

**NPS RECOMMENDED PATH FORWARD ON CARRYING CAPACITY
COVERAGE IN ORV MANAGEMENT PLAN EIS/REGULATORY
NEGOTIATION PROCESSES**

The following represents NPS thoughts on the subject and is presented for discussion only and does not represent any decision by NPS to proceed along these lines.

- Inter-NPS discussion on the need to address carrying capacity within the context of the current effort would seem to indicate that as long as the subject is addressed in a logical fashion, no specific analytical prescription or studies are required.
- It is the opinion of Park (CAHA) staff, after some research into the subject, that an acceptable approach to viewing carrying capacity within the context of the current effort is to consider it in terms of three separate elements or aspects; ecological carrying capacity, park operational capacity, and user capacity.
- In simple terms, ecological carrying capacity is essentially the number of organisms that can be supported given the attributes of an ecosystem, e.g., number of piping plover that can be supported at CAHA.
- Park operational capacity for visitor management in the context of this project is the number of ORV that the park law enforcement staff can manage in a location at a time.
- User capacity addresses desired visitor experiences and desired resource conditions. NPS general management plans (GMPs) are required to include identification and implementation of commitments for user capacity (as opposed to carrying capacity) as the type and level of use that can be accommodated while sustaining the quality of park resources and visitor opportunities (experiences) consistent with the purposes of the park. It is best reflected through a process involving establishing desired conditions, monitoring, evaluation, and visitor management actions to ensure park values are protected.
- The Park is considering whether the three aspects of carrying capacity could be addressed in this project as follows:
 - Ecological carrying capacity is a biological determination. It is not necessarily the same as the desired resource condition in all situations. Ecological carrying capacity could be considered as described below under user capacity through the establishment of a “desired condition” approach, i.e., determining how many birds of the various protected species need to be maintained (abundance) and what level of reproductive success needs to be maintained in order to have a sustainable, stable population over the long term to meet park responsibilities under the NPS Organic Act and NPS management policies. This could then be translated into a management approach, likely using adaptive management, to achieve this population in combination with either of two methods (1)

- establishment of a buffer system (similar to the current practice), or (2) use of a seasonal or year-round “bird conservation areas” method (establishing certain prime areas where bird protection would be at an elevated state above that in the rest of the seashore).
- Determination of desired resource conditions are shaped by legal and policy constraints as well as the availability of scientific information. For example, for a federally listed species the desired resource condition may be at or close to ecological carrying capacity or at a level stated in a recovery plan for the species. For abundant native species the desired resource condition may be a population sustainable over time, which may be below the ecological carrying capacity. In these situations the desired condition would likely be stated in terms of ecosystem structure and function rather than for each species in the ecosystem. While there is some flexibility in defining desired resource conditions, NPS may not establish desired resource conditions which would result in impairment or unacceptable impacts under the Organic Act and the NPS Management Policies.
 - As summarized above, user capacity is the type and level of use that can be accommodated while sustaining the desired quality of park resources and visitor opportunities (experiences) consistent with the purposes of the park. It is best reflected through a process involving establishing desired conditions, monitoring, evaluation, and visitor management actions to ensure park values are protected. CAHA is of the opinion that the establishment of ORV routes and areas and non-ORV use areas essentially addresses the visitor experience aspect consistent with the plan objectives to (1) manage ORV use to allow for a variety of appropriate visitor use experiences, and (2) minimize conflicts between ORV use and other uses.
 - Within ORV and non-ORV areas, visitors will tend to be self-regulating depending on the experience they are seeking. For example, visitors wanting solitude will migrate away from crowded areas to areas that are more difficult to get to in both non-ORV and ORV areas, whereas people who want more social contact will gravitate to where other people are. Given the establishment of these two types of areas and the self-regulating element, no separate effort would be required to establish a level of use within these areas other than addressed in the park operation capacity aspect.
 - Park operational capacity for visitor management for this project translates into “how many ORV can be accommodated at CAHA at a particular place and time”? CAHA Law Enforcement/Visitor Protection/Emergency Protection staff has determined that overcrowding situations can reduce staff capacity to react effectively to critical situations. Although to date this situation has only been determined to potentially occur at certain prime locations on certain prime holidays, it is reasonable to assume that increased visitation to CAHA may increase such situations over time. One solution is to restrict the number of vehicles on the beaches when they

exceed a certain number. A relatively simple metric can be developed to set a maximum vehicle limit based, e.g. on the physical space available, and then it becomes an enforcement initiative. This approach has precedent at other National Parks.

- In the ORV Management Plan, some or all of the above aspects would use an adaptive management approach that would integrate on-going monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment at some predetermined frequency to continue to strive to achieve the desired conditions. This would allow adjustments to be made based on changing conditions at CAHA.