

[From Summer 1994]

Beach Parking - Planning Ahead

Over the years since the bridge was built to Assateague Island, many thousands of visitors have enjoyed the beach for recreational purposes such as bird watching, beach combing, swimming, sunbathing, etc. Most of these visitors probably never gave a second thought about the convenience of the parking, which is located directly behind the dunes. However, Assateague Island, like other barrier islands along the Delmarva Peninsula, is migrating to the west, as sand is blown or washed across the island. Many local residents of the Eastern Shore, or visitors who have been coming for a long time, remember the restaurant of the early 1960s - the former location of which is currently out in the ocean. As the island moves westward, the current land base (which contains the beach parking lots) is becoming smaller. Eventually this may result in less available parking area.

Visitors and residents should not be alarmed, since this is the natural movement of this barrier island, but should be aware that this situation is not going unnoticed by community planners and the two federal agencies involved with Assateague Island, the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Beach parking is addressed in the recently completed Master Plan for the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge. This plan calls for the parking to remain near the beach as long as the land base remains to support the current number of spaces, but that future parking when needed would have to be located off Assateague Island. The plan does not address emergency situations, such as the January 1992 storm which damaged the parking lots, or the particulars of what needs to be done to lessen any possible impacts to visitors and local residents.

However, as a consequence of a meeting in early May, these concerns are being addressed. A committee was appointed by the Town of Chincoteague to work with the Assateague Island National Seashore and the Chincoteague Refuge in order to plan for the future of beach use. The Committee consists of Mayor Harry Thornton, Town Manager Stewart Baker, Council Members Donald Leonard and Wanda Thornton, and Chamber of Commerce representatives, Kelly Conklin, Donna Leonard and Jackie Russell. On May 3, the majority of the Committee met with Congressman Bateman's aide, Suzanne Beasley, along with Seashore Superintendent, Marc Koenings, and Refuge Manager, John Schroer, in the first of many meetings on this subject.

The purpose of the meetings will be to maintain lines of communication between the various organizations and to have a plan of action for future emergencies. The goal of the meetings will be to lessen possible impacts to both visitors, residents and the community. Members of the Chincoteague Natural History Association are encouraged to have input to this process by discussing their thoughts with members on the Committee or one of the federal representatives involved.

*John Schroer,
Refuge Manager*

