



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gateway National Recreation Area

*Gateway State of the Park 2008*



# Foreword



The accomplishments of the park this past year are impressive, reflecting the diversity of resources that make up the park itself. Some of these accomplishments include Operation Clean Bay, an effort to remove the numerous abandoned boats that litter and pollute Jamaica Bay; the hiring of additional summer seasonal employees who enhanced

visitor services in everything from maintenance to lifeguard protection; and the rehabilitation of three important structures in the Fort Hancock Historic District. These and all the accomplishments chronicled in this report reflect the combined efforts that our staff and our partners have made to restore the significant cultural and natural features of the park, while always working to provide environmental leadership and superior visitor services.

While Gateway is a showcase for the National Parks in New York and New Jersey, we must rededicate ourselves to use that status as a means to reach our future leaders. The range of our programs reflects our commitment to reach the diversity of our visitors, to foster partnerships and work with our neighbors to protect park resources, and to provide opportunities for education and visitor enjoyment. All National Parks afford people an opportunity to experience their heritage; at Gateway the public is encouraged to help care for that heritage.

Gateway is a relatively young park that is still in the process of reaching its potential. This past year we moved closer to that goal as significant progress was made on the multi-year effort to write a new General Management Plan. The success of this process depends on public involvement, and beginning in 2009 numerous opportunities will be set-up to allow everyone to participate in this planning effort. I encourage you to become involved as a way to help Gateway reach its true potential.

Finally I wish to thank the staff, our partners and our volunteers who have worked so hard to serve the nearly ten million visitors who came to Gateway this past year. Faced with significant challenges you remain steadfast in your dedication to build an urban National Park that is the pride of the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area and the nation.

*Barry T. Sullivan*  
General Superintendent

# Primary Goals

Gateway National Recreation Area has five primary park goals that are used to set priorities and guide activity in all areas of park operations. The narrative of this year's accomplishments are centered around these goals.

## GOAL 1: REVERSE DETERIORATION OF ALL PRIMARY PARK RESOURCES



### Operation Clean Bay

Operation Clean Bay continues an effort focused on abandoned boats in Jamaica Bay. Gateway's staff spearheaded a multi-agency task force that included the New York State DEC, the United States Coast Guard, and three New York City departments: Environmental Protection, Sanitation and the

NYPD. Seventy one derelict vessels were removed from Jamaica Bay, boats that could have polluted the bay with fuel left in their rusting tanks. Combined with a new public awareness campaign, the program hopes to finally end this decades-old practice.

### Horseshoe Crab Protection

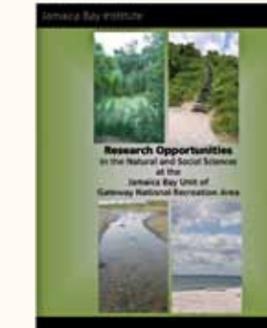


In accordance with Federal regulations that prohibit the taking of wildlife in National Parks, Gateway is instituting a policy prohibiting all harvesting of horseshoe crabs throughout the park. This resource protection and enforcement comes at a critical time

when demand for horseshoe crabs as bait for commercial fishing operations has greatly reduced their numbers. Horseshoe crab eggs are also a crucial food source for

migratory shorebirds whose numbers have also decreased in recent years. Park rangers and the US Park Police are working together in targeted public outreach and concentrated enforcement efforts to provide a safe haven for this invaluable species that predates the dinosaurs.

### Natural Resource Challenge



In a testament to the kind of collaboration envisioned by the Natural Resource Challenge, the Jamaica Bay Institute and the North Atlantic Coast CESU prepared a Natural Resources Research Opportunities Catalogue for Jamaica Bay. This document identifies park research needs for interested students and researchers, as well as park staff. From wetland loss to light pollution, the document is a current and comprehensive description of the many

resource challenges faced at Gateway.

### Goats Clear Vegetation from Historic Structures

Visitors to Battery Duane, one of Fort Wadsworth's most significant Endicott Era gun batteries, were likely to meet fourteen yearling goats recruited this year to continue clearing vegetation from this historic gun emplacement. Newspapers and television outlets such as CBS News and the New York Times covered the story, with one newspaper dubbing them New York's "weapons of grass destruction." They provided a green, cost effective, visitor friendly tool for preservation of historic structures. A total of three



acres of vegetation has now been removed from atop this battery and plans for reestablishing native grasses are being considered.

## Lighthouse Cleaning



Park maintenance staff cleaned the historic Sandy Hook lighthouse to remove rust stains and biological growth from the painted masonry surface. The three man crew was able to reach the entire 73 foot high tower with a lift borrowed from the Statue of Liberty NM. A low pressure water wash and light scrubbing of the surface with an environmentally friendly detergent removed the stains. The project benefitted from funding provided by the Sandy Hook Foundation.

## Sandy Hook Endangered Species Program

The Sandy Hook Unit implemented a new Endangered Species Management Plan that was developed in 2007. Improvements over the old plan included new conservation measures related to human disturbance, predator management, and habitat protection. Least terns, American oystercatchers and piping plover were successful in fledging their young. Ten pairs of osprey nested at Sandy Hook raising a total of 14 offspring. Adult northeastern beach tiger beetles are still being located as a result of reintroduction efforts begun in 1995. Large numbers of sea beach amaranth, 1078 plants to date, continue to be found in the park.



## GOAL 2: PROVIDE NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR SAFE AND ENJOYABLE PARK VISITS

### Enhanced Lifeguard Staff



Using funds provided by the National Park Service Centennial Initiative, the park hired additional lifeguards to expand coverage at Jacob Riis Park and Sandy Hook swimming beaches. At Jacob Riis Park the new funding provided a level of staffing that had not been attainable for several years and it enabled the opening of Bays 1-12

during peak visitation periods. Rigorous testing ensured that a competent and skilled workforce was hired to combat the dangers posed by New York and New Jersey's strong rip currents. In the end, the park had yet another season with no drowning deaths on guarded beaches while lifeguards were on duty.

### Ecology Village Tent Platform Replacement



The park received a Recycling at Work Sustainability Grant from the National Park Foundation and Unilever to improve the Ecology Village Campgrounds at Floyd Bennett Field. The funding enabled the park to replace 24 deteriorated wooden tent platforms and handicap ramps with sustainable,

recycled plastic lumber. Many volunteers contributed their time, effort and expertise to the construction of the new platforms, including employees from a local salvage company, union carpenters, school teachers and their students, and the U.S. Marine Corps. As a result of this team effort, future campers will sleep in their tents safely and comfortably while learning about sustainability.

## Miller Field Parking Improvements



Finding parking at your son or daughter's soccer game has just gotten a lot easier at Miller Field. A multi-million dollar project to renovate the parking facilities at Miller Field has been completed. Teams and visitors will now be able to easily access one of the dozens of sports fields spread

throughout the complex. Additionally, the long awaited entrance to Miller Field's north side has been completed. This entrance, leading from Father Capodanno Boulevard, is well marked with decorative stone pillars and gates. It will allow visitors coming from the north or east easy foot access to park facilities. The project was a collaborative effort between Gateway, the local Congressman, and the Staten Island Borough President.

## Trail Projects

National Trails Day marked the beginning of a season of trail improvements at the Staten Island Unit of the park. Volunteers, staff, and a Student Conservation Association intern sponsored by Lipton's Healthy Parks Healthy Living initiative reworked entranceways to the Blue Dot Trail at Great Kills Park and the Swamp White Oak Forest at Miller Field. Trail heads were cleared, pruned, planted and reappointed with split rail fence and new trailhead signage. Staff and volunteers also collaborated to remove encroaching trees and shrubs from a dry meadow along the Blue Dot Trail, an area known for its great bird watching opportunities.



## Route 36 Bridge



The New Jersey Department of Transportation has begun the multi-year project to replace the structurally deficient Route 36 Highlands Bridge that connects most visitors with the Sandy Hook Peninsula. The \$124 million state-funded construction project

has affected traffic to and from Sandy Hook, but park staff have worked closely with state and local officials to reduce the impact to visitors during the busy summer months. The new bridge will include pedestrian overpasses to connect Sandy Hook's Multiuse Pathway with neighboring communities. This will expand recreational opportunities and access for thousands of pathway users.

## Rude Awakenings Anti-Drinking and Driving Program

Sandy Hook LE rangers took a lead in presenting the 2008 Rude Awakenings anti-drinking and driving program. More than 980 students from Sandy Hook's Marine Academy of Science and Technology and four other high schools participated in the program that included discussions of the personal, emotional, social, medical and legal impacts of drinking and driving. The students then participated in hands-on field activities that included the use of Fatal Vision Goggles, field sobriety tests, and driving golf carts with and without the goggles to experience the effects. Other participants included the Middletown Twp. Police Dept., Fire Dept. and EMS, other local police departments, the New Jersey State Police, the US Coast Guard, and a host of volunteers.



## GOAL 3: UPDATE AND REVITALIZE INTERPRETIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

### OPEX Reaches Milestone



Last fall 35 New York area educators gathered hand lenses, view finders, colored pencils and inquisitive scientific hats to kick off the 33<sup>rd</sup> season of Operation Explore (OPEX) at Gateway. Since the program's beginning approximately 1,500 fourth through sixth grade teachers, 2,000 parents and 50,000 students have linked traditional classroom science with place-based experiences in the woodland and waterway natural classrooms of Gateway. The park works collaboratively with five other agencies to conduct this year-long, nationally recognized program which has the distinction of being New York City's longest running environmental education program.

### Jamaica Bay Odyssey – Outside and In

The new permanent exhibit at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge has officially put out the welcome mat to visitors. Entitled *The Jamaica Bay Odyssey*, the stunning new exhibit takes visitors on a journey to understand the significance of Jamaica Bay and entices them to venture outdoors to learn more. Combining bright, attractive graphics, engaging text, and three dimensional models, the exhibit highlights the rich plant and animal life of Jamaica Bay and explains how people will continue to shape the nature of the bay.



### Butterfly Garden and Feeder Watch Program



The Protectors of the Pine Oak Woods, a Staten Island conservation group, worked with the staff and volunteers at Great Kills Park to establish a butterfly garden at the Education Field Station. This effort not only increased available habitat for butterflies, but also provided

improvements for all sorts of birds. Students have made use of these changed conditions to monitor bird populations at this important natural area on Staten Island.

### Clean Ocean Action Student Summit

Over 300 students attended two, day-long programs at the Clean Ocean Action Student Summit at Sandy Hook. The National Park Service and other environmental organizations presented talks, walks and demonstrations on marine environmental issues ranging from habitat preservation and marine pollution, to salt marsh ecology.



### Junior Ranger Program

The Sandy Hook Unit expanded its Junior Ranger programs with two new offerings. "Junior Naturalists" lets participants explore the ecology of various barrier beach habitats, and "Junior Environmentalists" looks at the issues of non-point pollution, endangered species and water quality.

### Osprey Video



"The Ospreys of Sandy Hook" is a 12 minute video created this year through a grant from the Sandy Hook Foundation. The video, developed jointly by Gateway, NJ Audubon Society and the Sandy Hook Foundation, traces a year in the life of the ospreys who nest and raise their young in

this coastal environment. The video is shown in the park and is also available as a download on the Sandy Hook Foundation website.

### Gateway Center for Science and Environmental Studies

Gateway has reestablished a formal agreement with the New York City Department of Education to host the Gateway Center for Science and Environmental Studies at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. The Center received a three year New York State Math and Science Partnership grant that includes funding for an NPS ranger who will help teachers understand how NPS resources can be used to enhance classroom activities.

### Save Our History

Thanks to a "Save Our History" grant from the History Channel, the National Parks of New York Harbor Education Center coordinated a year-long project called *Immigrant Reflections: From Ellis Island to Staten Island*. During the course of the project students at the College of Staten Island High School for International Studies learned about immigration, how to interpret primary sources and how to conduct oral histories. Partners who worked with the Education Center on this project included the College of Staten Island, the Ellis Island Immigration Museum and Save Ellis Island, Inc.



### Weather and Climate in Our National Parks

A pilot program for middle schools was offered this year which links specific resources offered at NPS sites with NYC curriculum standards about weather patterns and concern over global warming. Students used computers and live cameras to observe weather patterns at four different NPS sites throughout the nation.

### Marine Invaders

The NPNH Education Center piloted a citizen science program at Jamaica Bay. Students at four high schools visited different rocky beaches in Jamaica Bay, turning over rocks and gathering data on invasive species, particularly the Asian shore crab. The Division of Natural Resources developed the protocols for recording data, which is posted on the MIT Invasive Species Database and reported to the NPS. The Jamaica Bay Unit staff adapted the program for summer camp programs as well.



### Achievements by Centennial Staff

With Centennial Initiative funding, five undergraduate and graduate students in education and science worked with NPNH Education Center staff over the summer to create and refine school programs at various NPNH sites. As a result four parks now have new programs and activities to offer to hundreds of visiting school groups each year. This includes teacher and student materials regarding plant diversity and two grade school programs for the African Burial Ground NM.

### CUNY Partnership

The formal partnership between the NPNH Education Center, Brooklyn College and College of Staten Island continues to evolve and deepen. Faculty from both colleges visited park sites at Gateway and other National Parks around New York Harbor to observe individual education programs and offer recommendations. Faculty and Education Center staff then worked with park staff on the recommendations made by the faculty to refine education programs targeted by the snapshots.

## GOAL 4: EXPAND OUR CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT PARK PROGRAMS

### Wadsworth Day



In commemoration of General James Wadsworth's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, Wadsworth Day provided a context to understand his role as both a Civil War hero and civil rights advocate. Period cannons fired as Civil War re-enactors talked to visitors and manned the fort. Re-enactors dressed as the general and his wife were featured in a live broadcast on NBC-TV's morning news show. A military band introduced the general's descendants, Senator James Wadsworth Symington of Missouri, his brother, and their family. Wadsworth Day was an opportunity for hundreds of visitors to explore the fort and celebrate General James Wadsworth and his accomplishments.

### Riis Summer History Tours

This summer, daily walking tours were offered at Jacob Riis Park from July 4th through Labor Day. The tours were given by park rangers and a "Transportation Interpreter" funded through a grant from the Ford Foundation through the National Park Foundation. Visitors took advantage of the opportunity to learn about the history of recreation at the site, along with the life and contributions of New York City reformer Jacob Riis. A discussion on the changing trends in transportation from the days of Robert Moses to the pilot ferry program at Riis Landing was also part of the popular tour.

### Native Plant Corps

For the second consecutive year the Student Conservation Association Native Plant Corps worked at Sandy Hook to remove non-native invasive plants, helping to restore the native coastal beach flora. The team removed hundreds of tree-of-heaven and autumn olive trees and treated five



other invasive species, improving over 78 acres. Data on the areas treated, including species, location, and the method of treatment were recorded and entered into the park geographic information system database.

### Kudos to a Park Volunteer



For the last year, the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge visitor contact station has been filled with shouts and giggles and the loud silence of awe. This welcome activity is the result of the creative efforts of a kindergarten teacher who worked with park interpreters to develop and present four new public programs: "Home Sweet Habitat," "Who's Sleeping at Jamaica Bay," "Planting with Sprouts," and "Beautiful Butterflies." This creative effort enabled the park to expand its public programming and to educate and inspire very young audiences.

### Eco Cruises and a New Ferry Service



Through a new partnership with the New York City Economic Development Corporation, ferry service to Gateway's Riis Landing and eco cruises on Jamaica Bay were part of a new summer experience. The new ferry service brought visitors to the park from Manhattan, establishing a "green" transportation alternative for those who regularly enjoy the beaches of Jacob Riis Park. Eco cruises and sunset boat tours also allowed visitors to experience Jamaica Bay wildlife up close. Accompanied by interns from the Student Conservation Association, these tours engaged family audiences and especially younger passengers with hands-on activities about the bay.

### Staten Island OutLOUD

Few New Yorkers recognize Staten Island's role in nineteenth century American literature, but no less a figure than Herman Melville spent years of his life on Staten Island where he was especially fond of Fort Wadsworth. Staten Island OutLOUD, a grass roots literacy organization, organizes public readings of the writer's work. This year a dozen speakers read from Melville's *Moby Dick* for the assembled visitors at Fort Wadsworth.



### Sandy Hook Partners work on Chapel, Theater and Post HQ

In its long-running effort to preserve 36 buildings within the Fort Hancock Historic District, Sandy Hook Partners has finished work on three important buildings: the Chapel, the Theater and the former Headquarters building. With rehabilitation now complete, these facilities are available to the community for special events, educational meetings, visual arts classes, theater performances, workshops and seminars.



## GOAL 5: IMPROVE OUR IMAGE AND IDENTITY AS PART OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

### Jacob Riis Park Still Promoting Healthy Living



Exercise and recreational programming for park visitors has a long history at Gateway. This is especially true at Jacob Riis Park where a Life Trail system was installed this past year. The Life Trail system is comprised of ten outdoor stations which provide enjoyable strengthening, flexibility

and balance activities for active older adults. The project was made possible through support provided by Lipton Tea—a subsidiary of Unilever and a Proud Partner of the National Park Foundation.

### Promoting Green Transportation

This year Gateway was selected as one of 16 National Parks to participate in the National Park Foundation's Transportation Interpreter Program. The program funds interns who work as park interpreters. Our intern was a Texas A& M student who spent her summer at the Jamaica Bay Unit enthusiastically promoting alternative transportation and educating the public about the park's treasured resources. She did this onboard trains, sailboats, canoes, kayaks, during bicycle and foot patrols, and while welcoming ferry passengers at Riis Landing.



## New York City Marathon



The sound of a howitzer echoed from the walls of historic Fort Tompkins and Battery Weed as the New York City Marathon started on Staten Island. Over 40,000 runners gathered at Fort Wadsworth to compete in the annual 26 mile race through all five New York City boroughs. For nearly a year the park worked with the event's organizers, the New York Road Runners, to ensure a smooth start to the

race as Gateway played host to one of the largest sporting events in the nation. The park also worked to publicize the National Park System at the Marathon's pre-race Health and Fitness Expo held at the Javits Convention Center in Manhattan.

## Five Boro Bike Tour



The 31<sup>st</sup> annual Five Boro Bike tour of New York City took place this spring. Over 30,000 cyclists rode 42 miles through the city's five boroughs, ending at Fort Wadsworth where riders were treated to music, food and information on the National Park System. The park continues to work with event organizers to enhance the public's understanding of the role of Gateway and the National Park Service in New York City.

## Video Podcasts



Working with the NPNH Education Center and park staff, Ducat Media created a series of nine video podcasts focused on Gateway resources and programs. These sharp, concise, compelling four-minute videos feature on-camera interviews with 26 NPS employees, volunteers and partners— to tell the stories of our resources in our own words. Videos include: Fort Wadsworth's military history; the use of

goats to remove vegetation on historic structures; Jamaica Bay's rich natural resources; citizen science; climate change threats to the salt marsh; natural resources, military history and architecture of Fort Hancock; and Education Center partnership efforts to create active learning experiences at Gateway and other National Parks of New York Harbor sites.

## Trolley Tours at Wadsworth



Staff from the park's Staten Island Unit worked with the Borough President's office, Gray Line bus tours, and a consortium of the Island's cultural, natural, and historic sites to produce a trolley tour of Staten Island's important landmarks. The daily tour leaves hourly from the Staten Island

Ferry Terminal and stops at a variety of sites including Fort Wadsworth's visitor center after treating passengers to a view from the Overlook. In a single season, the tours have been attended by visitors from six of seven continents and in an amusing press release, Gray Line has officially invited visitors from Antarctica to hop on board.

## Women's Lifeguard Tournament



One hundred ninety one female competitors representing federal and municipal lifeguard services from five states took part in the 24<sup>th</sup> annual National Park Service All-Women Lifeguard Tournament, held at the park's Sandy Hook Unit. The yearly competition is part of Gateway's continuing effort

to showcase the high level of fitness and skill women bring to surf-lifeguarding—and thus to provide impressive role models so others will consider this still-nontraditional line of work for women.

## Treasures in the Harbor

Working with New York's public television station *Thirteen*, the National Parks of New York Harbor were highlighted in a television special called *Treasures in the Harbor*. Hosted by Jim Baker, the one-hour show premiered last November and has been rebroadcast several times. The show highlights Gateway's resources, its staff, and many of the partners and volunteers which make this National Park a "Treasure of New York Harbor."

# Gateway...one of your National Parks

As you looked over the accomplishments on the preceding pages, did you wonder why a national recreation area is doing so much more than recreation?

The answer is simple: Gateway is a National Park, one of 391 federally protected areas that make up the National Park System.

Every park in the National Park System is managed in accordance with the same policies, regulations and basic legislation. In addition, every unit in the National Park System was set aside because of special features that are inextricably tied to that particular park.



In this sense, Gateway is no different from other National Parks like Yellowstone or Grand Canyon. All three parks contain outstanding natural and historical features that are the centerpiece of visitor interest and the main focus of preservation efforts. Yellowstone is world famous for geysers; Grand Canyon is

equally renowned for geologic history. Gateway's features include Jamaica Bay, Sandy Hook, Floyd Bennett Field, Fort Wadsworth and miles of beautiful ocean beaches.

While National Parks are all the same in different ways, Gateway is even more distinctive because of the dynamic nature of our resource base and "...location, location, location."

Most National Parks are established to care for places that are well understood and in good condition. That was not the case at Gateway where our endowment consisted largely of abandoned buildings and polluted waters. The value of Gateway as a National Park has grown with every abandoned boat pulled from Jamaica Bay, every oral history interview completed, every beach cleanup and every bio-blitz.

And all of this emergent richness is surrounded by the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area—the nation's center for media, finance and business; and home to the largest, most diverse population in the United States. Because of this setting, Gateway is well positioned to offer a "National Park experience" to millions of people and to engage a multitude of people as partners and stakeholders in the great challenges of the new century.

Outstanding natural and historical resources surrounded by America's greatest urban complex—clear reasons why Gateway is increasingly being recognized as an important National Park in our nationwide system of National Parks.

*Billy G. Garrett*  
Deputy General Superintendent

# Gateway...a special place



Dawn light captures the flight of a heron against a horizon of skyscrapers and warms massive gray walls that once protected the nation's great city of commerce; a large extended family of newly arrived immigrants picnic between dips in cool ocean waters while a hiker explores trails through a marine forest and a boater sets sail with a crew of inner city kids—this is Gateway National Recreation Area, one of America's preeminent National Parks.

Like every National Park, Gateway is a special place where visitors can experience the heritage of the United States on a first hand basis. Like every other National Park, Gateway is managed to protect the unique natural and cultural resources that make it a special place.

What makes this National Park different is that Gateway is readily accessible to 16 million people who live in the metropolitan area. Gateway was created to bring the "National Park Service experience" to these people, many who will never have the opportunity to travel outside the region. Gateway is not the only National Park in or around New York Harbor nor is it the best known, but at more than 26,000 acres it is by far the largest park in the area, it services the largest number of park visitors, and it contains the most diverse array of natural and cultural features.

Gateway National Recreation Area fills a unique niche as a representative of the National Park System in the nation's most populous urban area. The challenges are great; the opportunities many.

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