

Creating a Business Plan for Assateague Island National Seashore  
&  
The Startup of a Nonprofit Friends Group

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Assateague Island National Seashore (Seashore) is faced with significant financial challenges. As a management consultant over an eleven week period, I worked with park staff to produce a business plan that clearly outlined operational requirements, identified financial resources currently available, and analyzed funding gaps. In addition, I worked with the Seashore to identify operational and investment priorities and develop strategies for meeting them. The purpose of the business plan is to improve the Seashore's ability to more clearly communicate its financial status with principal stakeholders. It is also intended to accomplish three main tasks. First, it provides the Seashore with a synopsis of its funding history. Second, it presents a clear, detailed picture of the state of current Seashore operations and funding. Finally, it outlines Seashore priorities and funding strategies. This document will assist management with financial and operational baseline knowledge for future decision making.

Of the six strategies recommended in the business plan, one was the creation of an independent organization to partner with the Seashore. This was the recommendation I implemented for the second part of my masters project. There were two important goals for this initiative. First, creating a nonprofit with a plan to become financially sustainable and second, ensuring the organization supports the mission of the Seashore. Assateague Island Alliance (Alliance) was incorporated on January 1, 2008 and has submitted its nonprofit application to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as of April 25, 2008. The Alliance is focused on supporting the mission of the Seashore and improving its financial flexibility. As Executive Director, I've worked on the organization's startup, board of directors recruitment, development of a mission, vision, and strategic plan, and engagement of the Seashore and community to build support for this new organization. Details on each of these initiatives are included in this master's project.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## **I. Scope of the Master's Project**

This Master's Project (MP) has two components. First are the results of a business plan that I co-authored between May 2007 and October 2007 at Assateague Island National Seashore (Seashore). The second component of this MP discusses the implementation of one recommendation from the business plan.

The business plan originated from an internship as a management consultant with the Business Plan Initiative (BPI) division of the National Park Service (NPS). The BPI is a joint effort between the NPS and the Student Conservation Association with a mission of promoting the long-term health of national parks through the development of improved financial planning and management tools. As one of twelve graduate students from business, public policy, and environmental graduate programs, we formed teams of two based on our respective skill set and individual park unit needs. Over the eleven week period, I worked with park staff to produce a business plan that clearly outlined park operational requirements, identified financial resources currently available, and analyzed any funding gap that may exist. In addition, I worked with the park to identify operational and investment priorities and develop strategies for meeting them.

The business plan recommends six strategies. Of these six, one is the development of a partnership between the Seashore and a nonprofit that focuses on supporting the mission of the Seashore. The second part of this MP details how I implemented this recommendation. One constant in the NPS is that it needs to build strong public support, awareness of parks, conservation values, and a strong sense of stewardship with America's changing demographics and landscape. Partnerships are one method of accomplishing this because they lead to involvement and involvement leads to awareness. This section of the MP includes an

explanation of the start-up process, the documentation required to form the nonprofit, a strategic plan, and its current status as of April 25, 2008. Partnerships between the NPS and nonprofits have become a way to accomplish goals both within and beyond park boundaries.

## **II. Objectives**

### ***BUSINESS PLAN***

The business plan was developed to establish and communicate the overarching direction of the Seashore. It provides new bold goals, clear objectives, and dynamic strategies that together will ensure a vibrant future for the Seashore. It also calls for transparent and accountable management coupled with new public and private investments that will benefit the Seashore, all visitors, and surrounding communities. (Bentley 2007)

The purpose of the business plan is to improve the Seashore's ability to more clearly communicate its financial status with principal stakeholders. Furthermore, it is intended to accomplish three main tasks. First, it provides the Seashore with a synopsis of its funding history. Second, it presents a clear, detailed picture of the state of current Seashore operations and funding. Finally, it outlines Seashore priorities and funding strategies. This business plan answers such questions as: What is the business of the Seashore? How much money does the Seashore require to be operated within appropriate standards? The plan demonstrates the functional responsibilities, operational standards, and financial picture of the Seashore while offering Seashore management a financial and operational baseline knowledge for future decision making. (Comptroller 2007)

The business plan is not just another government plan, it is a pledge to current and future visitors, stakeholders, surrounding communities, and Seashore partners that the staff of the

Seashore will preserve this magnificent island and work to ensure its existence for the enjoyment of current and future generations. (Bentley 2007)

### ***NONPROFIT AND STRATEGIC PLAN***

One recommendation from the business plan is that the Seashore has an immediate need for a partnership with a nonprofit that serves as a cooperating association and friends group that focuses its efforts on supporting the mission of the Seashore. Cooperating Associations are private nonprofit corporations established under state law (Appendix A). They support the educational, scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of the NPS in a variety of ways, under the provisions of formal agreements with the NPS. (NPS.gov 2006) Cooperating associations must have a signed agreement to sell goods and services in areas of the national park system. Friends groups are not authorized to sell goods and services in these areas except through a special agreement with a cooperating association and approval of the park superintendent. (Mainella 2003) By setting up a nonprofit that serves as a friends group and cooperating association (combined = “Association”), the organization can leverage the benefits of both, maximize funding flexibility, and secure a strong position to leverage additional support. For many years, Associations have been among the NPS’ most effective supporters. There are currently over sixty-five Associations that partner with the NPS to provide a multitude of services and funding. (NPS.gov 2006) As mentioned previously, the second component of this MP details the process of starting the Association. This includes:

- Defining the name, mission, and vision;
- Creation of bylaws and articles of incorporation;
- Analysis of earned income opportunities;
- Recruitment of Founding Board of Directors (Board);

- Filing for Maryland state incorporation;
- Filing Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) status;
- Negotiating a Seashore and Association agreement;
- Board meetings; and
- Building a strategic plan framework.

### **III. Introduction to Seashore History, Values, Significance, and Purpose Statement**

Treasured by millions, the Seashore provides an oasis of relaxation, enjoyment, recreation, and hands-on learning experiences. The Seashore is one of the few publicly accessible coastal environments in the densely populated northeastern United States where people experience clean water and beaches, unspoiled bays and marshlands, natural sounds, quiet, clear night skies, and solitude. As a premier natural, cultural, and recreational resource, it has been, and continues to be, a national and international destination. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006)

The Seashore was established by an act of Congress on September 21, 1965. The entire island boasts a dynamic 37 mile long barrier island and nearly 40,000 acres of land and water in Maryland and Virginia (Appendix B). It offers an unspoiled setting where visitors can experience the ambiance of a dynamic barrier island with its legendary wild horses and a multitude of exceptional recreational opportunities. The Seashore provides a protected enclave for complex plant and animal communities, both terrestrial and aquatic, which characterize the mid-Atlantic coast and fully illustrate the natural processes of change which is constantly shaping the coastal environment.

### Enabling Legislation

The United States Congress established the Seashore in 1965 “...for the purpose of protecting and developing Assateague Island in the States of Maryland and Virginia and certain adjacent waters and small marsh islands for public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment...”

(United States Congress 1965)

### Seashore Purpose Statement

The Seashore exists to preserve the unique Mid-Atlantic coastal resources and natural ecosystem conditions and processes upon which they depend while providing high quality resource-compatible recreational opportunities. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

### Seashore Organization

The 37 mile length of Assateague Island is encompassed within the national seashore boundary. The island is in public ownership, and management responsibilities on the island are shared by three agencies: NPS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Maryland Forest, Seashore and Wildlife Service (Appendix B).

Since the Seashore has two widely separated public use areas, it is administratively treated as having two districts – Maryland and Virginia. Seashore headquarters are located in the Maryland District. The Virginia District occupies the Virginia end of the island where NPS operations are confined, for the most part, to the beach and day-use facilities on the outermost edge of the island, water resources, a historical Coast Guard station, and a mainland maintenance facility.



## Assateague Island History

In about 1930, a number of proposals recommended public ownership of Assateague Island to protect its esthetic character and to provide for recreation. In the 1950's real estate developers acquired and subdivided most of the island's Maryland section. The promotion attracted about 3,600 buyers. In March of 1962, a severe storm swept the mid-Atlantic coast and severely damaged cottages and frontal barrier dunes. A barrier dune was soon constructed only to be destroyed by additional storms in 1962 and 1963. In 1963, a report was completed highlighting the best use of the island; it recommended that Assateague Island be designated as a National Seashore. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

Congressional consideration of legislation in 1964 and 1965 generated massive public interest and controversy. Island property owners, their associations and organizations, and the Worcester County governing body fought for continued private ownership and development. Fortunately, the concept of a national seashore won the approval of the States of Maryland and Virginia and their congressional delegations. Public Law 89-195 was signed into law on September 21, 1965, formally authorizing the Seashore. The NPS moved rapidly to begin the process of establishing the Seashore by setting up a project office in December of 1965. By September 1966, a massive land acquisition program was underway in the Maryland section of the island. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

## Values and Significance

Recreation: The Seashore offers a wide variety of exceptional recreational opportunities in an unspoiled natural setting. Popular activities include swimming, surf fishing, bird watching, shell-fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, off-road vehicle use, canoeing, surfing, horseback riding, nature photography, and wildlife viewing. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

Rare Species Habitat: The Seashore provides suitable habitat for a wide variety of rare, threatened and endangered species. In large part, this is due to the Seashore providing the only natural barrier island habitat in Maryland. Such storm-created habitats have largely disappeared due to development and stabilization activities along the Atlantic coast. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

Migratory Bird Conservation and Protection of Rare Ecosystems: The Seashore plays a key role in the conservation of migratory birds, including neo-tropical songbirds, shorebirds, and several raptor species, by providing protected resting and foraging stop-over habitat. It was credited with supporting the second highest number of shorebird species east of the Rocky Mountains and its value recognized by its designation as a component of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and as a Globally Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

Environmental Education: The Seashore is actively engaged in curriculum-based environmental education, providing a unique opportunity for hands-on learning about barrier islands and coastal conservation issues. In 2006, approximately 6,500 students from local schools visited the Seashore as part of formal environmental educational programs. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

Scientific Research: The Seashore is the only location in Maryland where natural barrier island conditions predominate, and one of the few in public ownership along the Atlantic coast. As such, the island serves as a unique “natural laboratory” for the scientific community to conduct investigations relating to barrier island flora, fauna, ecology, and island geomorphology and coastal processes. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

Local Economic Benefits from the Seashore: A 2005 report using a peer-reviewed tool used by the NPS estimated the contribution of visitor and Seashore staff spending to gateway economies within a 50 mile radius of the Seashore. The total economic benefit was approximately \$137,019,000 and the support of nearly 3,100 local jobs. The figures represent dollars that enter a gateway economy as a direct result of the Seashore's presence and operation. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2004)

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

### ***BUSINESS PLAN***

The most common method for data collection were interviews with Seashore senior management, division chiefs, and staff. Interviews occurred in the employee's workspace to create a comfortable atmosphere and encourage open dialogue. In addition, strategy and brainstorming sessions were designed to include all staff and management but organized by seniority level. These sessions included employees from various divisions to encourage strategic thinking about cross-functional efficiencies.

In order to best understand the daily operations of the Seashore, several half or full day employee shadowing excursions occurred. This included staff responsible for the day to day operations of the Seashore including maintenance, field research, law enforcement, and aquatic resources.

Financial and operational data was accessed from a number of resources including the NPS Scorecard (Scorecard), Core Operations Analysis, Budget Cost Projection Module (BCP), Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), Competitive Sourcing and Most Efficient Organization (MEO), Facility Management Software System (FMSS), Operations Formulation System (OFS), and Project Management Information Systems (PMIS). The next section provides resource summaries and are from the Business Plan Initiative Summer 2007 Reference Manual. (Comptroller 2006)

#### NPS Scorecard

The Scorecard is a budget request evaluation tool that provides a systematic and consistent methodology to gauge overall efficiency and performance. In order to facilitate a

more consistent and transparent approach to budget prioritization, it was designed to be a diagnostic tool to evaluate performance and efficiency.

### Core Operations Analysis

The intent of this analysis tool is to improve management practices, to ensure funds are spent in support of a park's well-defined purpose, that the funds are spent in the most efficient manner, that a park's request for funding is credible to the Administration and Congress, and that there are adequate funds (allocated properly) and people to preserve and protect the resources for which parks are responsible. A core operations analysis is about using park funds wisely and allocating them to the highest need.

### Budget Cost Projection Module

The BCP module is located within the NPS' accounting system, AFS, and allows a park to forecast its financial future by:

- Projecting future resource requirements of the organization based on its current budget plan data and projected funding levels;
- Assessing the impact of outside influences on operating expenses; and
- Evaluating the financial impact of decision making within the organization.

The BCP module projects expenditures and available funding for a five year timeframe.

### Government Performance and Results Act

GPRA was enacted in 1997 as a response to Congressional demand for greater accountability by Executive branch agencies. While the BPI focuses on describing programs and their associated costs using operational standards, GPRA focuses on reporting results based on performance metrics and variables.

- Goal Category I: Preserve park resources

- Goal Category II: Provide for the public use and enjoyment and visitor experience
- Goal Category III: Strengthen and preserve natural and cultural resources and enhance recreational opportunities managed by partners
- Goal Category IV: Ensure organizational effectiveness

#### Competitive Sourcing and Most Efficient Organization

Competitive sourcing requires federal agencies to consider outsourcing commercial services currently performed by federal employees by comparing the costs and overall value of services between federal government and private sector companies. The MEO system provides the NPS the ability to compare the work being considered for competitive sourcing.

#### Facility Management Software System (FMSS)

This system is used to create an asset business plan and provides a summary level overview of the constructed asset portfolio at a NPS unit. The contents include information about who occupies NPS assets, how important each asset is in supporting the park mission, operations and maintenance funding levels, and key data about current replacement values, quantities asset condition, and the amount of deferred maintenance. The plan also predicts future system replacement need, out-of-year project development, and candidates for planned disposition.

#### OFS and PMIS

NPS units put forward requests for additional appropriated funding<sup>1</sup> through these two primary mechanisms. OFS is for operations increases for annually recurring park operational activities. Requests for one-time appropriated funding for special projects (sometimes called

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<sup>1</sup> In the NPS, there are two broad classifications for funding: Appropriated and Non-Appropriated. Appropriated funding is essentially permission to spend money from the Federal Treasury. Non-Appropriated funding comes from outside the Federal government and includes donations and fee revenues.

“project funding” of “soft money”) are put forward through PMIS. PMIS requests are tiered, based on priority at the NPS unit.

Finally, building relationships and networking was crucial with all levels of Seashore staff and the local business and political community. This was the most powerful method to build professional relationships, meet new people, and collect information. By attending luncheons, social events, seminars, meeting with members of the chamber of commerce, city hall and county officials, attending local community events, and pro-actively introducing my work with the Seashore to the people I did not know, I formed a list of contacts to consult with. The population of 3,800<sup>2</sup> in Berlin, MD made this process easier than if in a larger town or city.

### ***NONPROFIT AND STRATEGIC PLAN***

Typically, there were weekly updates and dialogue with the Seashore superintendent, senior staff, and Board. The updates promoted an open line of communication and helped lay the groundwork for the strategic plan. Furthermore, frequent communication had an important role in connecting friends of the Seashore. This included influential community members and professionals willing to provide pro-bono services.

Other methods included extensive research in the field of nonprofit startup strategy. Literature reviews, attending conferences, and meeting with professionals and professors specializing in the nonprofit sector. Finally, meeting other national park unit Associations and executive directors provided valuable insight and strategy into the development of the Association, nonprofit industry, the NPS culture, and operational framework.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/city/Berlin-Maryland.html>

## **RESULTS:**

### ***BUSINESS PLAN***

There are two deliverables for the business plan. First, the creation of an internal document that serves as a detailed guide and resource for the Seashore to implement strategies or continue researching areas identified as priorities. Second, a printed document to share with the public that examines the Seashore's current status and direction over the next three to five years.

(Comptroller 2007) The printed product will:

- Market the Seashore as a good investment and partner;
- Convey commitment to transparency and effective management;
- Describe the Seashore's operations, strategic priorities, and funding requirements;
- Highlight strengths and identify where extra resources are needed; and
- Highlight strategies for meeting resource requirements and other management challenges.

For the purposes of this Master's Project, only sections that I authored are included. These sections are:

- Base Budget Expenditure Analysis
- Appropriated Base Budget Funds Analysis
- Volunteer Analysis
- Resource Management
- Visitor and Resource Protection
- Business Services
- Strategies



## **I. Base Expenditures Analysis**

Fixed costs within the context of this business plan are defined as costs the Seashore has limited discretion in controlling. For the Seashore, the fixed costs are those associated with permanent personnel (salaries and benefits), service agreements (e.g., office equipment), and utilities.

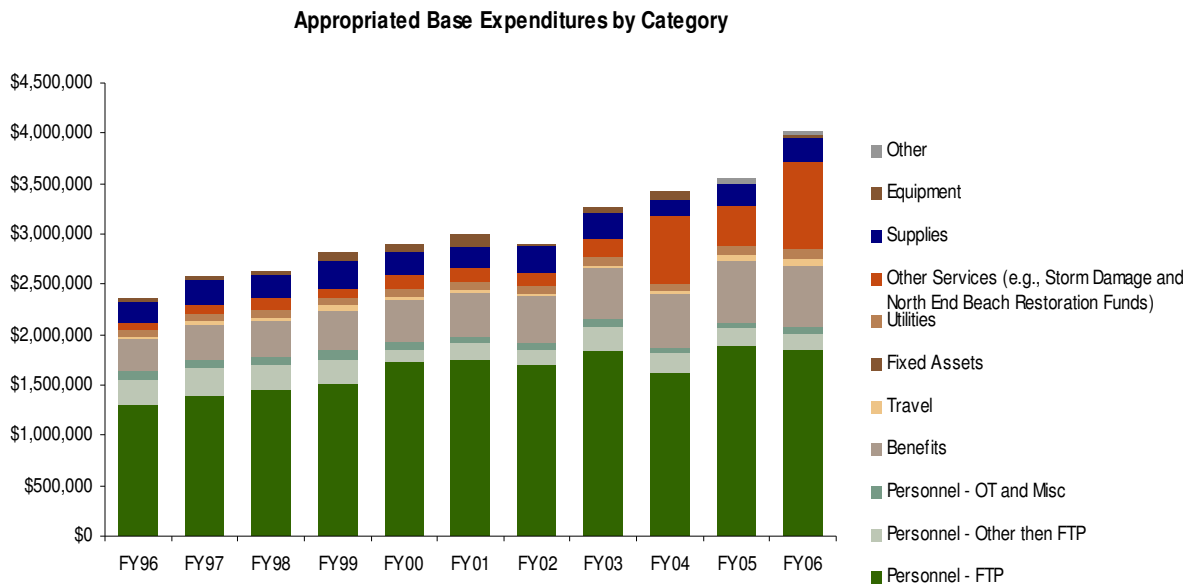
### Financial Flexibility

In fiscal year (FY) 2006, fixed costs represented approximately 90% of base funded expenditures for the Seashore. (Comptroller 2006) National Seashores typically try to limit their fixed expenditures to 80-85% of their total expenditures. This provides management financial flexibility when addressing variable costs that occur over the course of a year. Congress usually approves a yearly pay increase for all federal employees, which increases the fixed costs that the Seashore incurs for permanent employees. Unfortunately, this mandate is often not met with an equal base funding increase. This means that should base funds not increase, the Seashore must absorb the cost.

### Seashore Employees

The number of full-time equivalents (FTE) remained steady over the past ten years with an average of 68. The FTE measure includes all permanent, seasonal, and term employees but does not designate the source of funding or percentage of permanent versus non-permanent staff. Though the total number of FTE has remained steady, the erosion of base funding has resulted in the lapsing of permanent positions and their replacement with lower cost, but less capable, seasonal and term employees. The FY06 breakdown of non-base funded FTE for permanent and seasonal employees are six and eighteen, respectively. (Bentley 2007) Clearly, a portion of non-base funding is used for expenses that typically are base funded.

Seashore management is working to reduce the fixed and variable costs that are supported with base funds. These efforts, combined with the identification of new revenue streams, will hopefully give the Seashore greater flexibility to address unexpected costs and respond to new opportunities.



## II. Appropriated Base Funds

Appropriated base funds are intended to cover permanent and recurring expenses that the Seashore incurs on a day-to-day basis. These costs include permanent personnel and other fixed costs. Base funds also support non-fixed costs, such as the cost of seasonal personnel, some types of materials and supplies, and discretionary spending (e.g. short-term science projects, certain software licenses, service agreements, etc.).

The Seashore’s base funding has grown from \$1,285,000 in FY86 to about \$4,224,000 in FY06. When adjusted for inflation, base funding growth is 3.07% annually over the same

period. Despite modest growth during the 20 year period, the graph depicts a significant increase beginning in FY03 that occurred for two reasons.

- 1) A significant percentage of the increase in base funds is annually transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to fund the Seashore portion of the Assateague North End Restoration project (approximately \$600,000 per year). Through an administrative change in FY 2004 and 2005, restoration funds were added to the Seashore's base through a re-allocation of regional Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) funds; in FY 2006, the funds became a permanent part of the Seashore operating base.

(Zimmerman 2007)

- 2) Storm repair funds have come to the Seashore as both an adjustment to base and at other times in the form of non-ONPS funds. Almost annually there is a significant northeaster storm that causes significant damage to the Seashore's beaches and facilities. As necessary a request is made to help finance repairs. (Bentley 2007)

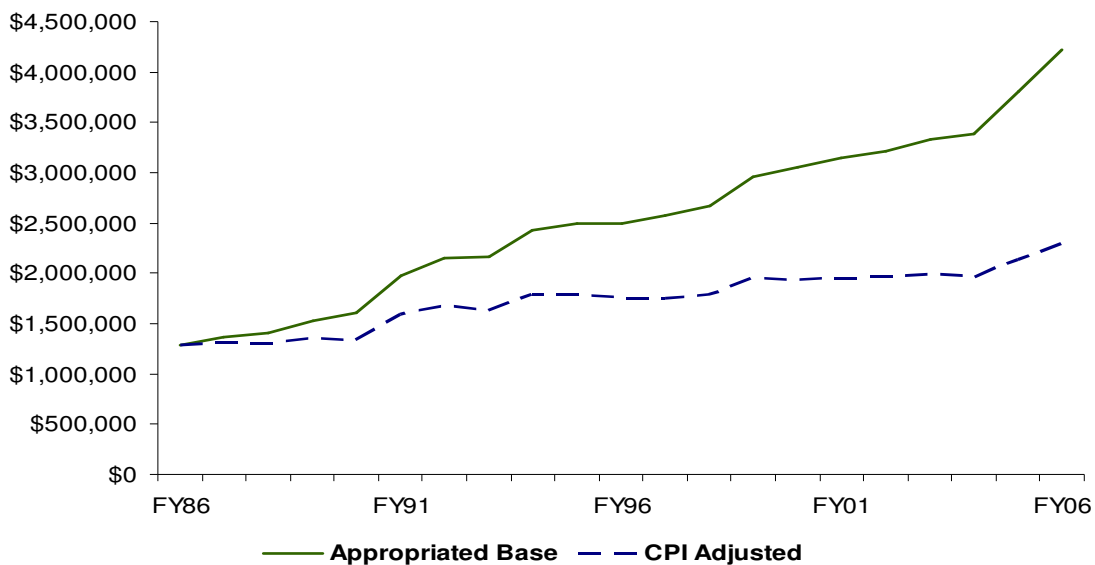
As a benchmark, between FY02-06, the annual average growth in base funding for all NPS units was 2.95%. For National Seashores, the average was 3.30%. An analysis of the Seashore's average annual base fund growth excluding funds annually transferred to the Army Corps of Engineers and storm repair funds is 2.90%. This growth rate has failed to keep pace with fixed operational expenses. (Hayward 2007)

There is a growing gap between increasing operating expenses and available base funds. In order to minimize this gap, the Seashore's management continue to identify efficiencies in their daily operations. For example, in FY07 a Common Operational Regional Environment (CORE) review helped identify certain efficiencies. Also, the Seashore has increased non-

appropriated fund sources through cost recovery programs and implemented an increase in fees for revenue generation.

The Seashore is currently in a funding situation whereby the cost of full time permanent personnel is approximately 92% of appropriated base funding. The Seashore's use of special permit fees, particularly over sand vehicle (OSV) permit cost recovery, provide the additional revenue for permanent staff. The figures in the graph below represent the amounts appropriated by Congress for the Seashore. Deductions for service wide initiatives and Seashore specific support assessed by the NPS and the Northeast Regional Office may further reduce base funds available for operations. (Comptroller 2006)

**Appropriated Base Budget History**



Despite these funding challenges, the Seashore has become an expert in learning to maximize the use of its financial support. With visitor satisfaction rates consistently around 95%, the Seashore continues to provide high quality services and experiences to its visitors. (Barrie 2007) Furthermore, the Seashore continues to take pro-active steps to control costs and find additional sources of revenue. For example, through the use of cost recovery programs related to

OSV permits, camping fees, and entrance fees, the Seashore has provided the visitor with a safe and well protected natural setting. The Seashore plans to increase fees in 2008 to provide further financing for the upgrade and replacement of high visitor use areas (restrooms, changing rooms, boardwalks, etc.) and infrastructure improvements. (Bentley 2007)

### **III. Volunteer Analysis**

In FY06, volunteers contributed a financial benefit of \$213,338 to the Seashore based on the NPS estimate of \$17.55 financial benefit per volunteer hour. The Seashore spent approximately \$9,111 on housing, \$5,760 on meals, \$3,000 on supplies, and \$866 on transportation for the 348 volunteers. The volunteers' net financial contribution in FY06 was \$194,601. Total volunteer hours were consistently between 11,000 and 12,000 hours during the last four years. The increase in FY05 of maintenance volunteers reflects two significant contributions from a university student group and a local Boy Scouts of America troop that assisted with rehabilitating campgrounds and the repair of dune fencing. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006)

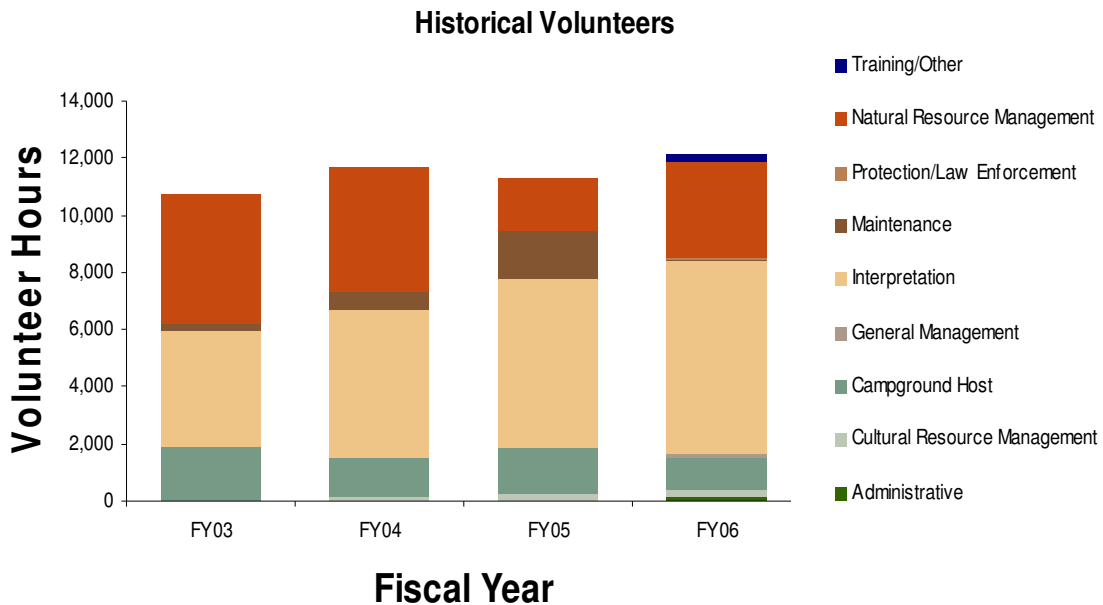
For ten years the volunteer coordinating duties have been a collateral position that has shifted among three full time Division of Interpretation and Education staff. As a result, there has been limited time available to strengthen the volunteer base through community outreach and recruitment. Additional volunteers are needed in areas such as the bookstore, trail work, education, outreach, and the staffing of historical structures (e.g., U.S. Coast Guard Station). In addition, a part-time volunteer coordinator would greatly increase the impact volunteers could make at the Seashore and facilitate local and regional community engagement. While the core volunteers provide a positive net financial contribution to the Seashore, the addition of a

volunteer coordinator would expand this contribution significantly despite a modest increase in labor costs.

Volunteers perform a variety of duties for the Seashore from interpretation and education to natural resource management. In FY06, volunteers provided 12,156 hours of services within the following areas:

- 1) Interpretation and Education (55%). Each year volunteers from the Student Conservation Association and local residents volunteer to assist with environmental education, the visitor center desk, and limited interpretive program areas. The U.S. Life-Saving Service Boathouse Museum (Boathouse Museum) is staffed by volunteers during the peak season and is closed the remainder of the year. It is solely through the work of these volunteers that the Boathouse Museum is open to Seashore visitors.
- 2) Natural Resource Management (28%). The Division of Resource Management includes volunteers from local universities that assist with water quality monitoring. Typically, there is one intern for each season except Winter. In previous years, volunteers assisted with the monitoring program of piping plover nesting grounds.
- 3) Campground Host (10%). Volunteer hosts work at the public campgrounds to provide information to campers and ensure resource protection.
- 4) Cultural Resource Management (~2%). Approximately twelve volunteers share the responsibility of educating visitors about the Seashore's wild horses. Known as the "Pony Patrol", volunteers locate horses when they are in high public use areas and educate nearby visitors about the history of the horses and Seashore policies designed to protect the horses and visitors.

5) Administrative (~2%). Volunteers assist Seashore staff with administrative tasks including filing and digitizing Seashore slide files.



#### IV. Resource Management

##### Current Operations

Responsibility for managing the natural and cultural resources of the Seashore is vested with the Seashore’s Division of Resource Management (DRM). The DRM is staffed by eleven permanent employees, reflecting a broad spectrum of professional training and experience. Specific areas of expertise include plant ecology, wildlife management, coastal geology, estuarine ecology, geographic information systems, coastal zone management, conservation planning, and cultural resource management. The permanent staff is assisted by varying numbers of seasonal and temporary employees, and a large pool of talented volunteers and student interns. (Zimmerman 2007)

The resource preservation objectives of the Seashore are being addressed through an integrated system of planning, research, and management program implementation. Activities are primarily focused on three broad functions:

1) Actions to understand the resources

At its most basic level, effective stewardship depends upon a thorough understanding of what resources are present, and how the ecosystem operates. The Seashore and its cooperators have recently completed a series of surveys developing baseline inventory data on several plant and animal groups. The surveys documented a number of previously unreported species and new state records, and identified several new rare species. In cooperation with the Maryland Historical Trust, the Seashore recently completed a comprehensive inventory and assessment of maritime archeological resources within the Seashore.

2) Actions to assess resource condition

Coastal barriers are extraordinarily dynamic environments where change occurs on a variety of timescales. Without adequate knowledge of how the system responds to natural disturbances and evolves over time, the ability to protect the Seashore is compromised. The most reliable form of keeping up to date with these changes is through high quality data collection and analysis. Without such data methods, the ability to accurately assess the condition of the resource is impaired. For example, the success or failure of the breeding season for the endangered piping plover species is an important indicator of the Seashore's overall health.

3) Actions to protect the resources

Few natural systems are immune from the affects of human activities and the Seashore is no exception. Both historic and contemporary activities have affected, and will continue to influence the Seashore's ecosystem. Significant threats to the Seashore's natural resources



include habitat destruction caused by non-native species, declining estuarine water quality as a result of adjacent land use practices, and emerging threats to aquatic resources from recreational and commercial craft.

Seashore staff rely on their thorough understanding of a resource along with an accurate assessment of its condition to make informed decisions about appropriate management interventions. The DRM is being assisted in its mission through cooperative relationships with a variety of academic institutions, other federal, state, and local agencies, and non-governmental organizations. (Zimmerman 2007)

### Accomplishments

#### 1) Assateague North End Restoration (ANER)

The ANER project was initiated to counteract decades of sand starvation at the north end of the island resulting from the construction of the Ocean City inlet and jetty system. In cooperation with the Corps, a 25-year restoration program was initiated in 2002 to mitigate both historic and future impacts to the island's sand supply and preserve the geologic integrity of Northern Assateague Island. (Zimmerman 2007)

#### 2) Seabeach amaranth re-introduction

Seabeach amaranth, a federally-listed threatened plant, was absent from the island for 30 years but reappeared in 1998. During subsequent years another five plants were discovered, and greenhouse-grown progeny from these original plants were used to conduct a successful species restoration project between 2000 and 2002. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006)

#### 3) Feral horse management

Although a treasured part of the Seashore experience, the feral horses inhabiting the island are significantly altering the ecology of the island. To achieve a better balance between

protecting the welfare of the horses and other natural resources, the Seashore is using an innovative wildlife contraceptive program to manage the population. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006)

### Operational Priorities

To help determine operational priorities, a current operation's review was performed and the following guidelines and questions were followed and asked during the process.

- Determine the division's most important objectives and outcomes over the next 3-5 years;
- Reflect activities with the highest impact towards achieving the division's goals;
- What are the top priorities among the various program needs identified during the current operation's review?; and
- If we received additional money tomorrow, where should it go?

The current operations review included a one-on-one discussion with the manager of the division and key staff. Appendix C details the evaluation documentation template used during this process. Finally, the determination of the most important Seashore priorities were made by the management team. As a management consultant, I worked with the division staff to prioritize at the program area and functional area level. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006)

- 1) Protect natural habitats, ecological processes, and biodiversity from non-native invasive species.

Non-native plants and animals represent the single greatest threat to terrestrial communities and impact recreational experiences by degrading the natural character and appeal of the Seashore environment. By 2012, the Seashore seeks to achieve control of the two most

significant invaders, sika deer and phragmites australis, and reduce their impacts to acceptable levels. To meet this and other DRM goals, the Seashore should consolidate responsibility for its wildlife and vegetation programs in an upgraded supervisory ecologist position, and develop an institutionalized seasonal workforce to conduct recurring management activities. (Zimmerman 2007)

- 2) Continue estuarine water quality monitoring and research to support watershed conservation programs and develop baseline inventory data to understand and protect ocean resources.

Commercial fishing and water-polluting land use practices threaten Seashore water quality, sensitive aquatic resources, and the quality and safety of water-based recreational opportunities. In cooperation with community partners, the Seashore is working to reverse the recent trend of declining water quality and resolve conflicts with commercial fishing. Future efforts to protect the aquatic environment and associated recreational resources would be improved by augmenting the Seashore's professional expertise and field capabilities in the marine sciences. (Zimmerman 2007)

- 3) Protect rare, threatened, and endangered species and the natural habitats upon which they depend.

The Seashore provides important habitat for a suite of rare species, ranging from state-listed tiger beetles to the federally listed piping plover and seabeach amaranth. As indicators of environmental quality, rare species provide a standard by which the Seashore's effectiveness in protecting the barrier island ecosystem for public use and enjoyment can be measured. Annual monitoring and management programs do, however, require intensive field work and would benefit from additional seasonal staffing. The Seashore would also gain from additional

investment in tactical research to ensure recreational activities remain compatible with rare species protection as visitor use increases. (Zimmerman 2007)

### Investment Priorities

Like any organization, units of the NPS must make periodic capital investments in order to meet current and future operations. To that end, the each division of the Seashore has identified investment priorities as non-base funds are acquired.

- 1) Develop baseline inventory of ocean resources.

The Seashore includes 37 miles of ocean beach and approximately 15,000 acres of adjacent ocean water; resources that play a key role in recreational use of the Seashore. Despite the significance of the Seashore's ocean resources, little information is available to ensure their protection in the face of mounting threats. Investment is needed to develop an improved understanding of key ocean attributes including water quality, bathymetry and subsurface geology, habitat characteristics, and resident biotic communities. [~\$650,000] (Zimmerman 2007)

- 2) Restore island habitats impacted by historic development activities.

Prior to the Seashore's establishment, private landowners, developers and government agencies engaged in a variety of habitat-altering activities including the ditching of tidal wetlands for mosquito control, extensive road building, and the creation of dikes and artificial water impoundments. In all cases, these manipulations adversely impacted habitat quality, biodiversity, and ecosystem functionality. Investment is needed to restore the affected areas and improve the quality of the Seashore environment for visitor use and enjoyment. [~\$350,000] (Zimmerman 2007)

- 3) Restore the Assateague Beach Coast Guard Station (Coast Guard Station) pier.

The Coast Guard Station is a Virginia historic landmark and was, at one time, an important visitor destination and focal point for interpretation and education. Unfortunately, changes in land access and storm damage to the Coast Guard Station's boat dock have rendered the historic facility virtually un-useable. Investment is needed to rehabilitate the dock and thereby facilitate visitor use and enjoyment of this nationally significant cultural resource. [~\$750,000] (Zimmerman 2007)

4) Secure long-term funding for the ANER program.

Since 2004, the NPS and Corps have jointly funded the annual cost of mitigating impacts from the Ocean City jetty-stabilized inlet and preventing impairment of Northern Assateague Island. Unlike NPS funding which is institutionalized in the Seashore's ONPS base, the Corps' funds result from an annual line item appropriation that is increasingly vulnerable to shifting Department of Defense priorities. Investment is needed to ensure sustainability of this critical restoration effort by fully funding the long-term recurring costs through ONPS appropriations. (Zimmerman 2007)

5) Develop a Seashore scholarship program

Effective resource protection and Seashore management depends upon access to high quality information. Graduate student research is an important source of scientific information yet the Seashore, for lack of adequate resources and competition with the Chesapeake Bay, has never been able to attract significant numbers of graduate students from regional universities. Investment is needed to improve the quantity of scientific information about the Seashore and its resources through a recurring scholarship program providing support to promising graduate students working at the Seashore. [~\$50,000/year in recurring funds] (Zimmerman 2007)

6) Develop sustainable visitor use facilities and infrastructure.

Barrier islands like the Seashore are among the most dynamic landscapes on earth, and may become even more so with rising sea levels resulting from global climate change. Maintaining visitor use in an increasingly animated environment requires re-thinking how the Seashore provides for visitor use including how the island is accessed, where and how parking is provided, what types of facilities are available, and what types of activities are encouraged. Investment is needed to plan, design, and develop new facilities and infrastructure to ensure that sustainable, resource-compatible visitor use continues to be available into the future. [Cost TBD]

#### **IV. Visitor and Resource Protection**

##### Current Operations

The Division of Visitor and Resource Protection (DVRP) is responsible for managing visitor use and protecting the natural and cultural resources of the Seashore. The DVRP is staffed by 14 permanent employees with a wide range of professional experience and expertise, including law enforcement, search and rescue, fire fighting, emergency medical services, and lifesaving. The permanent staff are assisted by a large cadre of seasonal and temporary employees and volunteers, and through working relationships with other federal, state and local agencies. The lifeguard program has ten lifeguards protecting 300 yards of beach in Maryland and Virginia. The group averages over 15 water saves per season. (Morlock 2007) The work of the DVRP is focused in three major program areas:

- 1) Protection of visitors

The DVRP enforces both NPS, Maryland, and Virginia State Law, and Seashore-specific regulations designed to manage visitors through a combination of education, patrol and monitoring activities, and investigative and enforcement actions.

- 2) Protection of natural and cultural resources

The DVRP uses a variety of tools to accomplish the Seashore's resource protection mission including public use limits and restrictions, area closures, education and outreach, monitoring and patrol activities, investigation and enforcement.

3) Providing for public use

The DVRP facilitates and actively manages a variety of recreational pursuits such as camping, swimming, OSV driving, hunting, fishing, and boating.

Operational Priorities

To help determine operational priorities, a current operation's review was performed and the following guidelines and questions were followed and asked during the process.

- Determine the division's most important objectives and outcomes over the next 3-5 years;
- Reflect activities with the highest impact towards achieving the division's goals;
- What are the top priorities among the various program needs identified during the current operation's review?; and
- If we received additional money tomorrow, where should it go?

The current operations review included a one-on-one discussion with the manager of the division and key staff. Appendix C details the evaluation documentation template used during this process. Finally, the determination of the most important Seashore priorities were made by the management team. As a management consultant, I worked with the division staff to prioritize at the program area and functional area level.

1) Complete the hiring of the chief ranger position.

The chief ranger position has remained vacant since March of 2007. The Seashore is working to fill the critical position by the beginning of FY08. (Morlock 2007)

- 2) Increase oversight and management of the bay and ocean through the hiring of one Seashore-wide full time subject to furlough water operations ranger.

The Seashore has seen a significant increase in personal watercraft, boating use, commercial fishing, clamming, and crabbing activities within the boundaries of the Seashore. This position will provide a Seashore presence on the water and seek to build a strong engagement with the water based visitor community. (Morlock 2007)

- 3) Implement flexible peak season patrol staffing.

Increase flexibility in Seashore patrolling during peak season through the hiring of an additional full time subject to furlough ranger in Virginia and additional seasonal staff in Maryland. (Morlock 2007)

- 4) Expand the protected lifeguard operation in Virginia and Maryland by employing two or more additional lifeguards on each beach.

The Maryland and Virginia protected beaches had approximately 48,000 and 42,000 visitors, respectively, during the summer of 2006. Expanding the protected beach by two lifeguards would allow the program to expand beach protection by 200 yards or one third of the beach that is used by visitors. This would lower the number of rescues and first aid incidents significantly. It would also give the program flexibility to provide coverage for sick or otherwise absent employees. (Morlock 2007)

- 5) Develop better methods of recruitment and financial incentives.

Improved recruiting techniques will help determine the capability of lifeguards to perform the job before they enter the final application process. This method of recruitment would help to eliminate the extra time and resources spent on applicants that are not capable of



the surf lifeguard position. Incentives for return lifeguards would reduce new lifeguard training time and allow the program to incorporate advanced training each season. (Morlock 2007)

### Accomplishments

- 1) Acquired the equipment for a water operations program.

The DVRP recently acquired and outfitted two new patrol boats, disposed of unserviceable property, and renovated remaining assets to be used for the program. (Morlock 2007)

- 2) Unifying the Seashore's Virginia law enforcement operation with the Maryland operation.

Previously, the operations were considered separate districts and due to geographical challenges they operated as separate units. Recent changes include a partnership with USFWS whereby the law enforcement division in Virginia is overseen by the USFWS supervisor. (Morlock 2007)

- 3) Improvement of the Seashore's hunting program.

Changes include the coordination of a reduction hunt in the Seashore's and adjoining State Seashore's developed areas; coordination with the DRM to manage the hunting according to the Seashore's natural resource needs; and an annual hunt for disabled persons in partnership with a national organization. (Morlock 2007)

### Investment Priorities

Like any organization, units of the National Park Service must make periodic capital investments in order to meet current and future operations. To that end, the each division of the Seashore has identified investment priorities as non-base funds are acquired.

- 1) Construction of a new ranger station for protection and fee operations

The current facility on the island is inadequate in space, storage, restrooms, HVAC, pest and rodent control, and overall construction for the number of employees (30-34) that utilize it. The complexity of the fee, volunteer, and protection operations that function in this building have outgrown its capacity. Current plans call for providing a sustainable facility that would be better situated to serve the public, employees, equipment, and resources. [\$850,000] (Morlock 2007)

2) Construction of new lifeguard stands

Existing stands are over 10 years old and constructed of wood. They require frequent repair and restoration, provide minimal employee comfort and safety, lack uniformity, and have a poor public appearance. New stands would provide industry standard in employee protection and effectiveness, longevity, favorable public impression, and service. [~30,000 per stand = \$180,000] (Morlock 2007)

## **V. Business Services**

### Current Operations

The Business Services Division (BSD) conducts, monitors, and manages all of the business functions within the Seashore. There are six working groups within BSD: Administrative Officer, Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT), Contracting, Budget, and Revenue Operations. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006)

### Operational Priorities

To help determine operational priorities, a current operation's review was performed and the following guidelines and questions were followed and asked during the process.

- Determine the division's most important objectives and outcomes over the next 3-5 years;

- Reflect activities with the highest impact towards achieving the division’s goals;
- What are the top priorities among the various program needs identified during the current operation’s review?
- If we received additional money tomorrow, where should it go?

The current operations review included a one-on-one discussion with the manager of the division and key staff. Appendix C details the evaluation documentation template used during this process. Finally, the determination of the most important Seashore priorities were made by the management team. As a management consultant, I worked with the division staff to prioritize at the program area and functional area level.

#### 1) Fee Changes

In January of 2008, fees for both the Maryland and Virginia Seashore changed. The Seashore completed the process of issuing the proposed changes to the public and received valuable feedback. The public comments included the request for fees to be more consistent between the USFWS and the Seashore. This resulted in several changes including the elimination of visitor fees for pedestrians and cyclists at the Seashore. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006) The following chart details fee changes only:

<b>Entrance Fee<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Valid</b>	<b>Current Cost</b>	<b>New Cost</b>
7 day foot or bicycle	7 days	\$3 Age 17-62	None
7 day vehicle pass (motorcycles, mopeds)	7 days	\$10 Age 17-62	\$15 Age 16-62
Assateague Annual Entrance Pass	Calendar year	\$20	\$30
Chincoteague Refuge Annual Pass	1 year from purchase	Honored by ASIS	Payment of difference to ASIS Annual Pass
Chincoteague Refuge Weekly Pass	7 days	Honored by ASIS	Payment of difference to ASIS 7-day Pass
Federal Duck Stamp	July 1 to June 30 of following year	Honored by ASIS	Payment of difference to ASIS Annual Pass

<sup>1</sup> 80% of the revenue generated from entrance fees remains at the Seashore

<b>Expanded Amenity Fees<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Valid</b>	<b>Current Cost</b>	<b>New Cost</b>
Virginia Beach Services	1 or 7 days	No fee	\$3/day, \$5/week or \$10 annual in addition to USFWS fees
Reservation Camping	April 15 to October 15	\$20/night	\$22/night
First Come, First Served Camping	October 16 to April 14	\$16/night	\$18/night
Group Camping	Year-round	\$30/night	\$50/night
Horse Camping	October 16 to April 14	\$25/night	\$50/night
Backcountry Camping	Year-round	\$5/group	\$5/adult Age 16 and older

<sup>2</sup> 80% of the revenue generated from expanded amenity fees remains at the Seashore

Currently, the Seashore is paying for Virginia based seasonal lifeguards, parking lot closures, repair, and patrol, beach roads, and facility repairs with Maryland Seashore entrance fee revenue. Based on a five year average cost, FY07 expenses related to these services are projected at \$280,000. To better balance the expenses related to the Virginia area of the Seashore with Virginia fees, the Virginia Beach Services fee will be used to ensure sufficient funding is available to cover the Virginia Seashore costs mentioned above. In partnership with USFWS, an agreement to assess the Virginia Beach Services fee during the Refuge fee collection process has been proposed. (Bentley 2007)

<b>Special Use Permit Fees<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Valid</b>	<b>Current Cost</b>	<b>New Cost</b>
VA Only Oversand Vehicle Day Use Permit	1 year from purchase, Refuge hours, No summer access	Previously allowed by \$70 OSV permit	\$70
Island-wide (MD & VA) Oversand Vehicle Day Use Permit	1 year from purchase, 5AM – Midnight only	Previously allowed by \$70 OSV permit	\$90
Overnight Oversand Vehicle Permit (Includes Island-wide Day Use) Must be awake/no camping	1 year from purchase, 24 hrs/day except in Refuge	Previously allowed by \$70 OSV permit	\$110
Bull Pen Overnight Seashoreing Permit (Includes Island-wide Day Use and Overnight)	1 year from purchase, 24 hrs/day except in Refuge	Previously allowed by \$70 OSV permit	\$150
Waterfowl Hunting Permits	Per Season	No fee	\$20/Season

<sup>3</sup> 100% of the revenue generated from special use permit fees remains at the Seashore

The projection for total recreation fee revenue to benefit the Seashore in FY08 is \$1,677,733. OSV fee revenue is projected at \$540,180. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006) The fee changes will allow the Seashore to focus on enhancing visitor experiences including improved facilities and increased maintenance. The Seashore intends for the cost of collection to be between 15 and 20%. The installation of an automated gate and fee collection system will further reduce this cost for the Seashore. In addition, the Revenue Operations area has implemented policies and procedures to better manage valuable visitor information that will help determine the typical Seashore visitor.

2) Maintain quadrant I Seashore status with the NPS Scorecard (Scorecard).

One of the primary goals of the Scorecard is to allow the NPS to effectively compare Seashore units. Overall, the Scorecard offers the NPS an opportunity to make a fully transparent, consistent, and effective justification for its budget needs in today's era of accountability. While senior NPS leadership should be able to effectively utilize the results of the Scorecard to focus on service wide initiatives, the greater value of the Scorecard rests in the interpretation of the results at the Seashore level.

The recent NPS Scorecard Analysis determined the Seashore's operations as High Efficiency/High Performance, the best level achievable. (Assateague Island National Seashore 2006) This classification indicates to the NPS that it should look to identify Seashore needs and fund base increases that support those needs. Quadrant I Seashores have demonstrated the ability to manage their current resources more efficiently and effectively and with additional funds, could produce increased performance. It is a high priority for the Seashore to remain in this quadrant.

3) External affairs initiative

Due to the highly complex nature of managing the Seashore's day to day operations and meeting the needs of over 3 million visitors annually, senior management is required to focus almost entirely on day to day operations. As a result, the ability for senior employees to play an active role as representatives of the Seashore on a local and regional level is extremely limited. A full time position dedicated to the management of day to day operations would increase the voice of the Seashore's communications and serve as a liaison with local and regional communities and governmental agencies. (Bentley 2007)

The goals of the external affairs initiative include:

- Filling a deputy superintendent position to take control of day to day operations;
- Increasing the visibility of the Seashore and effectively sharing concerns and priorities with surrounding communities in Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware.
  - Specific areas of immediate concern involve nutrient reduction efforts in the coastal bays surrounding the Seashore, sea level rise, hurricane preparedness, and economic development through strategically planned growth and recreational tourism;
- Working to educate elected and appointed governmental officials about the Seashore's contributions as a premier destination focused in the areas of resource stewardship, environmental leadership, recreational experiences, and education focused on the primary mission of the Seashore;
- Providing timely information and assistance with problem solving related to the Seashore's public service role as a steward of the Seashore; and
- Address and provide advice on major developing issues on and off the Seashore, including key operational issues and issues of policy, regulations, and programs.

## Accomplishments

- 1) Conversion to voice over internet protocol (VOIP) and potential cost sharing with USFWS.

The Seashore is converting its phone and data lines to a VOIP system to reduce expenses related to its land access number, internet access, and long distance calling. The Seashore is discussing with USFWS about sharing this technology to reduce both agency installation costs, annual maintenance costs, and internet access line costs. In addition, the Seashore currently staffs one full-time permanent employee to focus on IT initiatives and maintenance. The USFWS currently does not have an IT employee. As a result, the Seashore and USFWS are exploring opportunities for sharing the IT position cost and services. (Bentley 2007)

- 2) HR efficiency

The annual increase in seasonal employees (almost doubling the staff) at the Seashore places high demands on the one person human resources department during the Spring and Summer. Through efficient planning and refined processes, the hiring process for this annual increase has been streamlined in order to recruit the most qualified seasonal staff. (Bentley 2007)

## Investment Priorities

Like any organization, units of the National Park Service must make periodic capital investments in order to meet current and future operations. To that end, the each division of the Seashore has identified investment priorities as non-base funds are acquired.

- 1) OSV gate and counter

Enforcement of current OSV zone limitation (145 vehicles at one time) requires a manual closure for a portion of most weekends and holidays within the peak season. An entrance gate

with counter will allow the Seashore to save approximately 400 staff hours per season as well as law enforcement time spent ensuring users have valid permits. (Bentley 2007)

2) New entrance, gates, and ranger station for the Maryland section of the Seashore

The existing facilities (abandoned buildings moved and conjoined) are deteriorated and inadequate for the number of employees and functions housed. Co-location of existing campground office and two entrance stations will increase efficiency and decrease operational costs. The proposed facility design adds an additional entrance lane, and gates at all lanes, including the exit. This will reduce staff needed to collect fees and reduce chronic traffic backups. Co-location will allow attendant to process entrance passes as well as other permits, campground registrations, and phone calls which must currently be handled in the ranger station. Gated entry and exit, and external automated fee machines will allow 24-hour entrance and campground fee collection, eliminating revenue loss from after hour visitors. A new facility will improve OSHA compliance with HVAC, restrooms, and pest infestation deficiencies in existing buildings. Eliminating remoteness of collection sites will increase security of personnel, cash, and equipment. (Bentley 2007)

3) Security camera system for ranger station.

Greater than \$1,000,000 is collected and processed by 10-15 employees at the Maryland Seashore entrance and ranger station. Cameras placed in the lobby, counting areas, safe rooms and at entrance lanes will provide greater security for personnel as well as government cash and equipment. Digital video recording will assist law enforcement in collection of evidence and increase the ability to recoup losses as a result of broken gates, non-paying visitors, vandalism, and burglary. (Bentley 2007)



## **VI. Strategies**

To address the Seashore's increasing fixed costs, this section outlines three types of strategies. These three options expand upon the core operations analysis through:

- 1) Identifying operational efficiencies that reduce costs;
- 2) Increasing revenue to supplement appropriated base funds; and
- 3) Creating and maintaining new partnerships to strengthen local and regional support for the Seashore.

### Operational Efficiencies

- 1) Automated gates and fee machines

Entrance fees are collected on weekdays from 8AM–10PM and weekends 8AM-Midnight during the peak season and 8AM – 6PM or 8PM during the off season. Outside of these times, fee collection does not occur despite frequent use of the Seashore during those times.

- Install three entry automated gates with proximity pass readers at the new ranger station and fee collection area scheduled for completion in 2008.
- Install a sensor activated exit gate with the planned new ranger station and fee collection area.
- Install an entry and exit gate system with proximity pass readers and counting capability at the OSV entrance and exit.
  - The counter will provide real time data to display the current number of vehicles in the OSV zone at strategic locations within the Seashore.
  - Install a 24 hour closed circuit video system to monitor OSV entry and exit activity to prevent gate destruction.

- Purchase two automated fee collection machines or vending machines to distribute weekly, annual, and OSV proximity passes. Locations will include outside the visitor center and the parking area just north of the planned new ranger station and fee collection area.

2) Inter-agency cost and resource sharing with USFWS

Implement a combined law enforcement program with USFWS and the Virginia section of the Seashore.

- Share supervisory and patrol duties for law enforcement personnel in Virginia;
- Share equipment between agencies and combine training opportunities when appropriate. Such collaboration will improve efficiencies for both agencies, create a more effective law enforcement presence in Virginia, and improve overall visitor safety and services; and
- Pursue additional opportunities for cost and resource sharing in other areas of administration and operations.

Additional Sources of Revenue and Funding

1) Continue to seek additional increases in annual base budget funding through the NPS ONPS budget process.

- In Fiscal Year 2006, the Seashore's fixed costs of full-time permanent staff, utilities, and the ANER project totaled nearly \$3.9 million of a base budget of \$4.2 million. The remaining \$300,000 left the Seashore with limited resources to fund seasonal employees and daily operations.

- The Seashore is currently revising its Position Management Plan and anticipates the recommendation of an increase in full-time permanent positions. Additional funding will be needed to support these new positions.
- The pay scale for wage grade employees is expected to go under review by the U.S. Government Wage Board, and is likely to result in an increase in this category of wages. This increase will be absorbed by the Seashore, but should be mitigated by additional federal funding.

2) Increase the number of donation boxes

- Utilize indoor and outdoor donation boxes at all visitor contact facilities and high visitation areas (interpretation program meeting areas, popular beach entrances, ranger station). Create different themes for each box to focus on a certain highlight of the Seashore.
  - The Seashore collected \$9,522 from two indoor donation boxes in FY2007. When analyzed over a five-year time frame with conservative donation and visitor statistics, six donations boxes would generate an estimated \$23,000 to \$35,000 per year.

Partnerships and Outreach

1) Seek new partnerships

The Seashore does not currently have a dedicated Association and receives a minimal return from the educational sales outlet operating in the Maryland and Virginia visitor centers. Both of these situations are a long term challenge facing the Seashore. However, there is significant potential to develop a model Friends organization in conjunction with an Association.

A partnership with an Association will build greater financial and community support for the Seashore. This type of partnership will provide the opportunity for:

- Improved educational sales stock diversity and management;
- Business focused approach to operating educational sales;
- Strengthening the Seashore's civic engagement;
- Significant increase in return to the Seashore from educational sales;
- New grant writing, fundraising, and philanthropic support;
- A reduction in NPS workload and requirements related to the educational sales operation;
- Strengthening of the Seashore's constituency;
- Increased opportunities for new stakeholders to contribute toward the Seashore's mission; and
- Potential to enhance revenue generation opportunities.

Projections of earned income from the popular Foster Horse program demonstrate a potentially significant source of recurring base income to hire an Executive Director for the Association (Appendix D). Furthermore, the issuance of a limited concessions agreement to the Association for operating at the Seashore would provide further recurring income for the non-profit.

## 2) Community Outreach

In order to maximize the diversity of the Seashore's visitors, partnerships with local non-profits and businesses should be considered to increase access to the Seashore.

- Through partnerships, peak season weekends would include a complimentary transportation service between the Seashore and low income neighborhoods in Worcester County.
  - Initially, two daily roundtrips from a central location in a select neighborhood to the ranger station would be provided. An increase in transportation capacity and central pick-up areas would be determined based on the success of the program.

## ***NONPROFIT AND STRATEGIC PLAN***

As mentioned in the strategies section above, the Seashore would benefit significantly from an Association that serves to help the Seashore meet its mission. Not long after my first week at the Seashore, it was very clear that this was an important component missing from the Seashore community. After meeting with an Association that supports the Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge and talking with executive directors from Associations across the United States, I sensed the potential for a well funded organization to partner with the Seashore. The combination of high visitation numbers, earned income opportunities, and strong Seashore support convinced me this was an opportunity to make a significant, positive impact for a place I was passionate about conserving for the generations to come.

The startup of an Association will assist in facilitating and managing certain functions and initiatives at the Seashore that are parallel to the Association's mission, vision, and goals. Realistically, the Association cannot be all things to all people. To be effective, its efforts must be carefully focused and defined. (Festen 2002) The Association was named Assateague Island Alliance ("Alliance") on January 1, 2008. The Alliance applied for Maryland state incorporation on February 1, 2008. The articles of incorporation, bylaws, mission and related activities, vision, and board members are in Appendix E. Initially, the Alliance will focus on the following initiatives:

- 1) Building community awareness of the Alliance;
- 2) Developing a three to five year strategic plan;
- 3) Creating a website and informational brochures that explain the Alliance mission;
- 4) Developing an Alliance membership program before the 2008 peak season; and
- 5) Creating sustainable earned income opportunities to fund a full time executive director.

Long term, potential activities and roles of the Alliance include:

- 1) Business focused approach to operating educational sales and visitor convenience items;
- 2) Strengthening the Seashore's civic engagement;
- 3) New grant writing, fundraising, and philanthropic support for program, project, capital, and operating areas;
- 4) Increasing opportunities for new stakeholders to contribute toward the Seashore's operations;
- 5) Develop, operate, and maintain structures, facilities, and programs;
- 6) Visitor market research;
- 7) Seashore staff support, program delivery and event staging, procure equipment and services, recruit and manage volunteers, acquire land; and
- 8) Evaluation of Seashore programs and operations.

The strategic plan framework (Strategic Plan) for the Alliance covers a three to five year period, 2008-2012. The Strategic Plan is based on meetings with the Board and senior Seashore management. The first section of the Plan defines the purpose and direction of the Alliance. This section has three components: a mission statement, strategic objectives that become the organization's principal standards for measuring success, and a statement of vision – the preferred future. (Grobman 1999) The vision is further defined by five tasks – specific priorities for the organization that will require close attention and the highest levels of performance. Strategic imperatives are also identified in this section.

The second section of the Plan defines the strategy for approaching the vision. Goals are proposed in this section, specifying results or outcomes to be achieved. (Fogg 1999) The goals

are organized under the five vision tasks. There are also objectives describing activities to be undertaken with a description of annual targets.

The third section presents a path forward. It includes a set of measurements to be used in gauging progress. (Festen 2002) In the fourth section, strategic business units are summarized, including their annual objectives. The annual objectives of the Strategic Plan are currently being addressed by the Board with the anticipated approval date of May 2008. Finally, Appendix F contains a list of operational, investment, and endowment needs on a project basis that the Alliance and Seashore have concluded to be priorities.

## **I. Mission and Vision**

1) Mission: A mission statement is a concise statement of strategy. (Grobman 1999) The following mission statement was adopted by the Alliance Board on January 1, 2008. “The Assateague Island Alliance was created to benefit Assateague Island National Seashore by supporting: interpretive and educational publications, programs and sales; stewardship through philanthropy; protection, restoration, and preservation of land, water, species, and historical sites; and high quality resource-compatible recreation.”

2) Strategic Objectives: These are standards by which success can be measured. (Hofer 1978)

- Launch and growth of membership program, educational sales, foster horse program, visitor convenience items, and field programs;
- Launch and growth in charitable contributions to Alliance in support of the Seashore;
- Growth in the number and diversity of Seashore stewards;
- Enhancing the Seashore visitor’s experience; and



- Projects successfully completed.

3) Vision: A statement of vision describes the changes that an organization seeks to effect.

The Board and staff commit to working toward that vision of change – their preferred future. It is a statement of aspiration. (Hofer 1978)

“Through its character, behavior, and actions, the Assateague Island Alliance will be seen as the preeminent partner of Assateague Island National Seashore helping to shape its future and foster a dialogue of conservation, education, and recreation.”

4) Vision Responsibilities: To achieve its vision, Assateague Island Alliance must perform with excellence in five areas termed vision responsibilities. (Buchholtz 2007)

- I. Philanthropic Spirit and Momentum
  - Assateague Island Alliance must create a spirit of philanthropy and inspire those who have already proven to be supporters and those yet to become active stewards of the Seashore.
    - Goal 1: Begin a membership program that involves Seashore donors with significant long-term projects that coincide with Seashore priorities.
    - Goal 2: Begin an Assateague Island Alliance endowment that reaches \$250,000 in five years.
    - Goal 3: Work with the corporate community to begin donations and increase their giving to the Assateague Island Alliance by 20% annually for the next five years.
    - Goal 4: Begin a program designed to encourage planned gifts to the Assateague Island Alliance in support of the Seashore.

- Goal 5: Increase the public’s understanding that charitable giving to the Assateague Island Alliance is the best means of securing the future of the Seashore and its natural and historical resources.
- II. Create and Enhance the Partnership with the NPS
  - Assateague Island Alliance must nurture its relationship with the NPS, understand its supporting role, and contribute resourcefully to help the agency achieve excellence.
    - Goal 1: Ensure cooperation and communication to achieve high levels of efficiency and effectiveness for the partnership and in utilizing human and financial capital.
    - Goal 2: Approach projects cooperatively to ensure maximum benefit to the Seashore and the best use of partner’s resources.
    - Goal 3: Respect the management style and decision making protocol of each partner.
    - Goal 4: Work to create a strong bond with all Seashore staff and to be seen as energetic and creative people who are passionate about the Seashore.
- III: Today’s Visitor...Tomorrow’s Steward
  - Assateague Island Alliance must think carefully about today and tomorrow’s visitor and the creation of tomorrow’s steward to ensure all people are welcome at the Seashore and that they will enjoy it, understand it, and ultimately commit to its care.

- Goal 1: Make significant progress to increase the awareness and access to the Seashore among minority groups and low social economic areas of Worcester and other surrounding counties.
    - Goal 2: Provide additional learning opportunities for children of all backgrounds at the Seashore.
- IV: Strengthening Assateague Island Alliance for the Future
  - Assateague Island Alliance must build a strong foundation for the organization's future.
    - Goal 1: Build a staff to enhance the ability to raise funds to support the Seashore.
    - Goal 2: Continue to revise the by-laws and Board policies of Assateague Island Alliance to ensure an accurate representation of how the organization operates.
    - Goal 3: Create a Regional Board that will serve to extend the geographic reach of the Assateague Island Alliance.
- V: Launch Sustainable Earned Income Opportunities
  - The Assateague Island Alliance must seek a financially sustainable business model to ensure recurring expenses and initiatives are funded.
    - Goal 1: Work with Seashore management to identify recurring earned income opportunities with low initial capital costs.
    - Goal 2: Approach the local community and Seashore visitors for ideas and partnerships that would serve the Seashore and generate earned income.

5) Strategic Imperatives: In approaching the goals above, the Alliance will monitor and be mindful of its strategic imperatives.

- Actions must benefit visitors and the Seashore in a climate of limited resources and evolving priorities;
- Protection of the Seashore environment is critical;
- The changing demographic ‘face’ of the United States and the Seashore region has important implications for the Seashore; and
- Initiate and maintain communication with partnerships and other local nonprofits.

6) Strategic Business Units and Annual Targets:

- The annual objectives of the Strategic Plan are currently being addressed by the Board with the anticipated approval date of May 2008.

**Vision I. Philanthropic Spirit and Momentum**

<i>Strategic Outcomes</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Annual Target 2008-2011</i>
Goal 1: Begin a membership program that involves Seashore donors with significant long-term projects that coincide with Seashore priorities.		
Goal 2: Begin an Assateague Island Alliance endowment that reaches \$250,000 in five years.		
Goal 3: Work with the corporate community to begin donations and increase their giving to the Assateague Island Alliance by 20% annually for the next five years.		
Goal 4: Begin a program designed to encourage planned gifts to the Assateague Island Alliance in support of the Seashore.		
Goal 5: Increase the public's understanding that charitable giving to the Assateague Island Alliance is the best means of securing the future of the Seashore and its natural and historical resources.		

<b>Vision II. Create and Enhance the Partnership with the NPS</b>		
<i>Strategic Outcomes</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Annual Target 2008-2011</i>
Goal 1: Ensure cooperation and communication to achieve high levels of efficiency and effectiveness for the partnership and in utilizing human and financial capital.		
Goal 2: Approach projects cooperatively to ensure maximum benefit to the Seashore and the best use of partner's resources.		
Goal 3: Respect the management style and decision making protocol of each partner.		
Goal 4: Work to create a strong bond with all Seashore staff and to be seen as energetic and creative people who are passionate about the Seashore.		

<b>Vision III. Today's Visitor...Tomorrow's Steward</b>		
<i>Strategic Outcomes</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Annual Target 2008-2011</i>
Goal 1: Make significant progress to increase the awareness and access to the Seashore for these groups among minority groups and low social economic areas of Worcester and surrounding counties.		
Goal 2: Provide additional learning opportunities for children of all backgrounds at the Seashore.		

<b>Vision IV. Strengthening Assateague Island Alliance for the Future</b>		
<i>Strategic Outcomes</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Annual Target 2008-2011</i>
Goal 1: Build a staff to enhance the ability to raise funds to support the Seashore.		
Goal 2: Continue to revise the by-laws and Board policies of Assateague Island Alliance to ensure an accurate representation of how the organization operate.		
Goal 3: Plan to create a Regional Board that will serve to extend the geographic reach of the Assateague Island Alliance.		

<b>Vision V. Launch Sustainable Earned Income Opportunities</b>		
<i>Strategic Outcomes</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Annual Target 2008-2011</i>
Goal 1: Work with Seashore management to identify recurring earned income opportunities with low initial capital costs.		
Goal 2: Approach the local community and Seashore visitors for ideas and partnerships that would serve the Seashore and generate earned income.		

## **II. Announcement and Press**

The formation of the Alliance was announced to the Worcester County community during a Seashore new visitor center groundbreaking ceremony. During this event, I briefly spoke about the mission, goals, and vision of the Alliance in addition to a brief story about my connection to the Seashore. In addition to the local community, attendance at this event included the Board, Honorable Senator Sarbanes, Senator Cardin, U.S. Representative Wayne Gilchrest, senior NPS management from Washington D.C., and several local area non-profit organizations (Appendix G). The significant press coverage of this event was an effective way to spread the news of the Alliance launch. In addition to the mention of the Alliance in two regional newspapers, I have conducted two interviews with local newspapers (Appendix H).

## **III. Membership Program and Website**

During the March 27, 2008 Board meeting, the Board voted unanimously to implement a membership program (Appendix I) I developed that will include four levels based on an individual's annual contribution amount. I am currently working with a designer to finalize brochures and membership applications with the intent of distributing them to Seashore visitors beginning Memorial Day weekend. The Alliance will also be coordinating a website launch with the Membership program in order to provide a second outlet for new members and donations.

## **IV. Logo**

A local artist has contributed time pro bono to help the Alliance brainstorm a logo. After five versions, the Board voted unanimously on March 27, 2008 to adopt the following.





The Board also left open the possibility of using some of the other logos for different programs and product branding the Alliance may become involved in at a later date. These logos include:



## **CONCLUSION:**

This MP has focused on making a long-term impact for one of our few national seashores. Assateague Island was once at risk of being fully developed but because of severe weather events, the idea of conservation became real. It was only because of these natural events and a strong community of conservationists that placed stewardship before development that Assateague Island came to exist how it is today.

The framework that I used can be applied to other national and state parks that do not have a partner organization. First, and most importantly, the question that must be answered is if the park needs a partner. To better answer this question, an assessment of the park's operations and financials are critical. This thorough assessment should include a detailed analysis that ties in operations and funding in order to provide identifiable funding gaps that a partner can be utilized to fill. Secondly, a partner must consider if there is an opportunity to become financially sustainable. Third, there must be a strong relationship between the park and partner organization at all levels of management. The mission, values, and strategic initiatives of the partner must be agreeable with the park in order to maximize the effectiveness of the partnership. Utilizing these three principles will help any park or organization determine if a public-private partnership is the best initiative to accomplish their respective goals.

My future with the Alliance includes keeping my position as Executive Director. I plan to contribute my time, pro bono, until the Alliance can become financially sustainable and hire a full-time Executive Director. After that, if invited, I will consider joining the Board or work with a park to start-up a new Association.



**[www.AssateagueIslandAlliance.org](http://www.AssateagueIslandAlliance.org)**  
**7206 National Seashore Lane**  
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