

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR RECREATION

Definition: Essential elements for recreation are those attributes of an area that make it unique and desirable for the recreational needs of the public. Particular attention should be paid to those waterfront activities such as swimming, fishing, boating, sailing that were cited by Congress when they established this Seashore Recreational Area.

Cape Point

Of all the areas in the Seashore, Cape Point is the most dynamic and is constantly changing with the season and wind patterns. Major changes can occur abruptly with severe storms. Winter nor'easters will move the point in a southward direction and sometimes curving around to the west to form a bay and ultimately closing to the form of the pond. Extended periods of southwest winds, typical of summer, extend the point to the east, curling northward to form a cove. All of this occurs with a backdrop of shifting sandbars created by the clash of the Labrador Current and the Gulf Stream. These changes create unusual opportunities for fishing for many species which vary according to the season. Changes in topography allow a variety of wave conditions conducive to a large number of active water sports such as kite, sail, surf, boogie, skim boards. Excellent "breaks" can be found just south of the point for kite and surf boarders. Calm weather and low tides produce exceptional habitat of safe pools and shallows for young children and novice swimmers. This is most important for parents with very young children. Large coves with less energetic wave action are safe for more experienced swimmers. The coves are also utilized by people with rubber rafts and are an ideal place for snorkeling. The tip of the point with the violent wave action is the domain of the surfcasters throwing lures to capture those fish species attracted to bait fish by the unique confluence of the two currents. There are times when this area is known as the "washing machine" because of the battering of the wave action. Strong and agile bodies are an asset here. More average anglers line up along the edge of the bar extending back to the shore, hoping the schools of game fish will come closer to their range. Here, fish can be caught with a modest amount of gear. A person would have to go offshore at much greater expense to catch these kinds of fish. One of the great attractions here is that every fish species caught in the surf battles more ferociously than if caught from a boat. Gullies and currents are used by the fish to their advantage to provide a higher level of sport for the sport fishermen and women. Fishing at Cape Point is so unique that an angler can vary his speed of retrieval to his lure and target different species with the same lure going from the fast Spanish Mackerel and Jacks to Blue Fish and dropping close to the bottom for Red Drum or Flounder. These all can be caught from the same position on one day at this special place that is unlike any other.

There is a broad expanse of sand between the water and the dunes that provides for ample parking, picnicking, and gathering of friends and family. Group games are located here: horseshoes, volley ball, and bocce ball. Those who don't participate may choose to simply sit and watch or read a book. Bird life is prevalent here and a variety of species can be observed and enjoyed up close. Willets, black bellied and other plovers, ruddy turnstone, terns and gulls of several varieties, sandpipers and sanderling are common. Walking along the beach and in the shallows, shell collectors are busy looking for the perfect specimen. Kids are enthralled by jelly fish and other gems of discovery like strings of whelk eggs. Discoveries and opportunities for

education abound. All of these attractions are available for the young, the old, the disabled and as well as challenging for the more physically strong and skillful. On those many days when the wind is too strong and the sand is blowing, family activities are restricted. This is the time for the kiteboarders south of the Point. It is the time for serious drum fishing on the Point. Later in the year striped bass become the target for these fishermen. Nighttime fishing is especially productive for drum fishing year round and striped bass winter and spring. In May and June, monster cobia make an appearance. Excellent table food like pompano, flounder, sea mullet are caught by fishermen using baited hooks near shore.

Opportunities for passive recreation are also available at Cape Point. The Point and the spits are the only places of the Seashore where you can observe sunrise and sunset at the same position. Sunrises are especially beautiful. The proximity of the Gulf Stream creates a fluffy bank of clouds that are spectacular in their illumination by the rays of the rising sun. Combine that with the foreground of waves clashing together, sometimes as high as 30 feet in the air. This vista is only found at Cape Point and this observation alone demands continual public access every day of the year. Access is also important at night because this area is one of the darker sites in the Seashore for viewing stars and planets of the heavens. Some of these elements of recreation are found on the other beaches of the Seashore. Only at Cape Point do they all come together.

Each National Park has a special feature for which it was designated. Cape Point is the epitome of Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area.

Inlet Spits

Large sand spits are formed at the three inlets within CHNSRA. The spits are:

1. Bodie Island
2. Hatteras Island
3. North Ocracoke
4. South Ocracoke

All of these locations have many of the Essential Elements for Recreation that exist at Cape Point. Opportunities for public recreation on these spits are greater than found along the main island beaches which accounts for their great popularity among the Seashore visitors. Scenic views, concentrations of fish life and wide beaches are all typical of these spits. The spits are renowned for multiple uses by all visitors to the park; each member of a family group may pursue a different interest. Of primary importance is the close proximity of shallow pools which form at low tide and provide safe bathing for small children and inexperienced swimmers. Many generations of visitors have enjoyed the close coexistence with the abundant shore birds.

Due to the remote locations of these areas and the wide variety of recreational gear that may be needed, the mechanized vehicle has proven necessary for most families and individuals to enjoy the beach attractions of this park. Few can access the Point and spits with the equipment needed to enjoy them without an SUV or pickup.