate per time of day and geographically. If I have to sign up for 4 sectoral permits, I certainly can’t use all areas at the same time. So, not sure if or how this approach could work. There is a lot we don’t know. And, carrying capacity is something very related to this topic we need to address some how.
- Concern about infrastructure and enforcement to have multiple kinds of permits -- too much for Park to manage.
- Distinction between annual permits and weekly permits, could be a tool used to deal with the overcrowding. Annual permits for who fish up and down, often, as kind of base approach with weekly permits, for sporadic use. ORV use is primarily a peak use problem that could be managed through a weekly permit system.
- Development of and agreement on some kind of approach here has to be tied to overall actual physical beach access (or lack thereof) and natural resource management. Looking for tradeoffs across other issues.

Information Needs and Next Steps

- If NPS could provide specific data for at least a few years, for CNNS and CAHA and any comparative data on violations before and after a permit system was enacted.
- What kind of information do we have available from ramp monitors, at least give us some information, current level of use? The sense is overcapacity is reached mostly only on the three big holiday weekends in summer.
- What is the square number of square miles each ranger is responsible for in different places in terms of Cape Cod versus CAHA?
- The facilitator will distribute fact sheets collected from different Parks on ORV permits/passes.
- Next call is scheduled for either July 30 or 31 at 3:00 PM.