

Fire Island National Seashore Off Road Vehicle Management

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



You're invited!

The National Park Service (NPS) is announcing the release of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for an update of the regulations for Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Management at the Fire Island National Seashore. The NPS has prepared this EA in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework. The release of the EA and this newsletter begins a public comment period (May 28 – June 30, 2024) in which the NPS requests your feedback. Your participation is vital to the success of our planning process. There are several ways to comment, including attending an in-person or web-based public meeting and submitting electronic or written comments.

Public Meetings

Begins with a 20-minute presentation, followed by Q&A.

IN-PERSON MEETING

Wednesday, June 5

Registration and open house start at 6:30 p.m.

Presentation begins at 7:00 p.m.

Patchogue Ferry Terminal

150 West Avenue

Patchogue, New York 11772

Long Island

VIRTUAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 12

Starts at 6:30 p.m.

Access the website at:

https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FIIS_ORV

Presentation will be recorded and available on project website by June 19

My team and I appreciate the long history of partnership between Fire Islanders and the National Park Service. We want to reassure all stakeholders that we value collaboration across the overlapping jurisdictions within the Fire Island National Seashore.

Throughout the process of updating the driving regulation, we have had substantial engagement with Fire Island stakeholders. We heard from the many different user groups on Fire Island, who expressed varying needs and desires related to driving on the island. This input has helped shape the alternatives that we are now sharing in the EA. We realize that there may not be a one-size-fits-all solution for updating the regulations, but we hope aspects of our current proposed alternatives demonstrate how the team is trying to find a balance in fulfilling the NPS's mission of protecting Seashore resources and visitor experience without disrupting access to thriving Fire Island communities. We thank you for your input throughout this process.

Alexcy Romero, Superintendent

Background

The EA focuses on the impacts of changes to the ORV driving regulations on lands administered by the NPS. ORV management on Fire Island is a uniquely complex system with permitting and management responsibilities under the jurisdiction of the towns of Islip and Brookhaven and the villages of Ocean Beach and Saltaire on the lands within their respective jurisdictions. The ORV driving regulations were created to protect the vulnerable resources of Fire Island from unmanaged ORV use. ORV permits issued by the NPS (except permits for recreational hunting and fishing access) and by the municipalities enable access to support viable Fire Island communities that cannot be achieved by water. The NPS regulations apply to ORV use on NPS administered lands. Each town or village may decide to update its own regulations or permitting process independent of changes made by the NPS.



Purpose and Need

The purpose of this effort is to evaluate ORV use at the Seashore. The intent is to review the existing 1987 ORV regulations to accomplish multiple goals:

- allow appropriate and equitable vehicular access to supplement water-based transportation, which is the primary means of transport to Fire Island and the communities;
- protect Seashore resources and a safe visitor experience; and
- improve the administration of the ORV permitting program.

The NPS needs to consider revisions to the existing driving regulations to address changes in development, access, technology, and use on Fire Island, and changes occurring as a result of the dynamic nature of the barrier island (e.g., the breach at Old Inlet caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012). The updated regulations should provide future flexibility as conditions continue to change. Revisions are further needed to update and clarify the process for obtaining driving permits.

The Environmental Assessment

The EA evaluates the impacts of no action (alternative A) and of two action alternatives (B and C). It describes the environment that the alternatives would affect and assesses the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives.

Alternative A (no action) would continue the current ORV management under the 1987 regulations and subsequent Seashore management plans. Action alternatives B and C would modify caps (alternative B) or remove caps (alternative C) on the number of permits issued per category and have strict permitting criteria for determining permit eligibility. It would include limits on the number of trips that are allowed per day and define a trip as one round-trip through the west or east gate. In the shoulder seasons, alternative B would permit driving during all days in May (until the Memorial Day weekend); and on weekdays and weekend nights in early June and after Labor Day for most categories. Alternative C would only permit weekday driving during those periods. Among other changes, alternatives B and C would modify the recreational driving window to reduce conflict with piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) during its nesting season, permit both vehicles with four-wheel and all-wheel drive, and specify that construction debris carting is within the construction/business permit category.

The EA analyzed six resources topics in detail:

- Dune systems and plant communities (including threatened and endangered plants)
- Wildlife (including beach invertebrates and threatened and endangered species)
- Sunken Forest and Sunken Forest Preserve
- Visitor use, experience, and safety
- NPS-managed sections of Burma Road and dune cuts
- Socioeconomic resources



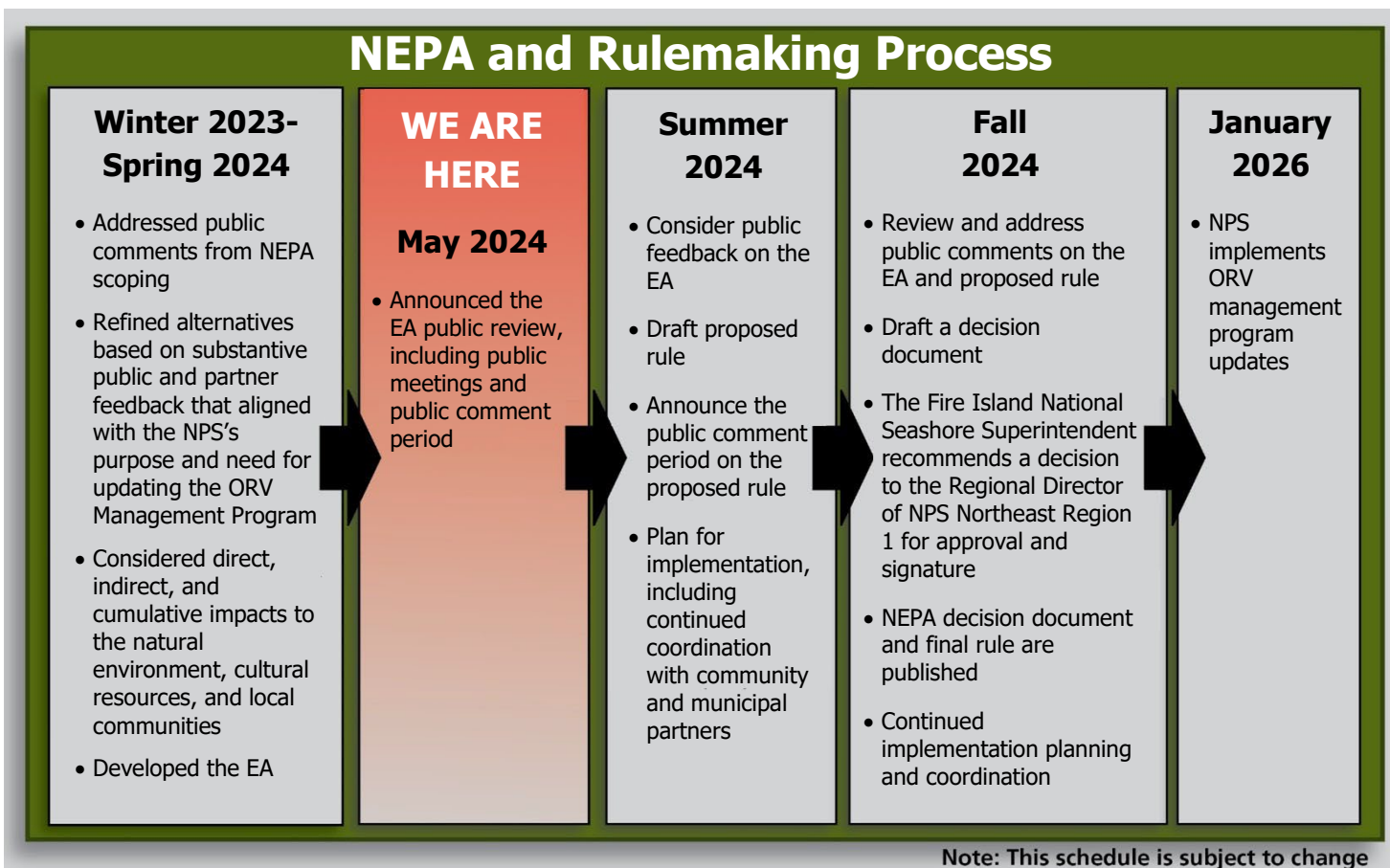
Other resource topics were also considered during the development of the EA but dismissed from detailed analysis because potential environmental impacts were not central to the proposed action or of critical importance, and/or a detailed analysis of environmental impacts related to the issue was not necessary to make a reasoned choice between alternatives.



Changes Based on Public Scoping Comments

During NEPA public scoping in fall 2023 the NPS solicited comments on the previous versions of the action alternatives. The NPS considered the comments during the preparation of the EA, making several changes to the action alternatives:

- **Brief and occasional absence for year-round residents:** As part of the qualifications for a year-round resident driving permit, the consecutive number of days at any one time period of being absent from the Seashore was changed from no more than 14 days to no more than 30 days.
- **Seasonal driving during the spring and fall shoulder seasons (applicable to alternative B):** The seasonal driving window was modified from allowing 24-hour access, to not allowing driving between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays for residents, municipal employees, essential services, and public utilities. This covers the period between Memorial Day and the last day of Suffolk County Public Schools in June, and the Tuesday after Labor Day to the Sunday before Columbus/Indigenous Peoples' Day.
- **Trips per day for Construction/businesses:** The number of trips through the gate was changed from one trip per day to two trips per day.
- **Emergency Services:** The EA clarified the language and the intent for these services (police, firefighting, ambulances). While emergency services would be identified as a category in the updated regulations, there would be no cap, a permit would likely not be required, and practices for driving by these vehicles (access, seasonal driving, etc.) would remain unchanged from current conditions.




Note: This schedule is subject to change



How to Comment

The NPS is seeking substantive comments on the draft EA. The NPS also plans to fulfill its public involvement requirement under the National Historic Preservation Act concurrently with the EA public review.

Please provide comments in one of the following ways:

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| 1 | Submit comments electronically at the link:
https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FIIS_ORV (<i>preferred method</i>) |  |
| 2 | Submit written comments at the in-person public meeting on June 5, 2024. | |
| 3 | Submit written comments in person to the NPS headquarters in Patchogue, NY, or by mail to:
Off Road Vehicle Management Plan
Superintendent Alexcy Romero
Fire Island National Seashore
120 Laurel Street
Patchogue, New York 11772 | |

This public comment period ends on **June 30, 2024**.

Notes: Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Please also note that your entire comment — including personal identifying information such as your address, phone number, and e-mail address — may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Comments submitted by individuals or organizations on behalf of other individuals or organizations will not be accepted.

Project Website

For more information on this project or to submit public comments, please visit the Project Website at
https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FIIS_ORV

