



Foundation Document Overview

Fort Matanzas National Monument

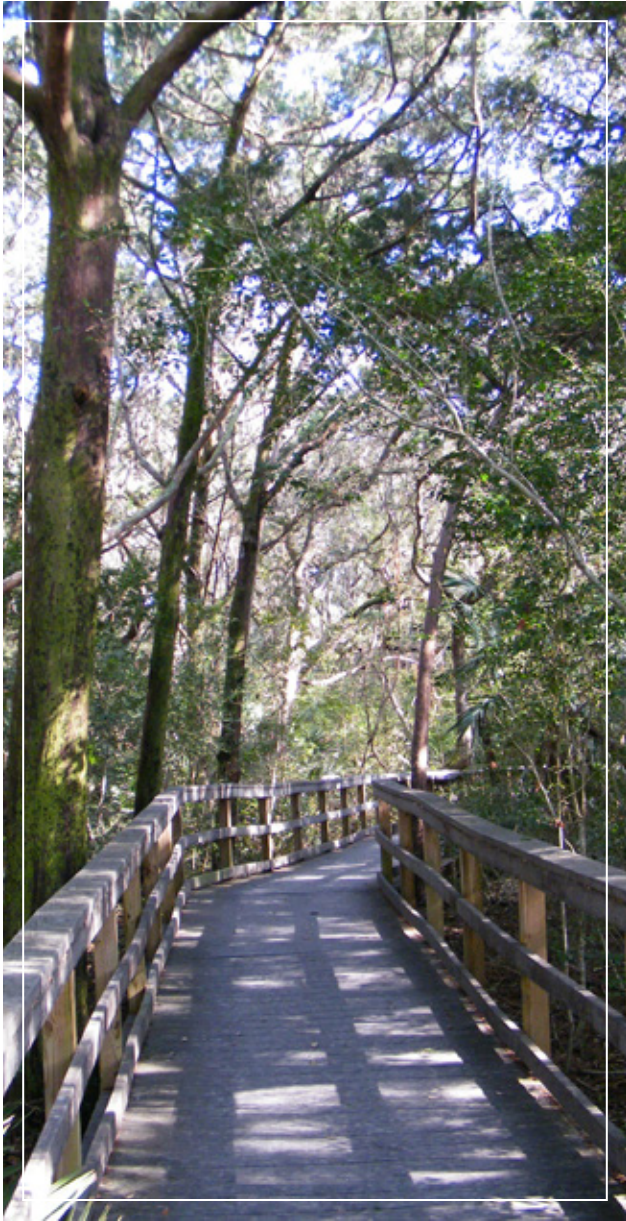
Florida



Contact Information

For more information about the *Fort Matanzas National Monument Foundation Document*, contact: foma_superintendent@nps.gov or 904-829-6506, x227 or write to: Superintendent, Fort Matanzas National Monument, 8635 A1A South, St. Augustine, FL 32080

Purpose



FORT MATANZAS NATIONAL MONUMENT preserves the fortified watchtower, completed in 1742, which defended the southern approach to the Spanish military settlement of St. Augustine, and protects approximately 300 acres of Florida coastal environment.

Significance

Significance statements express why Fort Matanzas National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

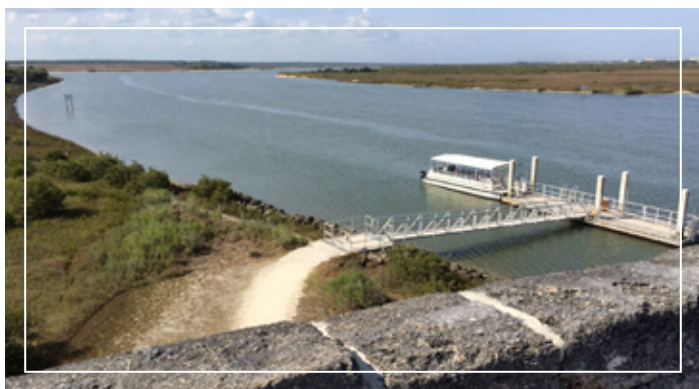
- Built from coquina, a locally quarried form of limestone, Fort Matanzas is the only example of a Spanish fortified watchtower in the continental United States.
- Fort Matanzas is the best-preserved component of the Spanish outer defense system that once protected St. Augustine.
- Fort Matanzas' setting provides a rare opportunity for visitors to experience the natural landscape as it might have appeared to an 18th-century Spanish soldier.
- Fort Matanzas National Monument preserves an undeveloped portion of an Atlantic barrier island and coastal ecosystem containing dunes, marsh, maritime forest, and associated flora and fauna, including threatened and endangered species.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Fort Matanzas.** Fort Matanzas is a coquina masonry Spanish fortification that guards the southern mouth of the Matanzas River, the Matanzas Inlet. The fort protected the “back door” entrance to the city of St. Augustine, a weak spot in the city defense, and also served as a rest stop, coast guard station, and a place where vessels heading for St. Augustine could get advice on navigating the river. Located on Rattlesnake Island, the fort was completed in 1742, although there were successive watchtowers at the Matanzas Inlet from 1569 until 1740. Fort Matanzas is a rare surviving example of Spanish fortification as erected in Florida in the 18th century. The fort includes an elevated gun deck, officer’s quarters, soldiers’ quarters, powder magazine, and a 30-foot high observation deck. The structure is a tangible symbol of Spanish culture and heritage in the area.
- **Historic Setting and Natural Environment.** The natural landscape surrounding the fort retains a high degree of natural integrity encompassing broad, sweeping views extending out from the fort, providing an authentic experience to visitors in terms of the strategic location and remoteness of the fort. Supporting the historic setting and viewshed is approximately 300 acres of undeveloped Atlantic barrier island and coastal ecosystem that are protected by Fort Matanzas National Monument. Natural coastal processes in the park, such as erosion, shoreline migration, deposition, and inlet formation, are allowed to continue without interference.



Other Important Resources and Values

Fort Matanzas National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Cast Iron Cannons.** Five cannons once guarded the fortress, facing in the three approaching directions. Each cannon could easily reach the inlet, then only a half-mile away. Two of these original cannons still stand at the fort today. They were made around 1750 (probably in Spain), emplaced at Matanzas in 1793, and left behind by the Spanish when they departed Florida in 1821. The other two cannons, now on the gun deck, are modern reproductions purchased through donations to the park and used in the park’s living history cannon firing demonstrations.
- **Archeology.** Fort Matanzas National Monument has seven archeological sites that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These resources are primarily shell middens and sites associated with Spanish and British periods of occupation. The historic and aboriginal middens on Rattlesnake and Anastasia Islands have provided, and will continue to provide, information useful for interpretation to the public.



Description

Fort Matanzas National Monument is 14 miles south of St. Augustine, on the northeast Atlantic coast of Florida. Fort Matanzas National Monument was established by presidential proclamation on October 15, 1924. The U.S. War Department administered the fort until it was transferred to the Department of the Interior, National Park Service in 1933. Land expansions that followed resulted in the inclusion a variety of natural habitats that support diverse plant and animal communities typical of the Northeast Florida coastal barrier ecosystems. The park encompasses approximately 300 acres, divided between the southern tip of Anastasia Island (approximately 110 acres) and the northern end of Rattlesnake Island (approximately 190 acres).

The history of Fort Matanzas is closely linked with St. Augustine and the Castillo de San Marcos, which served as the city's chief defensive structure for many years. Since St. Augustine's founding in 1565, the outpost town had been the heart of Spain's coastal defense system in Florida. After the completion of the Castillo in 1695, the town still had a glaring weakness—the Matanzas Inlet. The inlet allowed easy access to the Matanzas River, by which enemy vessels could attack St. Augustine.

Construction of Fort Matanzas began soon after a 39-day British blockade at the St. Augustine Inlet and siege on the city of St. Augustine threatened the town's surrender to Britain. In 1742, with the fort near completion, the British positioned 12 ships near the inlet. The fort's cannons were able to drive off the British scouting boats and the ships. Besides warning St. Augustine of enemy vessels, the fort also served as a rest stop, coast guard station, and a place where vessels heading for St. Augustine could get advice on navigating the river. Its primary mission, though, was maintaining control of the Matanzas Inlet, which it did successfully throughout the fort's military life. This control prevented the enemy from easily accessing the southern approach to St. Augustine.

Today, more than 568,500 people visit the park annually, and of those, about 65,000 people visit the fort. Visitors to Fort Matanzas National Monument can visit the fort on NPS-led boat trips, ranger talks, and occasional historic weapons firing demonstrations. In addition to visiting the fort, the park offers a variety of recreational activities, including bird watching, boating, fishing, kayaking, nature walks, swimming, and wildlife viewing. The park offers a 0.5-mile self-guided nature trail on a boardwalk through a coastal maritime forest and through the dunes to a beach overlook. The majority of the land on Rattlesnake Island is open to the public, with the exception of the area immediately surrounding the fort. Although most of the parkland on Anastasia Island is closed to the public because of the dunes and their sensitive environment, the beach areas are open to the public and receive the vast majority of the park's visitors, who enjoy traditional beach activities such as picnicking, boating, shelling, wading/swimming, and sunbathing.

