



# Foundation Document Overview

## Cape Cod National Seashore

### Massachusetts



#### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purposes of CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE are to preserve the nationally significant and special cultural and natural features, distinctive patterns of human activity, and ambience that characterize the Outer Cape, along with the associated scenic, cultural, historic, scientific, and recreational values, and to provide opportunities for current and future generations to experience, enjoy, and understand these features and values.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Cape Cod National Seashore 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.

- Cape Cod is one of the largest glacial peninsulas in the world, and the Great Beach on the Atlantic side of the Cape is one of the longest uninterrupted sandy shorelines on the East Coast, making it an exceptionally important, ecologically intact beach ecosystem.
- The dynamic natural coastal processes that continually reshape the Cape are directly impacted by the effects of climate change and are possible to observe and document.
- Cape Cod National Seashore contains some of the largest unfragmented tracts of uplands and wetlands remaining on Cape Cod, which are essential to maintaining ecological integrity and which provide habitats vital for many plant and animal species. The national seashore encompasses natural resources such as heathlands, coastal pine barrens, kettle ponds, spadefoot toads, shorebirds, and right whales that are regionally and/or globally rare, yet locally abundant.





## Significance

- Cape Cod's prominent position, jutting into the Atlantic at a northerly latitude, makes it a significant resource for migratory species, including several whale, bird, and turtle species that are threatened or endangered.
- Cape Cod was the site of early contact between native and European cultures. The national seashore encompasses archeological sites that document more than 9,000 years of occupation, including use by Wampanoag Indians that continues to this day. The Pilgrims landed first on Cape Cod when they arrived in America in 1620. In Provincetown harbor, they drafted and signed the Mayflower Compact.
- Over centuries of habitation, maritime occupations (whaling, fishing, and lifesaving), as well as distinctive lifeways, community life, and architecture, have developed in response to the location of Cape Cod.
- Cape Cod's geographic location has made it the site of significant technological achievements in communication, including the first transatlantic cable, the first exchange of transatlantic wireless messages, the development of long-range radar, and, recently, the development of emerging technologies.
- Cape Cod's beauty, solitude, and aesthetic values have offered inspiration and renewal for more than 100 years and contributed to a rich artistic and architectural heritage. Proximity to densely populated areas of the Northeast makes the Cape accessible to millions.



## 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.

- **Natural Resources**

- Beaches, Barrier Islands, and Spits
- Estuaries and Salt Marshes
- Freshwater Ponds, Wetlands, and Aquifer
- Nearshore Marine Resources
- Coastal Uplands
- Wildlife and Fish
- Night Sky, Soundscape, and Air Quality

- **Cultural Resources**

- Truro Highlands Historic District
- Coastal Lifesaving Heritage Sites
- Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District
- Fort Hill Rural Historic District
- Nauset Archeological District
- Archeological Sites (upland and submerged)
- Museum and Archival Collections
- Marconi Station Site (commemorative site)

- **Visitor Experience**

- Salt Pond Visitor Center and Province Lands Visitor Center
- NPS-Lifeguarded Beaches
- Cape Cod Experience

- **Partnerships**

- Cape Cod Model
- Cape Cod National Seashore Advisory Commission

Cape Cod National Seashore 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.

- **Cultural Resources**

- Sites Related to the Outer Cape's Cultural Heritage.
- Mid-Century Modern Homes.

- **Visitor Experience**

- Atlantic Research and Learning Center.
- Bicycle Trails.
- Walking Trails and Picnic Areas.

## Description

Cape Cod, a slender spit of land curving some 60 miles out into the Atlantic Ocean, is an extraordinary resource, an area that is strikingly lovely and unusual in its combination and diversity of resources. Its unsurpassed beaches, ponds, marshes, bays, pine barrens, inlets, and dunes combine with historic landscapes and thriving communities to create an intricate mosaic. Cape Cod National Seashore was authorized in 1961 to preserve a part of this fascinating, ever-changing landscape.

Cape Cod is one of the largest glacially formed peninsulas in the world, and the Great Beach, on the Atlantic side, is one of the longest expanses of uninterrupted sandy shoreline on the East Coast. Natural change on the Cape is constant and dramatic, especially along the ocean shore. Within the national seashore the action of wind, waves, tides, and rain remains mostly unaffected by development, providing a rare opportunity to observe their effects on the land and shoreline formations.

The lands and waters of the national seashore comprise about 44,000 acres (varies depending on the location of the low tide shoreline for parts of the outer Cape). The nonmarine land and water area totals about 26,810 acres. Based on recent aerial mapping, that area includes 3,375 acres of grassland, 895 acres of heathland, 3,765 acres of deciduous forest, 11,500 acres of mixed pine forest, 2,550 acres of wetlands and ponds, 1,875 acres of salt marsh, 1,700 acres of beach and tide flats, and 1,150 acres of developed land.

The Cape's prominent position in the Atlantic has long made it a key location for human settlement; archeological sites testify to more than 9,000 years of occupation. This long period of continuous human settlement has produced occupations, folkways, and pastimes that have been singular developments in American history. By the 1600s the Wampanoag Indians used or inhabited all the lands now within the national seashore. In 1620 Cape Cod was the first landfall for the Pilgrims and the site of the creation of the Mayflower Compact.

With European settlement, Cape Codders took to the sea, creating whaling and fishing industries as well as a long and famous tradition of shellfishing. This seafaring heritage is reflected in the many lighthouses and lifesaving and Coast Guard stations that dot the Cape.

Settlers were the architects of a style of dwelling with a steep roof to shed the rain and snow and low to the ground to withstand buffeting winds; this style came to be known as the Cape Cod house, recognized throughout the United States.

Cape Cod has also been the site of significant technological achievements. The first transatlantic cable was laid between Cape Cod and France in 1866. In 1903 Guglielmo Marconi was instrumental in successfully sending and receiving the first exchange of transatlantic wireless messages between President Theodore Roosevelt and King Edward VII. More recently, the Cape has played a role in the research and development of long-range radar.

Cape Cod's beauty, sense of solitude, and other aesthetic values have created a place for people to come for inspiration and renewal for more than 100 years. These attributes have also inspired generations of artists and writers. Edward Hopper, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Henry David Thoreau, John Dos Passos, and Mary McCarthy are only a few who have created a rich tradition of contributions to the arts. Cape Cod continues to be recognized for its special charm and unique ambience, and its proximity to densely populated and developed areas makes its special character all the more important to preserve.

