



FIELDREPORT

Southeast Region | Fall 2017



Potential Residential Development on Cumberland Island National Seashore

Cumberland Island is the largest of Georgia's barrier islands and home to awe-inspiring beaches, dunes, maritime forests and marshlands. Historically, the island has also been home to the native Timucuans, Spanish and English settlements, enslaved people freed by the Civil War and some of America's most affluent families. In 1972, Congress authorized Cumberland Island National Seashore to be "permanently preserved in its primitive state" to protect the vanishing opportunity for the American public to experience this island's majestic scenery, its history, and its serene sense of solitude.

Over the years, the National Park Service (NPS) has acquired all but about 1,000 acres of the land within the 36,000-acre national seashore. NPCA was instrumental in the process of the acquisition of 1,100 acres of private land almost 20 years ago, over half of the remaining private land at that time. While retained rights remain on some of these acquired lands (usually in the form of lifetime estates), the last 1,000 acres of inholdings remain in fee simple ownership, largely in the possession of families that have lived

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Connecting the Living Landscape

In 2001 and 2002, after an absence of more than 200 years, elk were reintroduced into Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The first 25 animals were brought to the Cataloochee Valley from the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area in Kentucky. The following year, the National Park Service (NPS) brought in an additional 27 animals from Elk Island National Park in Alberta, Canada. Today, the herd is growing and colonizing new habitat outside the park. Of particular interest is a small herd that has found a way to cross Interstate 40 and has taken up residence near Max Patch in the Pisgah National Forest. Elk movement was expected post-reintroduction, but animals crossing the interstate pose safety issues for both animals and humans.

This is not just a story about elk. Since its opening in the fall of 1968, Interstate 40 in the Pigeon River Gorge has been an obstacle for a variety of wildlife species. In the 1980s, University of Tennessee researcher Mike Pelton documented bear mortality and the barrier effect presented by this busy roadway. Since Pelton's groundbreaking research in the late 80s, the region's bear population has nearly quadrupled. During this same



period, traffic on this roadway has nearly doubled. Today, it's not unusual to see dead bears along I-40 on the drive between Knoxville, TN and Asheville, NC.

By examining this corridor to determine whether we can improve existing wildlife passage structures along I-40, NPCA and its partners hope to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. Last February, we convened a meeting that included representatives from NPS, US Forest Service, wildlife agencies from both Tennessee and North Carolina, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)

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Top: Bull Elk in Cataloochee Valley, Great Smoky Mountains National Park ©Jo Crebbin | Dreamstime.com
Above: Kim Delozier of the RMEF and NPCA's Jeff Hunter review topographical maps to plan wildlife camera trap placements. ©NPCA

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Fall 2017

Southeast Regional Office

Advocating for National Parks in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina

706 Walnut Street • Suite 200
Knoxville, TN 37902
www.npca.org/southeast
865.329.2424 • 800.628.7275

Don Barger

SENIOR REGIONAL DIRECTOR
dbarger@npca.org
865.329.2424, ext 23

Emily Jones

CAMPAIGN DIRECTOR
ejones@npca.org
865.329.2424, ext 26

Chris Watson

SENIOR PROGRAM MANAGER
cwatson@npca.org
865.329.2424, ext 24

Tracy Kramer

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT
MANAGER
tkramer@npca.org
865.329.2424, ext 21

Asheville Field Office

One Rankin Ave. • 2nd Floor
Asheville, NC 28801

Jeff Hunter

PROGRAM MANAGER
jhunter@npca.org
828.545.1401



npca.org

Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its 1.3 million members and supporters, and many partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for our children and grandchildren.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SENIOR DIRECTOR

The Promise of Parks

At its essence, a national park is a promise—a promise set forth in the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”



line items in a budget battle that has nothing to do with the values they preserve.

In this newsletter, you will read about a development threat at Cumberland Island National Seashore that, if realized, would reverse the progress on a 45-year promise to preserve for the American people this idyllic barrier

island in its primitive state. We call it Cumberland, but the ancient Timucuan people called it *Tacatacuru*—the beautiful island. We must keep the promise to our grandchildren that they will be able to experience the forests, marshes, dunes and beaches of this magnificent island unimpaired by the selfishness of structures.

The critical importance of vigilance and advocacy to protect America's legacy has never been clearer. Since 1919, NPCA has been there to be the public's voice for a public not yet born. Your voice is important to this labor of love. Raise it. We promised.



Above: Traversing the boardwalk beneath the live oaks near Sea Camp Campground on Cumberland Island. ©Tracy Kramer

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

What do you like about this newsletter? What other topics or features would you like to see? Please contact us with your feedback at npca.org/southeast.

Potential Residential Development on Cumberland Island National Seashore

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on the island since before its designation as a national seashore—Carnegies, Rockefellers, Candler and others.

In 1998, one of the Rockefeller heirs sold an undeveloped 87-acre parcel to an entity known as Lumar, LLC. At the time, everyone was told that it was a “conservation buyer” and that the land would not be developed. The Park Service had been offered the property, but could not come up with the funding from Congress to purchase it. The Lumar tract lies just north of the island’s only front-country campground, Sea Camp. Though the property has remained undeveloped since its 1998 purchase, a recent residential development proposal now threatens all of the island’s remaining private land with residential development.

On December 7, 2016, the Planning Commission for Camden County, Georgia

granted a “hardship variance” that would allow the owners of the 87-acre Lumar tract to subdivide that property into ten lots. NPCA and the St. Marys Earthkeepers, represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center, filed an administrative appeal of the granting of that variance and began discussions with both the landowners and the county. Camden County subsequently prepared a draft ordinance that would rezone the remaining 1,000 acres of private inholdings in the park for residential development, a move that would fundamentally reverse the Congressional promise to the American people to preserve the island free of such development.

As a June 1st deadline set by the County for possible introduction of their ordinance arrived,

the NPS announced its intention to enter into discussions with the island inholders to determine if a resolution could be found to accommodate some of the landowners’ needs while still meeting the legislated mandate to provide park visitors with an experience of the island in its primitive state. A recent poll found that more than 70 percent of registered voters in Camden County oppose the proposal to rezone the inholdings on the national seashore. NPCA will be closely monitoring as these complex discussions move forward.

Right: On the River Trail, palm trees and live oaks draped with Spanish moss frame a glimpse of the Cumberland Sound. ©Tracy Kramer **Below:** Looking north from Sea Camp Beach on the Atlantic Ocean side of Cumberland Island National Seashore. ©Tracy Kramer



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Connecting the Living Landscape



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and other nonprofit organizations. The parties present agreed to take a proactive, collaborative approach to improving wildlife connectivity along I-40 in the Pigeon River Gorge.

A number of questions remain. Where are the mortality hotspots? Where are elk and bear likely to cross the interstate? In our Asheville field office, we have customized a smart phone app to collect mortality data. Working with partners at The Wilderness Society, Defenders of Wildlife, Wildlands

Network and the RMEF, we've also been setting camera traps to identify wildlife corridors in the lands surrounding I-40 in the gorge. In just a few short months, we have identified a key corridor that elk are using to leave the Smokies and approach the Pigeon River. We have also documented



Clockwise from left: Remote camera trap images - A bobcat in Pisgah National Forest near I-40; a black bear traversing a key travel corridor outside Great Smoky Mountains NP; a cow elk and her calf crossing a key travel corridor near I-40 in Western NC.

THE CROSSING



bobcat, bear, coyote and white-tailed deer using a land bridge that passes over a double tunnel in the gorge. This land bridge functions much like a wildlife overpass, but it is not currently being used by elk.

In the months ahead, our emerging collaborative will engage with road ecologists and the Departments of Transportation in North Carolina and Tennessee to seek solutions for this important landscape. With climate change and regional growth impacts expected to increase in the coming years, collaborative research, planning and action will be needed to connect the living landscape of the Southern Appalachians.

Above: NPCA Intern Hannah Mullally and Hugh Irwin (Landscape Conservation Planner at The Wilderness Society) use GPS coordinates to place wildlife cameras. ©NPCA **Below:** Hannah attaches a motion sensor-activated wildlife camera to a tree. ©NPCA



What is an elk worth? What about a bear, a deer or a bobcat? The Smoky Mountains are fortunate to have a diversity of critters that roam our hills and hollows. However, they are not aware of boundaries, jurisdictions or private versus public properties. As they traverse their territories searching for food, mates, or peace and quiet, the one obstacle they all will encounter is a road. It might be a low-risk, small gravel road, but it could be a high-risk, high traffic road like an interstate.

Working as a wildlife biologist at Great Smoky Mountains National Park for 32 years was a learning experience about managing wild animals. To protect bears and people, some nuisance bears were relocated to more remote areas. Some bears returned. Some stayed. Some were killed crossing roads, but the outcome for many was unknown. I recall one bear that was relocated from Cades Cove, Tennessee to Harrisonburg, Virginia, over 400 miles away. In his attempt to return, Bear #75 crossed numerous streams, rivers, gravel roads, interstates and urban areas on his trek home. Bear #75 had the skills to cross obstacles in his path, but other critters may not. The effort costs many animals their lives.

From the animals' perspective, trying to cross an extremely busy interstate where the heavy traffic sometimes resembles a never-ending freight train—in addition to navigating the 4 to 5 foot concrete wall separating east/west traffic—is either a challenge or impossible.

Currently, there is an ongoing local effort to see if we can help our critters cross Interstate 40 (I-40) along the TN/NC state line in the Pigeon River Gorge. From the animals' perspective, trying to cross an extremely busy interstate where the heavy traffic sometimes resembles a never-ending freight train—in addition to navigating the 4 to 5 foot concrete wall separating east/west traffic—is either a challenge or impossible. Last November alone, five road-killed bears were observed along this section of I-40 and other animals are regularly injured or killed. If our society has the technology and ability to put humans on the moon, I feel confident we can help our Smoky critters safely cross our roads.

***E. Kim DeLozier** is the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's Conservation Program Manager for the East and is participating in the NPCA-led effort to improve wildlife connectivity in the Pigeon River Gorge.*

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jeff Hunter, in our Asheville field office, is organizing an assortment of hikes, book discussions, film screenings and volunteer opportunities in the region's national parks to introduce area residents and visitors to NPCA's mission. For more info, visit our Meetup page at www.meetup.com/Asheville-National-Parks-Meetup/. We hope you will join us!

Offshore Executive Order Threatens Coastal Parks

The ideal summer vacation for many people includes a beach trip to our national seashores. Last year, more than 41.3 million people traveled to the 33 coastal national park sites from Maine to Florida to enjoy swimming, fishing, boating, beachcombing, visiting historic sites and eating delicious fresh seafood. In addition to providing the perfect sandy, sunny backdrop for making great memories, these 2,875 miles of shoreline and 329,110 acres of marine sanctuaries provide essential safeguards for our coastline, habitat for wildlife, and recreation opportunities for visitors and residents alike. The recreation economy in these coastal communities generates billions of dollars in revenue and supports thousands of jobs.

However, if proposed revisions to oil and gas exploration and drilling regulations are put in place, these beaches and waters could be irreparably harmed. Coastal tourism and fishing economies could be ruined by oil washing onto shores from rig operations and

spills. The scenic allure of seaside towns could be marred by the refineries and pipelines needed to process and transport oil and natural gas. Critical marine species, habitats and ecosystems would be harmed.

In April, President Trump signed an Executive Order (EO) “Implementing an America-First Offshore Energy Strategy”, which dictates a rollback of ocean protections established under the previous administration in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico. This EO directs the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to start developing a new ‘Five-Year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Leasing Program’ even though the current 2017-2022 OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program was just approved in January.

The administration’s new plan includes the Atlantic Ocean and the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas off the coast of Alaska—seas that were excluded from the original 2017-2022 plan because they were determined to be of

extraordinary biological significance.

Following the release of the EO, 27 senators wrote a letter to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, urging him not to revise the previous ruling. In June, 103 members of Congress signed a letter in “strong opposition” to offshore oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic Ocean. North Carolina Governor Cooper summed up his opinion on the matter in four words: “Not on our coast.”

NPCA agrees. Healthy coastal parks depend on the protection of offshore waters. We urge you to become a park advocate and speak up for our coastal parks. Call or write your elected officials. Become an online advocate with NPCA to get action alerts on this and other park protection issues at npca.org/signup.

Below: Making great vacation memories at the Outer Banks. ©Jodie Manross





Georgia Park Effort Could Result in Major Economic Gains

NPCA continues its work to gain passage of boundary expansion legislation for the Ocmulgee National Monument in Macon, GA. The Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park Boundary Revision Act came within a hairs' breadth of final passage last December, but stalled in the Senate during the last moments of the 114th Congress. The bill would have enlarged the park from 700 acres to almost 3,000, changed its designation from a national monument to a national historical park, and authorized the National Park Service to study the Ocmulgee River corridor between Macon and Hawkinsville to make further recommendations to Congress about conserving the river's unique Native American history and wildlife resources.

Due to the bipartisan efforts of Reps. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) and Austin Scott (R-GA), as well as Sens. Johnny Isakson (R-GA) and David Perdue (R-GA), the bill was rapidly reintroduced in the new 115th Congress in January. Amazingly, the House version of the bill (H.R. 538) passed before the end of the month by a vote of 396 to 8, a stunning accomplishment in a highly divided Congress. In March, the Senate version of the bill

(S. 135) was passed out of committee and is currently awaiting a final vote by the Senate.

As the bill works its way over the last hurdles, NPCA is already looking ahead. Local grassroots organizations have proposed a long-term vision of consolidating the Ocmulgee National Monument with other public lands along the river to ultimately establish a combined national park and preserve. In support of this proposal, NPCA released a study this spring, *Diamond in the Rough—An Economic Analysis of the Proposed Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve*, which was generously funded in part by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. In the study, economists from the University of Tennessee's Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics modeled growth projections over a 15-year period comparing two scenarios—the economic impact if a national park and preserve were to be created, versus the likely result if the public lands along the river were to continue to operate in isolation from one another.

The results indicated that a national park and preserve designation for Ocmulgee

could lead to a six-fold increase in visitation within 15 years and add \$206.7 million in annual economic activity, defining a new trajectory for middle Georgia. The analysis also indicated that the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and Ocmulgee River Water Trail have even greater potential than currently recognized. They could be integral components of a national park and preserve and serve as primary recreation-based economic drivers. To explore the full report, visit: www.npca.org/ocmulgeereport.

Passage of the pending congressional legislation is just the next step in a continuing process to envision middle Georgia over the next 50 to 75 years. What role might a national park and preserve play in anchoring the region's future, conserving its unique cultural and wildlife resources, and building the tourism and recreation economy? NPCA is grateful for the opportunity to participate in this special conversation and we plan to stay engaged as the vision unfolds.

Above: Great Temple Mound, Ocmulgee National Monument ©Sharman Ayoub



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Bobcat (*Lynx Rufus*):

Recognizable for their black tipped ears and stubby tail, bobcats are about twice the size of a housecat and hunt rabbits, rodents, some birds and deer.

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Daisey Smith is a junior at the University of Tennessee majoring in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics. During her summer internship, she worked to collect and present information about the different economic and environmental impacts that Spaceport Camden could have on Cumberland Island National Seashore and the surrounding communities. When asked what she enjoyed most about interning at NPCA, she said, “It’s energizing to work with people that are all so passionate and educated about what they do.”

MEET OUR INTERNS

Hannah Mullally is a graduate student at the University of Tennessee pursuing her Master of Science degree in Wildlife and Fisheries. This past spring she helped with the Pigeon River Gorge wildlife connectivity project by conducting research and setting up camera traps in the field. “Hannah was instrumental in getting our camera trapping project off the ground,” said NPCA Program Manager Jeff Hunter. “Her experience and enthusiasm for field work proved invaluable for our work.”

Noah White is a junior at Duke University majoring in Environmental Science and Policy who came to NPCA this summer as part of the Stanback internship program. He helped develop curriculum that will be presented this fall during the Youth Leadership Development Project at Warren Wilson College and also researched the array of predator management practices used in coastal parks. He decided to intern with NPCA because “it was clear that NPCA is a community-minded organization that celebrates the importance of conservation, advocacy, and diversity—values I strongly connect with.”

Thanks to all of our interns for their enthusiasm, efforts and commitment to our mission.



Above (L-R): Daisey Smith, Hannah Mullally and Noah White