



Proposed Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area

Benefits of Designation

Coastal wetlands. Photo © Bob Howen.

Hurricane Ike tore through the upper Texas Gulf coast in 2008, unleashing devastation on communities and economies. Yet portions of the region fared better, showing that undeveloped lands along the coast serve as a natural buffer for a tremendous amount of storm surge tide, reducing flooding and property damage to inland communities.

Creating a new national recreation area within this coastal buffer zone has been proposed as one strategy for capitalizing on the economic value of the area's natural, cultural, and historical sites while ensuring long-term flood protection. A study of potential economic impacts for a four-county coastal region finds the proposed Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area could offer nearly \$200 million in annual economic benefits from recreation and heritage tourism.

To identify likely advantages, this study evaluated areas similar to the proposed Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area. These include national recreation areas and other National Park Service (NPS) sites, as well as other regional recreation, tourism, and heritage "trails" and areas.

Benefits of Creating a New National Recreation Area

1 NPS visitor appeal

NPS affiliation would put this region on par with the nation's finest public lands, and offer exposure to large national and international markets.

At seven NPS sites similar to the proposed Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area, visitation grew 565 percent during the first ten years of operation.

2 More visitors, more revenue

A shared identity for tourism development and marketing could expand the size of the "tourist pie."

Collaborative marketing along the Crooked Road music heritage trail in Virginia doubled lodging sales in the first four years. Music events grew five percent per year, and the region's share of Virginia tourism expanded by two percent.

3 Quality of life for residents

A national recreation area can help protect what people value most about their communities.

Residents believe the Lake Country scenic byway in Minnesota contributes to their quality of life by supporting natural areas, cultural and historic sites, and recreation opportunities.

4 Coordination among land managers toward common goals

Programming, facilities construction and maintenance, signage, and resource protection can all benefit from coordinated efforts.

At Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, operating agreements allow goods and services to move easily between partner agencies, to meet the needs of the park as a whole.

5 Financial leverage and access to funding

Collaborative proposals and the high profile of NPS designation could help attract nonprofit, corporate, federal, and other funds, and provide access to NPS special funding. National Park Service units are typically supported by strong friends groups that help raise money, recruit volunteers, and conduct special programs.

6 Reduced property damage from storms

A national recreation area could promote long-term, coordinated storm protection by enhancing the economic value of low-lying coastal areas for recreation.

Cost savings could be dramatic, both in diminished property damage, and in avoided costs of installing massive flood-control structures to replace these natural buffers.

Management Benefits of National Recreation Area Designation

National Stature, Local Control

A national recreation area can be locally governed. This provides a flexible way to garner the advantages and stature of National Park Service involvement while sustaining local management.

A locally-developed charter can govern a national recreation area. The managing partnership can include local, state, and federal government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners.

Voluntary Participation

The proposed Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area would be built around a core of existing natural, recreation, and historic sites. Landowner participation is voluntary.

Land is not condemned. If land is acquired for the national recreation area, it is from willing sellers. Any regulations on land use related to the national recreation area would apply only to participating landowners.

National Park Service Role

The designation may leverage federal resources and funding. The Park Service can play a coordinating role and contribute expertise in areas such as education, interpretation, science, visitor services, recreation management, and planning. The NPS is likely—although not required—to own land within the national recreation area.

Partnership and Funding

A general management plan guides the operation of the national recreation area. Participating agency plans are typically coordinated with each other and with this general plan, but the national recreation area does not override partners' decision-making authorities.

Partner organizations contribute in various ways, consistent with their mandates and resources. A national recreation area can leverage money partner organizations already spend managing their lands, add NPS funding to the equation, and create other vehicles for financial and technical support.

Fishing off Bolivar Peninsula. A national recreation area could help coordinate and improve coastal access for recreation.

Photo: © Bob Howen.

What is a National Recreation Area?

- A means of protecting a nationally significant land and water recreation area. These designated areas can also include historical structures, trails, and sites.
- A vehicle for coordinating visitor services, coastal flood control and resource protection, tourism marketing, and land management among voluntarily participating partners.
- A flexible NPS designation that allows for local control. A national recreation area can be managed by a local partnership that can include local, state, and federal government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners.
- A Congressionally created unit of the National Park Service.



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