



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gulf Islands
National Seashore

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Gulf Islands News Release

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National Seashore Releases Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Personal Watercraft Use

Gulf Breeze, Fla. – The National Park Service has released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Personal Watercraft (PWC) use beginning the public comment period. Members of the public are invited to review and comment on the document online at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/guis-PWC-EIS>. Public comments will be accepted on the DEIS through September 17. Public meetings will be held in Florida and Mississippi the week of August 20. All meetings will be held from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

- Tuesday, August 21: Park Headquarters, 1801 Gulf Breeze Parkway, Gulf Breeze, FL 32563
- Wednesday, August 22: Perdido Key Community Center, 15500 Perdido Key Drive, Pensacola, FL 32507
- Thursday, August 23: Davis Bayou Visitor Center, 3500 Park Road, Ocean Springs, MS 39564

In developing the DEIS, the National Park Service incorporated research regarding the impacts of PWC use on water, air, and soundscape quality as well as submerged aquatic vegetation (seagrass beds) to develop several alternatives for managing PWC use in the national seashore. The preferred alternative proposed by the National Park Service includes:

- Revised flat wake zones
 - 150 yards from shorelines in Florida
 - 300 yards from shorelines in Mississippi
- A requirement for PWCs to meet the 2010 EPA emissions standards
- A prohibition on PWC landings on wilderness islands

Current national seashore regulations require PWC users to maintain a flat wake zones; 300 yards from shore in Florida and non-wilderness islands in MS, except West Ship Island and ½ mile from wilderness islands and West Ship Island. The flat wake zones in the preferred alternative were chosen by determining at what depth PWCs do not impact seagrass beds and at what distance from shore these depths are located in national seashore waters. Additional considerations were also taken into account including nesting shorebird impacts and wilderness act regulations.

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In 2000, the National Park Service limited PWC use in all but 22 specifically identified parks that were required to develop their own special regulations for continued PWC use. Gulf Islands National Seashore completed an Environmental Assessment in 2004 to develop the special regulation which was implemented in 2006. In 2010, the U.S. District Court determined the NEPA process completed in 2004 was inadequate, but left the existing special regulation and flat-wake zone in place while the national seashore began a new NEPA process, which resulted in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Please visit <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/guis-PWC-EIS> to review and comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and to see details on the upcoming public meetings.

***About Gulf Islands National Seashore:** Created in 1971, the national seashore stretches 160 miles along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico in Florida and Mississippi, and includes barrier islands, maritime forests, historic forts, bayous, and marine habitat. Visit us at www.nps.gov/guis, on Facebook www.Facebook.com/GulfIslandsNPS, Twitter www.Twitter.com/GulfIslandsNPS, and Instagram www.Instagram.com/GulfIslandsNPS.*

***About the National Park Service:** More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America's 417 national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Visit us at www.nps.gov, on Facebook www.facebook.com/nationalparkservice and Twitter www.twitter.com/natlparkservice.*

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