

**SHORELINE MANAGEMENT AT PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF ANGLER RELATIONSHIPS TO THE BEACH**

A Thesis

by

CHELSEA LYNNE ALDRICH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2009

Major Subject: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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Chair of Committee,	Tazim Jamal
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## ABSTRACT

Shoreline Management at Padre Island National Seashore: An Investigation of Angler Relationships to the Beach. (August 2009)

Chelsea Lynne Aldrich, B.S., Clemson University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Tazim Jamal

Park management at Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) actively continues to modify the General Management Plan to maintain the safety of the increasing numbers of visitors and protect natural resources. When changes conflict with anglers' current usage of the beach, park management receives vocal opposition from local and visiting anglers who do not want their long-standing rights to the beach to be affected. To better inform management decisions and policies surrounding the beach area, this qualitative thesis research used ethnographic interviews to address the following key objectives: (1) Understand the relationship between surf anglers and the beach at PAIS, (2) Identify the main issues, concerns, needs, and expectations of the surf anglers at PAIS, (3) Describe the relationship between surf anglers and the National Park Service (NPS), and (4) Determine key areas of conflict and tension surrounding NPS management of the beach.

At Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS), referred to by local anglers as "the PINS," anglers connect to the beach because of memories experienced there, a heritage of use, a sense of serenity and spirituality, and camaraderie. Those who have a long-standing relationship to the beach at the PINS, in some cases multi-generational, feel a

sense of guardianship and even ownership over the beach. Many surf anglers at the PINS experience the outdoors through a family heritage of fishing, connect to others through fishing, and promote conservation practices through media, camaraderie, and local knowledge.

Angler feelings towards the NPS range from distrust to an appreciation of the role of the NPS in protecting their sacred fishing place. Areas of conflict and tension stem from anglers' safety concerns, new regulations that challenge and threaten their traditional values and experiences associated with surf fishing, and a lack of communication and inclusion of anglers in the National Seashore's decision-making processes. To better manage conflict surrounding management issues on the beach at PAIS, this thesis suggests that park managers (1) reinstate public meetings; (2) utilize moderated roundtable discussion at public meetings; and (3) involve the scientific community, appropriate stakeholder groups, and angler knowledge in informing decisions and new regulations.

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wonderful, meaningful papers, and for your constant desire to put your research into practical, grounded effect.

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**NOMENCLATURE**

CBBEP	Coastal Bend, Bays and Estuaries Program
GMP	General Management Plan
PINS	Padre Island National Seashore (angler reference)
PAIS	Padre Island National Seashore (federal reference)
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
NOMENCLATURE.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
 CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Overview of Study .....	1
1.2 Purpose and Objectives .....	3
1.3 Importance of This Study.....	5
1.4 Organization of Thesis .....	8
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
2.1 Introduction .....	10
2.2 Place Meanings, Place Identification, and Attachment to Natural Areas.....	10
2.3 Cultural Relationships and Protected Areas as Tourism Destinations.....	14
III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	17
3.1 Case Study Approach.....	17
3.2 Site Information.....	18
3.3 Research Questions .....	31
3.4 Data Gathering .....	33
3.5 Data Analysis .....	36
3.6 Trustworthiness and Credibility of Research.....	39

CHAPTER		Page
IV	RESEARCH RESULTS .....	48
	4.1 The Special “Essence” of the Island .....	49
	4.2 Fishing at the PINS .....	55
	4.3 Experiencing the “Social” Island .....	68
	4.4 Conservation.....	76
V	ANGLERS’ ISSUES AND CONCERNS.....	86
	5.1 Introduction .....	86
	5.2 Anglers’ Relationships to the National Park Service .....	87
	5.3 Safety and Changes at the PINS.....	91
	5.4 Challenged Values and Associated Management Challenges..	94
	5.5 Issues of Communication and Inclusion .....	102
VI	SUMMARY: STUDY IMPLICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT DIRECTION .....	105
	6.1 Review of Research Results.....	105
	6.2 Addressing Angler Issues and Concerns .....	108
	6.3 Concluding Comments .....	116
	REFERENCES .....	118
	APPENDIX .....	123
	VITA .....	125

**LIST OF FIGURES**

FIGURE		Page
1	Research Questions .....	4
2	Map of Padre Island National Seashore .....	19
3	Map of Corpus Christi as Located in Texas .....	20
4	Worldwide and Texas Visitors to PAIS .....	27
5	Interview Questions.....	32

**LIST OF TABLES**

TABLE		Page
1	PAIS Annual Visitation Rates .....	2
2	State and Federal Protected Species Occurring at PAIS .....	21
3	Kemp’s Ridley Sea Turtle Recovery .....	24
4	Participants in the Study .....	37
5	Emergent Themes Among Surf Angler Groups .....	49
6	PAIS Beach User Regulations .....	96
7	Angler Community Outreach Media in Corpus Christi .....	112

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview of Study

Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) is heavily visited by recreational and professional anglers from the surrounding Corpus Christi area, throughout Texas, nationwide, and globally. The National Seashore is visited by recreational anglers, who both use the park as an access point for surf fishing down island on the beach and for accessing the Laguna Madre by boat or for wade fishing. This research focuses on the recreational surf anglers, many of whom have a family history of fishing on the beach at Padre Island prior to its designation as a national seashore in 1962.

PAIS is revising its General Management Plan (GMP) to mitigate the potential impacts of higher visitation rates and consequent increased usage of the beach. The National Park Service (NPS) online Public Use Statistics Office shows the following numbers of recreational visits to the National Seashore (see also Table 1): 152,400 recreational visitors in 1966; 960,700 recreational visitors in 1976; 708,932 recreational visitors in 1986; and 840,236 in 1996. The number of visitors dropped after 2001 to 532,843, but has been steadily increasing since then, despite the last two years which park employees attribute to the state of the economy. Present visitation rates are around 635,925 (NPS 2008a). In a study conducted in 2004, 22.1% of the visitors to PAIS were documented as those visiting to use the beach for fishing activities (Scott and Lai 2004).

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This thesis follows the style of *Annals of Tourism Research*.

**Table 1. PAIS Annual Visitation Rates**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Recreational Visitors</b>
2008	635,925
2007	658,317
2006	730,994
2005	666,580
2004	643,792
2003	568,737
2002	532,843
2001	656,873
2000	759,596
1999	630,562
1998	707,999
1997	677,492
1996	840,236
1995	755,817
1994	915,596
1993	766,391
1992	848,073
1991	972,122
1990	593,255
1989	586,235
1988	587,283
1987	605,977
1986	708,932
1985	669,078
1984	613,386
1983	630,165
1982	731,218
1981	620,782
1980	765,423
1979	774,862
1978	860,654
1977	836,300
1976	960,700
1975	861,300
1974	789,400
1973	930,900
1972	877,553

**Table 1. Continued**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Recreational Visitors</b>
1971	892,900
1970	721,200
1969	711,000
1968	360,800
1967	195,400
1966	152,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,005,048</b>

Anglers have been visiting Padre Island prior to its federal designation as a national seashore, and have continued to visit the beach area and the Laguna Madre within its boundaries, following the initiation of federal management. Challenges have arisen regarding the management of the beach, especially regarding the new regulations that interfere with the way anglers use, experience, and value the beach. Conflicts between users and the park are expected to increase as environmental resources become subject to greater stress over time. Management personnel at PAIS have expressed an interest in better understanding how anglers perceive the National Park Service (NPS) generally and, more specifically, the role of the NPS at PAIS.

### **1.2 Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this thesis is to understand angler relationships with the beach at PAIS and with the NPS, in order to help inform decisions and policies being made by the NPS and to help minimize and manage conflict effectively.

This thesis will provide an interpretive description of the relationships between anglers and the beach area at PAIS. Direct observation and ethnographic interviews were used to address the following key study objectives: (1) Understand the relationship between surf anglers and the beach at PAIS; (2) Identify the main issues, concerns, needs, and expectations of the surf anglers at PAIS; (3) Examine the relationship between surf anglers at PAIS and the National Park Service (NPS); and (4) Determine key areas of conflict and tension surrounding NPS management of the beach at PAIS.

These research objectives will be guided by four research questions, as can be seen in detail in Figure 1. Sub research questions are included under each of the four main research questions. PAIS is referred to in the research questions as “the PINS” to be reflective of the way anglers refer to the park.

1.0 How do surf anglers relate to the beach at Padre Island National Seashore?
1.1 What makes Padre Island National Seashore special to surf anglers?
1.2 What does it mean to be a surf angler at the PINS?
1.3 What values do surf anglers associate with the PINS?
1.4 What are the reasons that surf anglers prefer fishing at the PINS over other beaches?
1.5 How has the National Seashore changed over time?
1.6 How do these changes affect the surf anglers at the PINS?
2.0 What is the relationship between surf anglers at the PINS and the NPS?
2.1 How do surf anglers perceive the NPS generally?
2.2 What expectations do surf anglers have of the NPS at the PINS?
2.3 What are the needs and expectations of the surf anglers at the PINS?
3.0 What are the major issues and concerns facing surf anglers at the PINS?
3.1 What are the perceptions of the surf anglers of conservation issues at the PINS?
3.2 How do they think the NPS is handling these issues?
3.3 How do they feel the NPS at the PINS is treating surf anglers?
4.0 How can surf anglers assist the NPS in addressing the surf anglers' issues and concerns?
4.1 What solutions or strategies can surf anglers propose that might address NPS concerns about conservation issues on the beach, and address access and other issues of the surf anglers?
4.2 What forms of communication should be considered between the NPS and surf anglers?
4.3 How can public meetings be better managed with respect to the conflict and tension that tends to occur at them?

**Figure 1. Research Questions**



### **1.3 Importance of This Study**

This study holds great importance for many reasons and for many people. Each of us has a place in the outdoors that we consider special. In many cases, we have memories and stories surrounding those places that render them significant in our personal histories. As such, this study focuses largely on how such places become special, and what makes the beach at the PINS, in particular, special to those who fish its waters.

My current role at Padre Island National Seashore is not only as a researcher, but also as a park ranger in the Division of Interpretation and Education. In this field, I have been taught that the role of the interpreter is to learn the natural and cultural stories of a place, and communicate these stories to visitors in such a way that the interpreter evokes in listeners a sense of caring and stewardship for a place or resource (natural or cultural). However, park rangers are not the only story-tellers of Padre Island National Seashore.

For years, stories of Padre Island, its inhabitants, and its reputation for good fishing and harsh climes, have circulated throughout parts of Texas. The few who were the first to be able to access and drive its beaches shared their tales from Padre Island. These stories have been told and re-told, from generation to generation, by fishermen who have been taken captive by its rugged environment, fought with fish they have kept and lost, and shared countless other experiences with their friends and family. These stories harbor the mystery of the island, angler devotion and attraction to the island, memories of loved ones with whom the island adventure was once shared, and fishing legacies of the past and present. This island has given birth to not only expert fishermen,

but naturalists and conservationists alike, and they stand strong in protection and defense of their island.

In 1962, the northern section of Padre Island was federally recognized as a place of natural and cultural importance. Today, close to 700,000 tourists each year flock from all across Texas, the United States, and the world to experience the wildlife, recreation, and serenity of the world's largest stretch of undeveloped barrier island. Faster than ever, the internet and other media are drawing people to the National Seashore for its renowned surf fishing, remote and wild beaches, and opportunities to be a part of protecting endangered wildlife. Increased usage is resulting in the need for improved conservation through community education and a better understanding of the associated impacts on all natural and cultural resources.

NPS management has recognized the importance of managing the beach and its other resources for increased visitor usage. However, new regulations and policies that are intended to mitigate harm to park resources have received opposition from local and visiting angler groups, because the park does not consult with user groups prior to implementation of the regulations. There also appears to be no scientific justification to contribute to further informing the regulations. Of particular concern to anglers is the potential loss of their ability to access the beach by driving, due to the increasing numbers of the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

Today, anglers' stories serve as an eager and desperate plea to the management of Padre Island National Seashore to recognize the importance of anglers in conservation and education, and the devastating effects that certain implemented and anticipated

policies might have on a heritage of fishing on the beach at the PINS. This study serves as a representation of their voice so that it may be heard and ultimately protect the beach's natural and cultural resources and anglers' rights to fish access and fish it as they have for generations.

As PAIS policy and decision makers struggle to balance the relationship between people and the natural environment, information gathered under objectives 1-4 should help to inform PAIS management in ways to better address the use/protection issues and conflicts, and to develop effective public involvement processes.

This study will present the NPS at PAIS with detailed information on activities, experiences, identities, and concerns of surf anglers. Such information can be helpful for informing, enhancing and assisting current management of the National Seashore, and facilitating conservation of the beach environment and its associated species of concern. An in-depth understanding of surf anglers' stake in the use of the beach should help PAIS management to proactively address issues and conflicts, such as during future meetings with the public that will be held to review policy changes surrounding visitor uses of the beach. It is also hoped that this study will result in improved communication and strengthening of relationships between the National Seashore and the local community of anglers.

This research, therefore, aims to help park policy and decision makers to simultaneously benefit its beach resources, and attend to the interests of anglers within the National Seashore. Understanding anglers' knowledge of Padre Island, and how they use and experience the place (their historical and cultural ties to an area; what motivates

them to visit certain locations, etc.), will help contribute to the paucity of culturally-oriented tourism research on protected areas in the United States. As an employee for the National Seashore's Division of Interpretation and Education, I will present the results of my study to park managers at PAIS in thesis form and as a condensed summary report.

In sum, this research is important in the following ways:

1. Understanding what makes outdoor places special to groups historically and culturally is important to understanding how people might be affected by policies, and how policies may affect support for, and promotion of, protected areas;
2. Economically, this park is important for attracting tourist dollars and promoting conservation through education, and this study will make suggestions for including the public and improving community perceptions of the park;
3. In order to mitigate conflict between user groups and the park, it is necessary to develop appropriate conflict and consensus-based management strategies.

#### **1.4 Organization of Thesis**

This thesis is organized in a basic layout. Chapter II features the literature review, which is included to provide a basic understanding of the ways in which people create meanings and become attached to places, and how they ultimately identify with a

particular place. Concepts, such as place meaning, place identification, and place attachment are discussed, with an emphasis on how these terms apply to natural areas.

Also included in the literature review is a section on cultural relationships with protected areas as tourism destinations, which describes the types of human-environment relationships that exist and how people give cultural meaning to places with which they have developed such human-environment relationships.

Chapter III will describe the participants in this study and the study site. This chapter will also introduce the methodology that was used to implement this study, and how I, as a researcher *and* park employee, addressed challenges and ethical issues as they emerged during the research process.

Results and analysis of the results are shared in Chapter IV, and the angler voice is used to demonstrate angler experiences, attitudes, values, and issues surrounding the National Seashore. Chapter V describes the issues and concerns presently experienced by anglers who fish the beach at the PINS. Lastly, Chapter VI will provide implications for this thesis research and suggested management directions to be taken based upon this study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review has been developed prior to and following interviews with local fishermen. As is typical of qualitative research, the research informants guided the development of this literature review by the emergence of pervasively shared ideas and interests. Such emergent themes can be better understood by reviewing concepts in the following areas of literature: place meanings, place attachment, and cultural relationships in protected areas as tourist destinations. I re-examined the literature based on these themes in order to support and inform Chapter VI on research direction and management implications of this study.

#### **2.2 Place Meanings, Place Identification, and Attachment to Natural Areas**

This section has been designed to include the types of meanings, relationships and experiences that exist between people and places. Chapter IV will describe the ways in which a group of people (surf anglers) collectively identify with and relate to a place (the beach at PAIS) in addition to the meanings and memories they have created there.

Multiple related terms exist to describe the ways in which places are significant to individuals and groups of people. Hammitt, Backlund, and Bixler (2006) explore the concepts of place familiarity, place belonging, place identity, and place dependence. “Places visited during recreation engagements often involve elements of self-selection,

and thus result in associations, memories, achievements, and lasting images that commonly provide affectionate experiences that promote bonding with these places (Hammitt *et al.* 2006:20).” Imagine a fishing trip that is first initiated due to a good weather window or a free weekend, spent alone or with a group of friends or family. Following this trip, anglers spend their days recounting the events of the trip. They may tell stories about awesome fights with rare or powerful fish, the discovery of unusual treasures encountered on the beach, the sightings of rare migratory birds or endangered wildcats, or even the unpleasant experience of being stranded by unexpected high tides.

Place familiarity develops as geographical and psychological associations with a place are experienced and re-experienced in a process known as human-to-place ‘structural coupling’ (Roberts 1996). In the case of Padre Island National Seashore, some locals have been fishing the beach at PAIS for greater than fifty years, or have developed traditions of traveling to the National Seashore from distant Texas cities (Ex., San Antonio, Austin, Houston, etc.) for multiple generations. Appleyard (1969, as cited in Hammitt *et al.* 2006) describes how the length of residence in an area can enhance place familiarity, along with the development of a strong knowledge base of a particular area (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989). Anglers of Padre Island who fish the beach, for example, share knowledge of the names of particular landmarks, structures and locations with notably good fishing, and the geological, ecological, or historical features of the island.

In many cases, surf anglers enjoy their experiences with family or friends, which is one of the key facilitators of place belonging and attachment (Guest & Lee 1983, as cited in Hammitt *et al.* 2006). This concept of intimacy and communal interactions and

relationships with exclusive individuals or groups of people and particular places further creates a sense of place belonging (Manning 1999).

Even more involved than place attachment and sense of belonging is the concept of place identity, which further includes “attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings, and behavior tendencies ...to a particular place (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff 1983:61).” In this sense, places become crucial in facilitating the development of an individual’s self-concept. Proshansky *et al.* (1983) and Proshansky (1987) propose that “place identity is another aspect of identity comparable to social identity that describes the person’s socialization with the physical world (Proshansky *et al.* 1983, Proshansky 1987, as cited by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996:206).” The leisure literature highlights the following principles associated with place identity: uniqueness or distinctiveness for a person, continuity across time and situation, feeling of personal worth or social value, and self-efficacy (Breakwell, as cited by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell).

Local anglers, or anglers who have developed a multi-year relationship with the beach at the National Seashore, describe the place’s multi-faceted uniqueness and its incomparability to other nearby beaches. This is a type of bonding to a place known as place dependence, in which “a particular place [satisfies] the needs and goals of an individual and [the individual assesses] how the current place compares with other currently available settings that may satisfy the same set of needs (Stokols & Shumaker 1981; Williams *et al.* 1992).” For example, beach driving accessibility at the National



Seashore is the predominant element for place and experience satisfaction for many of the anglers who participated in this study.

The aforementioned concepts all contribute to an individual's or a group's ability to establish a sense of place. Yi-Fu Tuan's seminal work, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, describes how experiences in a place serve to establish definitive realities once a place is given meaning and definition by those who experience it. He writes that "Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience (1977:19)."

Lowenthal (1985) describes how people are drawn to the past because of their nostalgia for simpler times than today, leading to interest in historic places, quiet and rural settings, and antique shops. Stokowski (2002) agrees, asserting that people are exhausted by such hurried contemporary times and increased residential mobility, and they therefore seek connections to, and meanings in, places. As people continue to journey to (and return to) places, they give meaning to these "special" places. Meanings can be attributed to places depending on how a person uses them, how they feel while they are in a place, and their attentiveness during their experiences in a place (Moscardo & Pearce 1986). Thus, places are social constructs and the meanings ascribed to them can change as understandings, memories, and experiences attributed to them evolve.

### 2.3 Cultural Relationships and Protected Areas as Tourism Destinations

As a tourist destination that seeks to sustain its resources and future use for the enjoyment of visitors, an understanding needs to exist of the types of relationships that connect recreational anglers who have a multi-generational history of visiting Padre Island into its designation as a National Seashore, and who continue to do so today. While national parks have historically been created as tourist destinations, the term “visitor” will be used to very generally describe those who visit Padre Island National Seashore, as newer parks have different enabling legislations and priorities. The term “tourist” cannot apply to all the anglers who visit PAIS, because some of them are local and a number would not consider themselves to be tourists. Still, literature in the fields of protected areas as tourism destinations is fitting for this study, because national parks are identified as tourism destinations.

Wilderness has been experienced and become meaningful in numerous ways to different groups of people (Nash 2001). In his seminal work, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash describes how U.S. Americans have identified with protected natural areas. Their journeys to such natural areas and their experiences and uses of these special places over time are what shape and give meaning to such places.

Meanings ascribed to natural areas have varied across cultures and peoples' histories since the beginning of humankind. Following the Revolutionary War, the United States lacked in its own unique identity, and therefore sought to iconize its natural landscapes as it lacked the treasured ancient cathedral and castles seen across Europe (Runte 1997). Visionaries and activists, including George Perkins Marsh, Henry

David Thoreau, George Catlin, and Samuel Hammond, led environmental movements in conservation and preservation that gained in popularity across the United States. These movements identified wilderness areas as beautiful, inspirational, and important to preserve for future use. Frederick Law Olmsted asserted that “the enjoyment of scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system (Nash 2001:106).”

Camargo, Lane, and Jamal (2008) identify in the sustainable tourism literature a paucity of information in the cultural dimension of sustainability. In doing so, Camargo et al. highlight the different types of human-environmental relationships that can exist: subsistence, places, heritage, rituals/health, spiritual, values/beliefs/virtues, ancestral/community relationships, and knowledge.

Harmon and Putney (2003) in their book *The Full Value of Parks* argue that conservation “need[s] to address the health of whole ecosystems rather than that of select parts only (p. 13).” In order to do so, they stress that the range of values associated with parks should be understood by those who care for them. Values, according to Harmon and Putney, can be instrumental (e.g. place dependence) or intrinsic (e.g. place attachment), and that value which comes in the form of human appreciation is “value added to parks.” Within their book is a chapter entitled “Conserving the Sacred,” by P.S. Ramakrishnan, who defines sacred landscapes as those areas which are inhabited by traditional societies that “have coevolved with their environment, modifying nature but

actively maintaining it in a diverse and productive state, based on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), sociocultural practices, and/or religious beliefs (2003:30).”

Parks as destinations serve as places for meaning-making, allowing people who return to a place over and over again to culturally define themselves (Jamal & Hollinshead 2001). While recreational anglers do not live within the National Seashore’s boundaries, they have a history of having journeyed to Padre Island for generations, and may feel a long-standing “right” and a special relationship to the island. One PAIS employee acknowledged that many of the recreational anglers who visit the park regularly, and who have been visiting the park for generations, know more about the National Seashore than those individuals who are employed by the National Park Service (Interview March 2008, NPS Ranger). As little is understood of anglers’ knowledge, experiences, and attachment to PAIS, this study will seek to understand these, and will also attempt to understand the issues and concerns of the anglers with respect to the Seashore, and their perceptions of NPS management.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Case Study Approach**

While a number of qualitative research methods exist, including naturalistic inquiry, participant observation, ethnography, and inductive research, a case study approach was determined most appropriate for this research. A case study can offer a general understanding of a bounded system (Smith 1978), its associated variables, and how those variables relate and interact within the bounded system.

This thesis research will employ a descriptive case study approach, in order to provide a “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. This “thick description is a term from anthropology [meaning] the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated (Merriam 1988:29).” Twenty face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were administered in order to address issues that are relevant to PAIS, the bounded system in this particular study.

In this section, background information on the site and its natural and cultural history are presented, in addition to present visitation facts and management challenges that exist at PAIS. As this report is oriented towards addressing practical issues, the analysis and recommendations will be tailored towards this pragmatic end, rather than an ‘academic’ discussion.

## **3.2 Site Information**

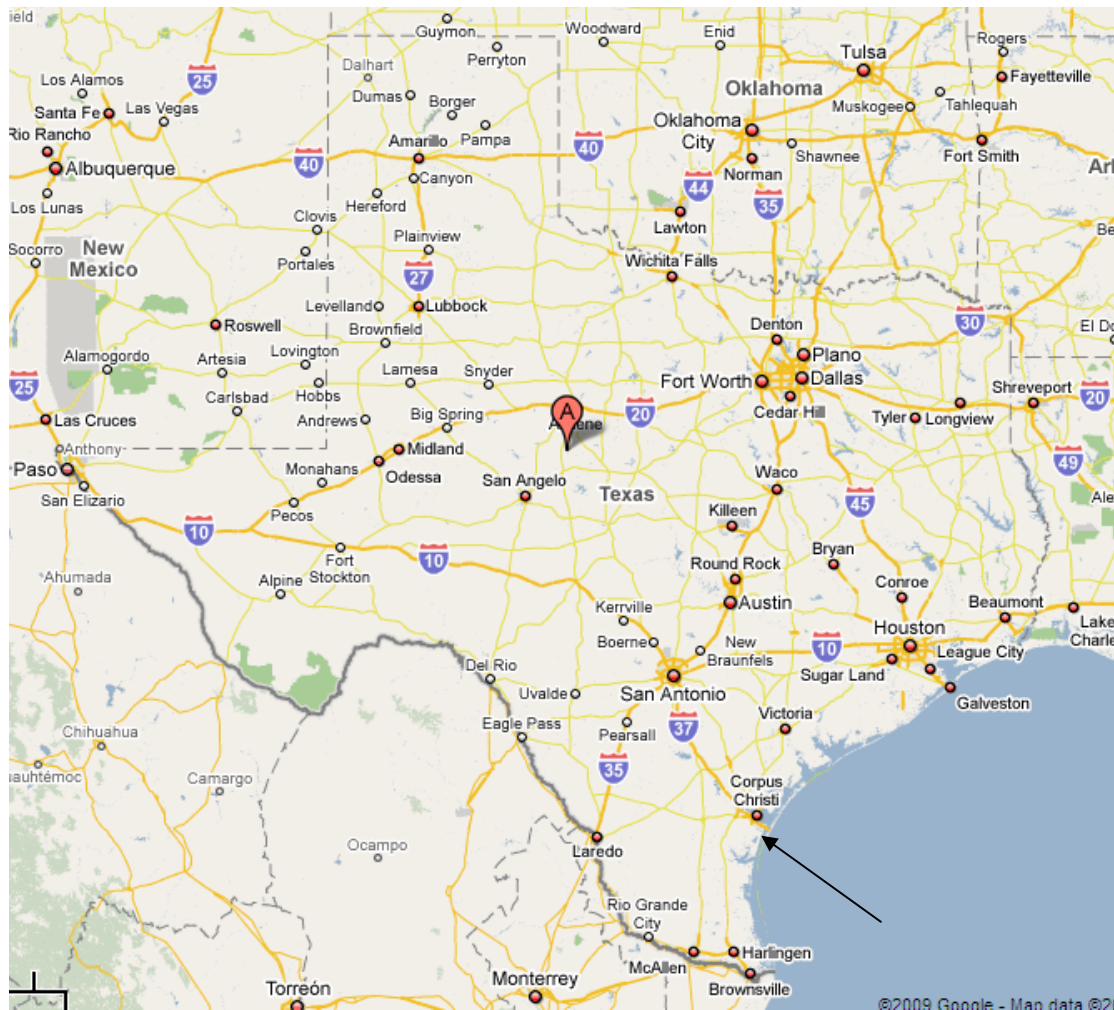
### **3.2.1 Natural History**

Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) is located on a 113-mile long barrier island off of the south Texas coast [Figures 2 (National Park Service 2009a) and 3 (Google Maps 2009)]. PAIS protects approximately 70 miles of North Padre Island, the largest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world. Situated between the Texas coast and Padre Island is the Laguna Madre, the only hyper-saline lagoon region in the United States. As there is little consistent inflow of gulf and fresh waters, the Laguna Madre has high concentrations of nutrients and minerals, making Padre Island an attractive feeding and breeding site for numerous fish and waterbird species. On the gulf side of the island, there are 18-30 converging ocean currents, which also contribute to the island's nutrient- and species-rich characteristics. An immediate steep drop-off on the south-eastern side of the National Seashore provides for deep-water fishing conditions close to the shore. Species-rich conditions, both in the Laguna Madre and along the Gulf coast, make PAIS a favorable location for a variety of angler groups seeking multiple fish species. Also of significance is that these conditions, in this protected area, are favorable for myriad ecosystems and wildlife and habitat diversity.

Padre Island NS is split by two ecoregions—the estuarine zone in the north and drier Gulf Coast prairies and marshes in the south. The diversity in protected ecoregions makes Padre Island NS a suitable place for providing critical habitat for a number of species, including around 26 animal species that are currently listed as either endangered, threatened, or species of concern (see Table 2).



Figure 2. Map of Padre Island National Seashore



**Figure 3. Map of Corpus Christi as Located in Texas**

Table 2 (National Park Service 2009c) features a list of state and federally protected animal species that occur or are likely to occur at Padre Island National Seashore. Eighteen of these species include resident and migratory waterbirds. For this research, the term “waterbirds” is inclusive of all shorebird, wading bird, and seabird species that utilize the beach at PAIS.



**Table 2. State and Federally Protected Species Occurring at PAIS***(T: Threatened, E: Endangered, SOC: Species of Concern)*

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>FEDERAL</b>	<b>STATE</b>
<b>Reptiles and Amphibians</b>		
American Alligator ( <i>Alligator mississippiensis</i> )	Threatened	
Texas Horned Lizard ( <i>Phrynosoma cornutum</i> )	Species of Concern	Threatened
Texas Indigo Snake ( <i>Drymarchon corais erebennus</i> ) *		Threatened
<b>Turtles</b>		
Kemp's ridley Sea Turtle ( <i>Lepidochelys kempii</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
Loggerhead Sea Turtle ( <i>Caretta caretta</i> )	Threatened	Threatened
Green Sea Turtle ( <i>Chelonia mydas</i> )	Threatened	Threatened
Atlantic Hawksbill Sea Turtle ( <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
Leatherback Sea Turtle ( <i>Dermochelys coriacea</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
<b>Birds</b>		
Eastern Brown Pelican ( <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
Reddish Egret ( <i>Egretta rufescens</i> )	Species of Concern	Threatened
White-faced Ibis ( <i>Plegadis chihi</i> )	Species of Concern	Threatened
Wood Stork ( <i>Mycteria americana</i> ) *		Threatened
Interior Least Tern ( <i>Sterna antillarum</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
Sooty Tern ( <i>Sterna fuscata</i> )	Threatened	
Black Tern ( <i>Chlidonias niger</i> )	Species of Concern	
Piping Plover ( <i>Charadrius melodous</i> )	Threatened	Threatened
Bald Eagle (lower 48 states) ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> )	Threatened	Threatened
Northern Aplomado Falcon ( <i>Falco femoralis septentrionalis</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
Ferruginous Hawk ( <i>Buteo regalis</i> )	Species of Concern	
Swallow-tailed Kite ( <i>Elanoides forficatus</i> ) *		Threatened
Tropical Parula ( <i>Parula pitiayumi</i> )	Species of Concern	Threatened
Loggerhead Shrike ( <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i> )	Species of Concern	
Cerulean Warbler ( <i>Dendroica cerulea</i> )	Species of Concern	
Black-capped Vireo ( <i>Vireo atricapillus</i> )	Endangered	Endangered
Peregrine Falcon ( <i>Falco peregrinus</i> )	Delisted	Endangered
White-tailed Hawk ( <i>Buteo albicaudatus</i> )		

Situated along the Central Flyway, more than 350 migratory, resident, and wintering bird species travel through Padre Island each year. Its range of habitats makes Padre Island a critical stop-over point for nearly half of the documented bird species in North America that are seeking out grounds for rest, food, nesting, and breeding. As such, the island has been designated as a *Globally Important Bird Area* by the American Bird Conservancy and a *Site of International Importance* by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network. PAIS is also recognized as a *Gulf Ecological Management Site*.

Based on the Texas Colonial Waterbird Survey, bird counts show decreasing numbers of waterbird species on the spoil islands within the park's boundaries, but participants in the waterbird survey provide varied explanations to suggest why the decrease is occurring. Explanations include habitat loss, disappearance of nesting grounds, marine debris, depletion of food sources, windmills impeding flight, and light pollution affecting migratory patterns. There are current surveys being conducted to document bird populations and activity on the beach area, but there are no studies that indicate a decline in waterbird populations in these particular studies.

Also of significant concern is the most endangered sea turtle in the world, the Kemp's ridley. A bi-national, multi-agency program designed to increase the population of the Kemp's ridley sea turtle began at PAIS in the 1970s. In 1947, 40,000 females were filmed nesting on their primary nesting beach at Rancho Nuevo in the Mexican State of Tamaulipas. Today, fewer than 5,000 nest in an entire year. There had been a few historically documented cases of Kemp's ridleys nesting on Padre Island, so the

National Seashore was thereby deemed a viable location for expanding the program. In 1978, a partnership between Mexico and the United States was established for developing attempts to re-establish the decimated turtle population at PAIS, and to serve as an alternative beach for nesting should Mexico experience a political or natural disaster.

Today, volunteers and park employees collect eggs from reported nests and incubate them in a park facility or keep them in corrals on the beach. This method has been implemented to reduce the likelihood of nest loss due to predation of eggs and hatchlings and presumed beach driving impacts.

Table 3 (National Park Service 2009b) shows that the sea turtle recovery program has seen five record years of located nests on the Texas coast. From the six returning turtles in 1996, the program has grown to 195 nests being found in 2008, the majority of which were located at Padre Island National Seashore. As the program continues to grow, concerns for nesting female turtles at PAIS include predation and human disturbances, including beach driving.

Two separate divisions—the Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery and the Division of Science and Resources Management—at PAIS conduct research on the beach and are dedicated to protecting natural resources at the park. Limited funding and staffing continues to be a challenge for the Division of Science and Resources Management. Much of the division's resources are consumed by managing oil and gas operations at PAIS, which is an added constraint to monitoring and protecting all habitats and species within the park. Due to a lack of funding and personnel, efforts to

produce longitudinal and current research remain minimal. The research that is conducted is integral to informing management policies and regulations at the National Seashore. Thus, it will be important to have both divisions contribute their—and other (Ex., universities, other government organizations, private organizations, etc.)—research for making informed suggestions and policies for managing the beach area.

**Table 3. Kemp’s Ridley Sea Turtle Recovery**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Nests</b>	<b>No. of Eggs</b>	<b>Hatchlings Released</b>
<b>1996</b>	6	590	369
<b>1997</b>	9	968	893
<b>1998</b>	13	1,270	800
<b>1999</b>	16	1,681	1,364
<b>2000</b>	12	1,160	1,000
<b>2001</b>	8	837	584
<b>2002</b>	38	3,771	2,536
<b>2003</b>	19	1,718	1,426
<b>2004</b>	42	3,928	3,298
<b>2005</b>	50	4,700	3,402
<b>2006</b>	102	9,717	7,475
<b>2007</b>	128	12,555	10,596
<b>2008</b>	195	17,958	15,819
<b>Total</b>	443	42,895	33,743

### **3.2.2 Cultural History**

Historic data obtained from meetings with NPS employees and a park document entitled *Padre Island NS Administrative History* detail the variety of ways in which Padre Island has been used throughout history by its numerous human inhabitants. Due

to its geographic location, Padre Island has been under ownership by four different nations throughout its history, following indigenous occupation. Spain owned the island from the time of its arrival in the mid-1550s until the Mexican Revolution in 1820. Mexico then owned Padre Island from 1821 to 1836 until the boundary dispute between Mexico and the Republic of Texas was resolved, when the Republic of Texas took the island as its own. The United States of America gained possession of the island following the War with Mexico, claiming Texas, along with Padre Island, as one of its states.

The area's former ownership by Spain is relevant to this research, because the Texas Open Beaches Act that allows beach driving is said to date back to Spanish rule, when beaches were considered public property (March 2008, Interview, CBBEP representative). Under the Texas Open Beaches Act and the State of Texas, beaches are considered to be Texas public highways, and are regulated at PAIS as such by NPS law enforcement.

In the time following the boundary struggles, Padre Island was inhabited by ranching families until the island's designation as a national park. The island has thus remained largely undeveloped and unoccupied throughout its colonial history, due to private ownership and lack of accessibility. Oil and natural gas drilling wells have also been in operation since before the park's federal designation in the 1960s, and oil and natural gas continues to be obtained by non-federal companies today. In accordance with the National Seashore's enabling legislation, subsurface "mineral rights are retained by the original grantors of the property (NPS 2009d)."

The Organic Act of 1916, which NPS employees are obligated to follow, states that national parks are established "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life 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 (National Park Service 2008c)." Under this act, the NPS manages the exploration, development, and transportation of non-federal oil and gas through the park, in order to protect park values and purposes. There are a nine drilling platforms that are accessible by four roads, but eight of platforms are currently being used are accessed by the beach. This use of the beach is important to consider when determining the most appropriate management decisions for conserving the beach habitat.

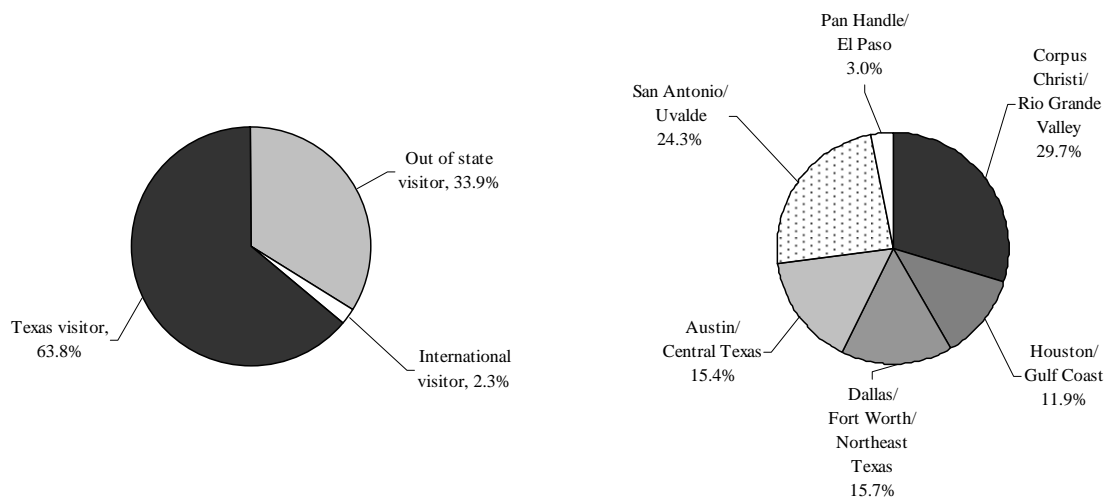
### **3.2.3 Visitor Use of PAIS**

According to a summary report presented to PAIS in 2004 (Scott and Lai 2004), PAIS is visited throughout the year by people for camping, playing active games, fishing from shore, picnicking on the beach, sunbathing, swimming, socializing, birdwatching, collecting shells and things on the beach, driving on the beach, sightseeing, and walking on the beach. This report also included data on population characteristics of visitors to the National Seashore, their motivations for visiting, their perceptions of human impacts on natural resources, their opinions about debris and litter at PAIS, and their opinions about proposed park rules to minimize human impacts.

According to my previous meeting with the former chief ranger at the park, visitors to the park are mainly comprised of families and anglers, and most of the

families visiting are interested in fishing as their main recreational activity. The report by Scott and Lai concluded that 22.1% of visitors go to PAIS to fish from shore, but this percentage does not seem representative of park employee perceptions of how many anglers (beach and Laguna Madre) actually visit the National Seashore.

There remains a gap in demographic and qualitative data defining specific types of visitors, their relationships to the National Seashore, how they perceive the NPS, their needs during their visit, and how they value the beach at the National Seashore. While each of these stakeholder groups utilizes the beach in different ways, this research will provide a thorough investigation of the anglers who fish the beach at PAIS. Figure 4 shows the origins of visitors to Texas from around the country and world, and it also illustrates the origins of visitors from Texas.



**Figure 4. Worldwide and Texas Visitors to PAIS**

The most popular section of the beach to visit, due to its accessibility to two-wheel drive vehicles, is the beach area within the first five miles past the Malaquite Visitor Center. Though weather conditions cause this to vary, beach drivers must typically have four-wheel drive from Milepost 5-60. Few visitors venture beyond the first few miles of the beach, maintaining relatively pristine conditions in the southern section of the island. Many local anglers often drive down the beach and camp in order to fish during the peak diurnal feeding time of fish (Interview March 2008, NPS Park Ranger, Division of Interpretation). On the beach, anglers are primarily surf fishing, either from the beach or from a few yards out into the water. Others may set out in kayaks from the beach in order to fish deeper waters.

### **3.2.4 Management Challenges at PAIS**

Under the provisions of the Organic Act, Enabling Legislature, and the Superintendent's Compendium, the National Park Service is charge with balancing recreation and conservation in such a way that parks will provide sustained experiences to future visitors. For example, the mission of Padre Island National Seashore states: "Our mission is to save and preserve this great park for purposes of public recreation, benefit, and inspiration (National Park Service 2009d)."

A ranger working for the Division of Interpretation and Education at the park shared in an interview:

We've always got preservation on the one hand and recreation in the other. Those two things can be polar opposites, but our job as interpreters is to try to dissolve some of that tension and educate the public; to inspire them to care about and care for the resource (Interview March 2008, NPS interpretive ranger).



Employees at Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) are concerned for the survival of migratory shorebird and sea turtle populations within the National Seashore's boundaries, due to the ecologically sensitive coastal environments upon which they depend for rest, food, breeding and nesting. The Superintendent's Compendium at Padre Island National Seashore presents updated regulations that are being implemented with the intent to mitigate visitor impacts on the beach environment and its protected species, in particular nesting Kemp's ridley sea turtles.

The park's General Management Plan is under revision to implement changes in beach access to further mitigate visitor impacts. A history of vocal dissent from angling groups resurfaces at PAIS whenever new policies and regulations that impact fishing practices are enforced. A challenging relationship exists between decision and policy makers at Padre Island National Seashore and the beach anglers who fish within its boundaries, because the anglers feel as though their long-standing right to the island is being threatened by the new regulations.

There is a history of tension/conflict between recreational anglers and park management regarding beach driving. For example, there has been a history of opposition from anglers, according to my meeting with the former Chief of Science and Resources Management, other employees at Padre Island NS and the project manager of the CBBEP, regarding the proposed revisions in the National Seashore's General Management Plan, which is currently under review. Regulations are being proposed to provide an alternate means of beach access for park visitors, in order to minimize beach use/driving impacts.

The anglers, who were previously asked to participate in public meetings held to review the revised GMP, have been adamant that their angling access and practices not be disturbed by the new regulations set by the revised GMP. According to one NPS employee, anglers have argued that they have been fishing at Padre Island long before it was a National Seashore, and are therefore entitled to maintain fishing practices. The Texas Open Beaches Act is being used by local activists and anglers, according to an environmental scientist at CBBEP, to claim “ownership” of and “right” to drive on public beaches. The project manager for CBBEP shared that this sentiment dates back hundreds of years ago to the time when Spain had ownership of this coastal area, and no limitations existed on beach access.

Other meetings that I have held earlier this year with park employees and CBBEP personnel suggested that much of the contestation that has arisen during NPS public meetings can be attributed to recreational anglers’ cultural background. For example, when asked why they believe anglers have been so vocal, some park employees commented, “That’s Texas”, “It’s the Texas mindset”, and “Texans don’t like being told what to do.” In Texas, greater than 90% of the land is privately owned, and a few interviews that took place during the preliminary data gathering phase of this project suggested that Texans are resistant to federal ownership of Texas lands, because it is out of the norm, and therefore untrustworthy.

Some NPS employees feel that education and enhanced park presence in the community are the best ways in which to help manage natural resource issues, while others feel that proper management of the park lies in law enforcement. During past

meetings with the public regarding driving on the beach, the NPS attempted to educate anglers on natural resource management issues surrounding the beach. However, according to the former Chief of Science and Natural Resources Management, this approach was largely unsuccessful because anglers do not want to be educated on issues at the National Seashore since they have developed a knowledge-base from their long history of visiting Padre Island. Rather than relying on the park to understand angler sentiment, this research will explain it from the angler perspective, using the angler voice. How this was accomplished will be addressed in the following section.

### **3.3 Research Questions**

Four overarching research questions will be used to direct this study; these research questions have guided the development of questions that were used during semi-structured interviews of the data collection process. A summary of the research questions presented in Chapter I is presented below in order to show a relationship between the research questions and the interview questions (Figure 5):

1. How do surf anglers relate to the beach at Padre Island National Seashore?
2. What is the relationship between surf anglers at PINS and the NPS?
3. What are the major issues and concerns facing surf anglers at PINS?
4. How can surf anglers assist the NPS in addressing the surf anglers' issues and concerns?

To address the above research questions, the questions shown in Figure 5 were used for the semi-structured interviews. The questions were modified depending on the

particular angler, and further probing with additional questions during each interview provided more in-depth information.

1.0 Please tell me about yourself.
1.1 How long have you been fishing?
1.2 How did you get into fishing?
1.3 How long have you been fishing at the PINS?
1.4 How would you describe PINS?
2.0 What makes the National Seashore special to you?
2.1 What do you like about the National Seashore?
2.2 Why do you visit the National Seashore over other places?
2.3 Why do you choose fishing over other recreational activities?
2.4 What is your favorite memory or experience of you fishing at PINS?
2.5 Do you have a favorite fishing spot? If so, what makes it your favorite spot?
2.6 Are there beaches close by that would serve as well as PINS?
3.0 Please tell me about your fishing experiences when you fish on the beach.
3.1 What do you fish for from the beach?
3.2 What do you do with the fish/sharks when you catch them?
3.3 What natural resources at the PINS do you think are important to protect?
3.4 What, if any, impacts do you perceive you have on the beach or animals on the beach?
3.5 While you are fishing on the beach, do you observe any conservation practices?
4.0 What does the National Park Service mean to you in general?
4.1 As a part of the National Park Service system, what does PINS mean to you?
4.2 What needs and expectations do you have from the National Park Service while you are fishing there?
5.0 What are the biggest issues and concerns you encounter at the National Seashore?
5.1 In what ways has the National Seashore changed over the years?
5.2 What do these changes mean to you?
5.3 How do you feel you might best express these needs and expectations to the National Seashore (Ex., public meetings versus other forms of communication)?

**Figure 5. Interview Questions**

### **3.4 Data Gathering**

This thesis was split into Phase I and Phase II. The first phase occurred over the course of January through March of 2008. Phase I featured a collection of general background information to inform the proposal to this thesis study. A qualitative research approach employed naturalistic methods, interpretive inquiry and fieldwork to collect data, with the interviewer as the primary research instrument.

Included in this background research was information that was gathered during seven semi-structured meetings with various National Park Service employees (natural resource managers, interpreters, and law enforcement rangers), the Corpus Christi Convention and Visitors Bureau, Sea Grant, a Texas AgriLIFE Extension agent, and employees from the Coastal Bend, Bays and Estuaries Program (CBBEP). During these semi-structured meetings, a series of open-ended questions were asked in regards to development, socioeconomic, and demographic trends in the Corpus Christi area, and issues surrounding these trends. More focused information was collected during the meetings on the relationships between the park and its visitors, issues within the park, and management strategies that are currently in use. Participants were selected based upon the diversity of information and perspectives towards local issues that I perceived them to be able to provide. The interviews lasted from approximately 30-90 minutes each, and were later transcribed.

In Phase II, between late January and early April, I recruited 20 anglers to participate in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The interviews were recorded, using an Olympus DS-50 Digital Voice Recorder. A series of open-ended interview

questions were administered, lasting from approximately 25-120 minutes. Questions shown in the Appendix were also asked in order to provide demographic data desired by the National Park Service, and were administered at the end of the interview, time permitting. All participants were males over the age of 18, and covered a wide range of socioeconomic groups. The sample was ethnically homogeneous, aside from two individuals who claimed partial Native American heritage.

The season I had available for data collection was during the winter, when the majority of people within the first five miles of South beach are people who are escaping the harsh winter climates of their home states, referred to by locals as “winter Texans.” The other groups of people who fish the first five miles are people who were limited, like me, by their vehicle type or by time. Some individuals kept to the first five miles because they only had time to fish for a couple of hours or they had their families with them and desired to be closer to the park’s facilities. As I interviewed and recruited anglers fishing in the first five miles, I continued to see larger trucks passing with rods sticking straight up, clearly on their way for a down-island fishing venture. Surely, these were the local fishermen.

My interview techniques improved as I conducted more and more interviews. Therefore, the most detailed responses were from local participants, not winter Texans, whom I interviewed at the beginning of my data collection phase. Visiting Texans were also a challenge to include and were more inclined to participate online, because of their inability to conduct face-to-face interviews from their present location. To ensure wide coverage of anglers who fish the beach, the participants were also recruited from Corpus

Christi fishing organizations and individuals recruited on internet fishing forums (Ex., [www.extremecoast.com](http://www.extremecoast.com), [www.corpusfishing.com](http://www.corpusfishing.com), etc), and groups that gather to address conservation issues associated with angling (Ex., Coastal Conservation Association). A snowball sampling technique was employed in order to recruit additional participants in the study.

Defining the sample is slightly challenging, because each angler categorizes himself so differently from the way another fisherman may have decided to categorize him. For example, some anglers consider every angler a recreational angler. Others categorize anglers as professional anglers, family-oriented anglers, and recreational anglers. Then, there are the different ways of fishing on the beach: surf fishing, wade fishing, fly-fishing, and kayak fishing. Some categorize themselves by the targeted catch, for example shark fishermen, trout fishermen, runners-and-gunners (anglers who chase fish feeding frenzies), and subsistence fishermen. Oftentimes, anglers fit into more than one category of the formerly-mentioned fishing groups.

Anglers can also be categorized is in terms of their dedication or level of experience on the beach, which can also be thought about in terms of history and experience fishing the beach or limitations to accessibility. Furthermore, I observed differences in anglers in terms of their level of conservation education. While great strides have been taken to promote catch-and-release fishing, some anglers value certain fish species differently. For example, I observed one angler leaving certain species of fish, namely Hardhead catfish, on the beach to die, with no intent to use them for bait. Also, some anglers, as I was interviewing them on the beach, allowed their dogs to run

through flocks of migratory birds feeding in the surf. The park has a rule against this because this stresses birds that land at Padre Island to rest during their long-distance migrations.

With so much overlap between the different perspectives of how anglers categorize themselves, as a researcher, I have categorized the informants in terms of their place of residence. Throughout the paper, I will also describe the participants in a way that makes the diversity of angler voices apparent to the reader. The groups that I have divided the participants into include local anglers, visiting Texas anglers, and Winter Texans.

Initial contacts were made with local fishing guides and fishermen known by rangers at Padre Island National Seashore. Participants were also recruited, and some interviews were conducted, on South Beach (see Figure 2), where driving is permitted. Individuals who were observed engaging in surf fishing activities were asked to participate in the study. I drove and walked along the first five miles of beach, to which I had access with my two-wheel drive Honda Civic. Table 4 provides a general description of the anglers who participated in this research in a way that does not identify the angler.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Recorded interviews were transcribed within a couple of days following the interview in order to keep the information fresh in my mind. Transcribing the interviews took an average of four hours per one hour of interview time. I manually transcribed the



interviews by playing the interview files that I had uploaded immediately to my laptop. Initially, I manually analyzed the transcribed interviews by color coding themes and patterns that emerged during the interviews. In order to more efficiently categorize and analyze the data, I used ATLAS.ti 5.0 (2004) transcription software.

**Table 4. Participants in the Study**

Informant #	Angler Description
I	Angler I is an old-time angler whom I met through an acquaintance at work. He has fished on Padre Island since his childhood, and primarily fishes for Red fish and Speckled trout, moving up and down South Beach, past the four-wheel drive sign. He fishes every season of the year, often by himself on day trips.
II	Angler II is a retired winter Texan. He was introduced to PAIS when he was stationed in Del Rio, Texas in the 1970s, but has just begun to surf fish there. I met him at the visitor center when he was making an inquiry about fishing at PAIS. He takes day trips alone, at least three times per week during the two months he resides in Corpus Christi.
III	I met Angler III during a phone conversation at Malaquite Visitor Center when he was making an inquiry about the park. He generally fishes in the first two miles of South Beach, but will venture down to Little and Big Shell Beaches (Mile Marker 7-25 approximately) on occasion. He visits with his family or friends about twice per month during all seasons, and stays just the day.
IV	I encountered angler IV within the first five miles of South Beach. He is a winter Texan from Chicago, and was visiting the National Seashore for the first time. He was camping in the park for one week and plans on returning to fish next winter.
V	Angler V was recruited while fishing with his dog within the first five miles of South Beach, and he works in the oil and gas industry. He visits during all seasons, usually by himself for just a day.
VI	Angler VI is a Corpus Christi resident and professional surf fisherman. He typically fishes Big Shell Beach on South Beach and a little past that area. He is also an artist and a writer, and makes educational films about the outdoors, fishing, and conservation issues. He fishes during all seasons alone or with his spouse, generally for a day trip.
VII	Angler VII was fishing within the first five miles of South Beach by himself. He recently moved from North Carolina to Corpus Christi for work, and is familiar with saltwater fishing from his childhood in New Jersey. Since moving to Corpus Christi two months ago, he has fished for the day at least once per week.
VIII	I approached Angler VIII within the first five miles of South Beach while he was fishing with his two sons. He fishes during all seasons alone, with his spouse, or with his children, usually for a day trip.
IX	Angler IX called the visitor center to make an inquiry about driving and beach conditions when I recruited him to participate in the study. He was visiting from San Antonio for the third time, and planned to go down to the Mansfield Channel for the first time. He camps for the weekend when he visits the National Seashore

**Table 4. Continued**

<b>Informant #</b>	<b>Angler Description</b>
X	I met Angler X by posting on local online fishing forums. He is mostly a trout fisherman who fishes the bays and surf. When he goes down island, he typically fishes past the four-wheel drive sign and stays for one night. He fishes during all seasons, around two times per month. Now a local university student, he grew up fishing the Texas coast and continues to do so today.
XI	Angler XI is a board member of the Coastal Conservation Association. He grew up in the area and has fished the channels and the surf his entire life. He typically fishes with his family or friends past the four-wheel drive sign when he fishes on South Beach, during all seasons.
XII	Angler XII is a guide on the beach at the PINS. An old-time fisherman, he has fished the Corpus Christi coast and bays since his childhood. He typically drives past the four-wheel drive sign for day trips when he fishes on South Beach, during all seasons. Regularity of his trips down island depends upon his business.
XIII	I met him through an online fishing forum. A local environmental scientist, Angler XIII fishes the bays and the surf mostly for Speckled Trout and Red fish. He typically fishes past the four-wheel drive sign, alone or with friends, for a day trip or one night.
XIV	I met angler XIV on the online forum. He is a carpenter in Port Aransas and usually fishes on the weekends past the four-wheel drive sign on the island for sharks or anything that will bite.
XV	Angler XV is an old-time angler whom I was introduced to by Angler VI at a local fishing shop. He was also suggested to me by Angler I. He has fished for mostly trout on South Beach since his childhood, long before the 1960s. Some years he fishes over three times per week, but this year he says he has not fished due to the lack of fish.
XVI	I met Angler XVI at the Big Shell Beach Clean-up. He is a professional artist and avid surfer. He fishes the beach with Anglers XIII and X, and fishes mainly for Red fish and trout at least once per month for day trips or one night.
XVII	Angler XVII was introduced to me by Angler VII. He is a shark fisherman and operates one of the online fishing forum sites. He around the local area, but mainly past the four-wheel drive sign on South Beach. He fishes year-round, and depending on the weather, he will try to fish once per week for at least two nights.
XVIII	I met Angler XVIII through Angler XVII. They go shark fishing together on occasion always on South Beach, past the four-wheel drive sign. He fishes during all seasons down island, about once per month for at least one night.
XIX	I met Angler XIX on an online fishing forum. He fishes mainly by himself, but also with his daughter at times. He generally fishes past the four-wheel drive sign on South Beach for day trips, at least twice per month during all seasons.
XX	Angler XX has fished the Texas Coast since his childhood and continues to do so today with his own children. He is connected to the shark fishing community and is a co-founder of a local fishing tournament. He fishes down island during all seasons, usually for overnight trips.

Themes and categories, as created by the informants, were then identified from the patterns that emerged during the data analysis process (Lincoln and Guba 1985). The analysis of these themes and categories have been written using an interpretive approach to describe the informants in the context of their relationship to, and their knowledge and use of, Padre Island National Seashore, as seen in Chapter IV. The table on page 49 clearly illustrates the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data gathering stages of Phase II.

The results and analysis provide a detailed description of the ways in which recreational anglers are attached to Padre Island, as well as the ways in which they identify with and experience the island. Additionally, the results and analysis provide an understanding of the knowledge that anglers have of the island due to their long-time association with, and visitation to, the island. Having an understanding of their knowledge of, attachment to, and the meanings they ascribe to Padre Island will provide insight that will inform an interpretation of their cultural heritage of experiencing the island. By collecting this information, anglers' voices will be heard, and informed suggestions can be made to help contribute to the collaborative development of policies and decisions at the National Seashore, which are detailed in Chapter VI of this thesis.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness and Credibility of Research**

From May 2008 to May of 2009, I have lived on Padre Island and worked at Padre Island National Seashore, the site of my case study. Being so personally entrenched in the setting of my research presented challenges and benefits alike. I have

had the benefit of observing and understanding the full spectrum of perspectives surrounding management issues of the beach at PAIS. These perspectives vary not only among park rangers and managers, but among angler groups, as well. On a daily basis at work, park rangers discuss with one another their opinions, sentiments, and concerns regarding current management of the beach. Local newspapers, magazines, online fishing forums, casual conversations, and interviews have provided me with the full array of opinions and sentiments in the angling community.

As the main research instrument and park ranger, I was constantly challenged with having to juggle representing the park voice and establishing trustworthiness in the fishing community. Furthermore, the more saturated I became with information and observations within this case study, the more I began to develop my own opinions and biases. The following sections discuss the validity and reliability of this thesis research and a reflection of ethics issues that emerged.

### **3.6.1 Re-conceiving Validity and Reliability**

Due to the case study and interpretive nature of this study, one cannot evaluate the credibility of this research based on truth, validity, and reliability, the criteria used to judge positivistic research (Jamal and Hollinshead 2001). With qualitative research, other researchers and individuals who read the results of a study should clearly be able to discern that “interviews [were] reliably and validly constructed; content of the documents were properly analyzed; conclusions of the case study rest upon the data (Guba and Lincoln 1981:378)[.]”

In order to ensure that the reader of my thesis perceives and judges my research as stated above, Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited by Jamal and Hollinshead (2001), provide an alternate set of criteria that has been modified and is appropriate for use in interpretive studies: “*credibility* related techniques (e.g., prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation, peer debriefing, etc.), *transferability* (to other settings), *dependability* (by examining the process of inquiry), and *confirmability* (by examining the output of the inquiry to see its supportability by the data (p. 301).”

Jamal and Hollinshead (2001) include *reflexivity* as an additional criterion to support and evaluate qualitative research. Reflexivity defines the level of engagement and opinions of the researcher surrounding a study in order to help determine how the study was influenced by the researcher over time. I kept a reflexive journal in order to record my ideas and biases that transpired throughout the course of my engagement in the research.

The processes I have followed while conducting my research (see earlier section) allows the reader to evaluate this study based upon the criteria described by Lincoln and Guba, along with Jamal and Hollinshead. In order to be sure that I maintained academic integrity throughout my research process, I also followed several other steps:

- (1) Detailed note-taking while conducting interviews and following interviews;
- (2) The use of ATLAS.ti 5.0 software in order to compare and organize substantial volumes of data;

- (3) Meetings (via phone and in person) with my advisor throughout the data collection and analyzing process to obtain feedback and improve research processes;
- (4) Verification of data using information from online fishing forums, discussions with park rangers and other anglers, and fishing magazines.

### **3.6.2 Interpretive Richness and Transferability**

Results of a study can also be evaluated by confirming that certain research objectives were met. For example, the many stories, perspectives, and feelings shared in Chapters IV and V should provide the reader with an in-depth and substantive understanding of the types of relationships that exist between anglers and the PINS, along with issues and concerns as experienced by the anglers. Geertz (1973:16) states that our interpretations and data should be measured against the “power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers,” rather than against “a body of uninterpreted data [and] radically thinned description.”

Transferability, unlike generalizability, does not mean that the results of one study should be defined as valid and reliable only if they hold true in other research settings. Instead, transferability indicates that similar research processes and interpretations can be utilized only in similar research settings, but the results will be unique to particular case studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) thus show that interpretive studies, such as being conducted here, are intended to provide rich, deep insights into particular phenomena and settings. Clearly, such interpretive studies do not lend

themselves to generalization as quantitative surveys intend to do. The more relevant criterion to use in this instance is “transferability,” argue Lincoln and Guba. In my study of anglers at the PINS, I developed open-ended questions that were semi-structured to allow for flexibility during each individual interview. That the interviews were semi-structured in nature enabled me to probe further for more information that at times provided for that thick, rich description of certain concepts that is indicative of interpretive research.

### **3.6.3 Ethics and Reflexivity**

Does the writer demonstrate an ethos of self-reflexive attention, not just to the moral obligation and ethical responsibility of the writer/researcher to the study, reader and interview participants, but also to this kind of interpretive research? The need for sensitivity to the play of emotions, control and multi-vocality of concepts in my data, was important to understanding the fluidity and dynamism in the process and the narrative, participatory self.

Balancing the role of researcher and park employee has presented both benefits and challenges. As a student with a background in Natural Resources Management, my training has covered the ideal and appropriate ways to manage protected areas, while addressing the challenges that park employees face each day. Parks are overwrought with issues of budgeting and staffing, and this has become increasingly evident throughout my experience at the National Seashore. Regulations and policies are made without scientific justification and without consulting the public or taking into

consideration potential cultural implications that affect user groups, which is in direct violation of the National Environmental Protection Agency.

Further, with limited resources, the National Seashore has allowed itself to govern based on isolated factors, rather than considering the full picture. For example, the beach exists to provide habitat for more species than the Kemp's ridley sea turtle, but regulations are implemented to cater to this individual endangered species, versus the other 25 that exist in the park. Further, the National Park Service mission is to protect natural places for the enjoyment of the people. Recent management, however seems to be adhering more to the mission of the wilderness system, which seeks to preserve, rather than conserve.

The more I became involved with my research and with the park, the more I felt my priority was to represent the voice of the anglers, and to encourage the park to partner with the anglers in terms of promoting education and conservation in the local community. Throughout my interviews, I had to constantly monitor what I said or how I represented the park or my opinions about the ways in which the park was managing its resources. I had to remember that, as a researcher, my role was not to sway the responses with the ways in which I shaped my interview questions. Rather, I had to remind myself to allow the anglers, the informants, to guide the discussion and shape their own responses.

While conducting research, I felt incredibly drawn to anglers whose conservation values paralleled my own and the park's; however the local anglers with such ideals are not the only people who fish this beach. Thus, in Chapter VI, I will discuss how this



group of anglers with values that are in-line with the National Seashore's mission can and should be utilized by the park to promote conservation and education among the local and visiting angling community.

Given the contentious climate that exists at present between the National Seashore and the angling community, I had to be extremely cautious to maintain appropriate ethics and balance my relationships with the park and the anglers. One example of this internal struggle was determining how I should identify myself to anglers. I would be able to identify myself as a researcher, but I was not certain if divulging my identity as a park ranger would be appropriate or if it would evoke in them a sense of distrust. As such, I considered identifying myself solely as a researcher, but this did not feel honest, and I became concerned that people in the community would eventually discover my role in the park. While I believe that being honest about being employed by the National Park Service prevented people from being as detailed as they were in casual conversation outside of the interview, anglers showed a great deal of gratitude for the research. Most inspiring to me was their hope in my research's ability to represent the angling community's voice to the park and the chance for a relationship to be established between the park and anglers. My research, as a few anglers shared, was "the Feds'" first time reaching out to them.

Consideration for the well-being of the anglers who participated in this study was a top priority of mine during this research. I applied and received ethics approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University. Additionally, the project received approval by the Research Compliance Committee at PAIS. A consent

form and verbal reiteration was used to explain to the anglers that their participation in the interviews could be stopped at any time, and that participants could choose if and how they wished to be identified in writing. Participants were assured that confidentiality was a priority in this research to avoid provoking distrust, conflict, and discomfort. All respondents were made aware that their participation in the interviews was completely voluntary, and that they were able to withdraw at any time during the process without compromising their relationship to the National Seashore, the angling community, or Texas A&M University. In all cases, the informants' responses were recorded using a digital recorder with written consent. In most cases, descriptive terms are utilized throughout the paper to illustrate the diversity of voices among angler participants; however, pseudonyms are used in situations where it seemed necessary to include an individual's name.

I have been considering how I will use this report and disseminate the results and recommendations. The park will be receiving a copy of this report, and all informants were made aware of this prior their participation in the study. In fact, all participants, especially local anglers, participated because they knew this would go in a report to the park. When considering how I will be sharing this information with the anglers themselves, I am aware that long-term visitors of the National Seashore, especially those who are affected by current and impending regulations, are eager to see this report; however, not everyone participated in my study. While the anglers I interviewed represent a larger community of surf anglers, there is a great deal of personal information that was shared during the interviews. And, even though the anglers are not

identifiable in this paper, the actual participants may recognize something they said and may feel embarrassed if they know the whole fishing community read this report. As such, I am limiting distribution of the report to the park and to the participants, and they will ultimately be able to decide who will get to read the final report, and distribute it as they see fit.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

Fishermen are inherently storytellers. As I listened to the stories told by the anglers who participated in my study, I realized that each story contained the patterns and themes which helped to build this study. To the fishermen, their stories are reflective of how they collectively see, value, and experience the island. The island is where some feel they are truly at “home” or that the island is their church or spiritual place. The island is what unites the fishermen who have been taken captive by its challenges and mysteries. The story, as told below, is an interpretation of my musings and interviews with twenty anglers of Padre Island National Seashore (the PINS, as they call it) during the time that I have spent working there.

Chapter IV of the research, then, will paint a picture of Padre Island as it was described to me by those who have spent years learning and exploring the island’s miles of beach, wildlife, plants, patterns, and secrets. While all respondents traced their fishing origins to their childhoods, this chapter will focus on their discussions of fishing surrounding the National Seashore, in terms of how they relate to the island and fishing at the PINS. Section 4.1 illustrates what is significant and special about Padre Island, the physical place; Section 4.2 discusses the activities prioritized by the anglers to allow them to experience the PINS; Section 4.3 talks about the social relationships that surround the island and how they feel connected to one another by their shared

relationships to and experiences at the PINS; and Section 4.4 demonstrates the conservation practices and values that exist among those who fish the PINS.

#### 4.1 The Special “Essence” of the Island

Table 5 lays out the themes that emerged during the interviews with the three groups of anglers (local anglers, visiting Texans, and winter Texans). They share the same relationships to the PINS, to fishing, and the types of experiences that surround fishing and the outdoors. Winter Texans differed only in their knowledge of the PINS, traditions at the PINS, attachment to the PINS, and their level of connection and sense of belonging, and knowledge of the issues and concerns to be discussed in the next chapter.

**Table 5. Emergent Themes Among Surf Angler Groups**

<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Local Angler</b>	<b>Visiting Angler</b>	<b>Winter Texan</b>
Essence of the Island	Wild, Undeveloped, Driving, Challenge, Primitive	Wild, Undeveloped, Driving, Challenge, Primitive	Wild, Undeveloped, Driving, Challenge, Primitive
Fishing at the PINS	Fish, Thrill/Adrenaline, Mystery/Diversity, Challenge, Beauty	Fish, Thrill/Adrenaline, Mystery/Diversity, Challenge, Beauty	Fish, Thrill/Adrenaline, Mystery/Diversity, Challenge, Beauty
Connection to Nature	Spirituality, Serenity, Solitude, Addiction, Freedom & Simpler Way of Life, Education/Observation, Conservation	Spirituality, Serenity, Solitude, Addiction, Freedom & Simpler Way of Life, Education/Observation, Conservation	Spirituality, Serenity, Solitude, Addiction, Freedom & Simpler Way of Life, Education/Observation, Conservation
Social	Family, Friends, Childhoods, Nicknames, Stories, Connectedness & Belonging	Family, Friends, Childhoods, Nicknames, Stories, Connectedness & Belonging	Family, Friends, Childhoods, Stories
Issues and Concerns	Safety, Changes, Regulations, Driving & Sea Turtles, Communication, Desire to Participate	Safety, Changes, Regulations, Driving & Sea Turtles, Communication, Desire to Participate	Safety

#### 4.1.1 The “Wild and Woolly” PINS

Padre Island National Seashore encompasses the largest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world, making it an ideal setting for conservation by the National Park Service. However, this setting is also ideal for providing the types of experiences desired by the people who fish its shoreline. Opportunities for fishing are abundant in the Corpus Christi area, including fishing piers or wade fishing and boat fishing in the bays. According to visiting and Texas anglers, though, the PINS stands alone, uniquely undeveloped and wild. “They’re civilized and PINS is wild,” shares a local fishing guide and community leader, comparing other beaches to the National Seashore. He continues,

I’ve always been attracted and drawn to hostile environments and hostile places because they’re more of a challenge. They’re not too easy. Things that are too easy aren’t as much fun to me. The challenge is a big part of the activity to me, and there is some peace and quiet left down here. And a lot of times you can catch just as many fish off the causeway, driving into Corpus, as you can down here. But it’s not all about the catching. It’s about the entire scenario. It’s the longest piece of undeveloped beachfront in the United States, and to my knowledge, the longest stretch in the world. There’s 80.4 miles here that’s undeveloped, and...you know, as fishermen, we think of Padre Island and all we think of is the beach. But if you walk over those sand dunes back there, in reality, you could walk where no one’s walked for a hundred years, if ever (Interview 12, Local Angler).

The “entire scenario” described above encompasses well what makes Padre Island a special place to those respondents I interviewed who fish there. Specific aspects of this scenario emerged repeatedly, revealing a very particular “essence” of the island. One of the features that makes this island special, and a common theme in the interviews, is best described using one angler’s words: “wild and woolly”. A local fisherman and nine-year Corpus Christi resident who grew up 60 miles from the Texas

coast, recounts how his father and other people in his hometown described and experienced Padre Island, prior to its designation as a National Seashore:

Wild and wooly. No one hardly went down there unless you had an old military jeep or some type of four-wheel drive. It was undeveloped and they'd go down there and just camp out and fish, you know. And I'd hear all the fishing stories—hundreds and hundreds of fish caught. That's back before there were limits and all that. Lot of fun stories about gathering driftwood—you know how there's a lot of scavenging, hunting for all the stuff that washes up on the beach (Interview 19, Local Angler).

In many cases, anglers viewed the National Seashore as being unique because it is remains undeveloped and wild. One local angler who has travelled the world's coasts for fishing shows how he values the “raw”, untouched nature of the PINS:

It's become unique. What was originally most beaches in the U.S., I should imagine was like [PINS], and they're very difficult to find now. Sixty miles of beach, which hasn't got a house on it, have not been affected by man, has been difficult to find, and so this has become so very, very special. And that's why. It's the uniqueness of it. It's untouched, I suppose...raw (Interview 6, Local Angler).

That the PINS remains “raw” and “untouched” is critical to the angling experience. At the National Seashore, one must drive on approximately eight miles of paved road before arriving at the entrance to South Beach, the main driving beach in the park. Once on the sand, there are no facilities provided by the National Park Service. Most visitors only have two-wheel drive or are too inexperienced in their four-wheel drive vehicles to venture past the two-wheel drive section of the beach. For those who crave PINS in its most “raw” sense, driving past the four-wheel drive sign is necessary for this experience. The fishermen call this “going down island.” Down island, they are able to escape from crowds and tourists and the presence of the National Park Service.

Down island, fishermen are able to experience untouched wilderness: man and nature in its most primitive and naturally intended sense.

#### 4.1.2 “The Island Takes Prisoners”

In addition to the wild, undeveloped sense of place, additional themes that contribute to making Padre Island a special place were identified in terms of the “special” experiences that capture its anglers. Several sub-themes arose here, ranging from freedom, solitude, serenity, spirituality, and timelessness to fishing and education. Padre Island is a place that captivates its anglers; it “takes a lot of people prisoner,” offering a natural, free, unconstrained experience:

[The island] takes a lot of people prisoner, but in varying degrees. It’s owned me for 52 years. If you hang around too long and become over-exposed, it is the place as much as the fishing. It is the primeval wildness of it that makes [us] her prisoners. The freedom one feels down there in the natural, constantly changing, harsh, challenging environment without another person or vehicle in sight. A place where time has not meaning and there are no wars and no economic horrors and there is only the rising and setting of the sun, and the rise and fall of the tides. All the prisoners prefer it that way: without another person or vehicle in sight, unless with a few friends like-minded and close to them. It’s man living as intended: a part of the natural world and not being stuck in the urban blight of modern society (Interview 12, Local Angler).

Flat tires, bottomed-out vehicles, defeats by fish attempting to be caught, and being stranded by Mother Nature with no communication, are all examples of just some of the *challenges* that face the anglers who dare embark upon the down-island adventure. With each challenge, the island lures its committed and devoted anglers back for more. One of the old-timers, who has fished the beach long before its designation as a national



seashore, told a story that illustrates the many unexpected events that can unfold during a down-island trip:

I've been stuck down there. I was not used to really driving on the beach when I first came down here. I always was with someone who had four-wheel drive, but I didn't drive it. So, when I came down here, of course I bought a 4-wheel drive and I didn't know anything about it, and so I thought I was invincible, and I guess the first 5 or 6 years I was down here, I probably got stuck 10-15 times. It was most embarrassing....There used to be a back road. You go on down passed Yarborough, down about the 21 (mile marker), and there's an entrance there to the backside of the island. I used to get stuck back there, and there's nobody there. Nobody comes that way 'cause they didn't know anything about it. One day I was in there for over 8 hours. I mean I've had some bad experiences. I finally learned, you know, that the vehicle is gonna get stuck (Interview 1, Local Angler).

Despite its challenges, though, the same angler reminisces and shares that the challenges are a part of the fun and adventure that comes with going down island. Those challenges, in many ways, are what keep the fishermen going back for more:

I was back there—there was a big hole there called Nine Mile Hole...it's full of Redfish. Anyway, you drive out there to get closer to the water, and I'd been down there the last week and I got to where I was and I thought, "Well, I think I can get down there another 50 yards." And so of course, I got stuck, and that was early in the morning. And I didn't get to fish that day, and I didn't get out of there until about four o'clock. There's no wood, no drift wood. There's nothing back there. And I went about the 25 mile marker. They used to have cattle down there, you know, and there's old corrals and stuff, so that's the only wood that was there to put underneath your tires. So I got that and I remember carrying that thing back, and there were wood ants just covering the whole thing. [Walking back to my truck], I kept seeing these things on the road, and they were egg hatchings, and the mothers kept dive bombing the hell out of us, and I kept having to cover my head....It's really fun to go down there, I don't know. I had my baptism under fire getting stuck. I can't help it, but I get such a kick out of it when I see other people get stuck. I really do (Interview 1, Local Angler).

### 4.1.3 “She”

During interviews and conversations with the fishermen, or while reading about fishing in the local media, I began to notice that fish, the Gulf, and island were often gendered as females. For example, on one particular fishing trip with an informant, I caught my first Speckled trout. As instructed, I dipped my hands in the water prior to handling the fish to avoid harming the fish with dry hands. When I lifted the fish out of the water, my informant remarked, “Now she’s a beautiful fish, isn’t she?”

That fishermen find beauty as an intrinsic quality of the fish they pursue and catch is reflective of the ever-familiar push-and-pull of frustration and love that exists in relationships. The former is one reason for the feminine classification of elements of the mariner’s world. Further, this gender labeling illustrates the caring and respect that anglers feel for their loved ones. Therefore, the feminine reference is paralleled with the way fishermen talk and feel about the fish they catch and the beach. When describing Padre Island, one of the new generation shark fishermen said,

*Angler:* Sixty miles of beauty and just cruelty. The beach can be very cruel. Hot, windy, no water, sandy, the seaweed rolling in. Very, very cruel fishing on the beach, but every now and then she puts out. Hahaha. So it’s kind of like a relationship.

*Researcher:* But you keep going back. Why?

*Angler:* You keep going back. She pisses you off and every now and then she puts out and that just makes everything worth it.

*Researcher:* So why is she a “she?”

*Angler:* Well, isn’t everything beautiful a “she?” Of course. You don’t name boats male names. You name them female names, and the beach is the same way, I feel. Yeah, it’s beautiful (Interview 18, Local Angler).

Another long-time angler shared:

The ocean has always been referred to as “she” by mariners. Even in Spanish, “la mar” is feminine in gender. The sea, “la mir,” is feminine in sea. And it’s

the same reason that my boat is named “Carolina.” My wife’s name is Carolina....Working men of the sea are working to support their families, so they name their boat after their families. And “she” is Mother Ocean. She gives life to this planet. Without the sea, there will be no life on this planet, period. And “she” is-it’s Mother Earth, as well, but it’s Mother Earth and Mother Ocean, because they’re the life-givers, and the female gender is a life-giver, eh? So to me, it’s totally appropriate (Interview 12, Local Angler).

## 4.2 Fishing at the PINS

Fishing exists as the primary activity that anglers prioritize for experiencing the PINS. For some, it is the *only* way to experience the “raw” and wildness, or calm and escape that the island provides. Others experience the island in a number of ways other than fishing, with fishing as an equally important, or less important, activity. Fishing, along with adventure and exploration, for example, is merely an element of the multi-faceted experience that lures people back to get their “island fix.”

### 4.2.1 The Catch

Fishing allows anglers to feel connected to wildlife and the natural world surrounding them. Fishing provides them with a sense of enjoyment. The mystery and the challenge and the competition surrounding fishing are some of the elements that have many of the informants of this study “hooked” on fishing. In Section 4.3, I discuss the social aspects of fishing which further serve as enjoyable factors surrounding fishing. These motivations for, and attachments to, fishing are experienced not only among the avid surf anglers of the National Seashore, but also by Winter Texans and others who share a love of fishing no matter where they may fish.

And that's why I love Max. He's gung-ho all the way. A lot of my other friends tend to do beach activities. Max likes to fish, so that's what I like to do is just fish. One of the very first trips I met all these guys, we went down to Mansfield jetties, I was in my kayak and we were King fishing out of the kayaks. Everybody's catching King fish but me. And I'm a persistent, stubborn sonofagun, so I stick with it... I actually fished and fished and fished, and just couldn't hook... Put my other bait rod up, grabbed my rod and this monster King fish takes it, and I lock down the drag and it pulls me about a mile or two miles off-shore. And I'm by myself, not too experienced at this time and just loving every minute of it. I love that adrenaline rush right there. It's so great, you know. The fish finally got close to my boat and a 10-ft plus Tiger shark came up and grabbed it, right-feet away from my boat, couple feet away from my boat. Very exciting.... That's what I love about fishing (Interview 18, Local Angler).

The adrenaline that goes along with fishing is something that is shared by all anglers. Fishing is simply a fun activity to those who select it as a recreational activity, regardless of skill level. Not only is it enjoyable, however, fishing can simultaneously offer other benefits, including serenity and freedom:

Oh, the thrill of the catch, yeah. As they say, being a boy-the thrill of the hunt, the thrill of the catch, just a fun hobby. Plus the sereneness of being out here, listening to the surf, getting a little sunshine, fresh air. All those things. Freedom goes along with it (Interview 5, Local Angler).

To anglers, fishing can also be about the fish itself. The size of the fish, the challenge of the fish, and the beauty of the fish pursued and caught are all factors that keep anglers casting time and time again. Anglers no longer fish solely for subsistence. Today, catch-and-release is widely practiced, but fishing itself remains a popular activity so that anglers can remain connected to the fish they covet so dearly:

The drive to catch something big and release it happy, unharmed, you know. That's my drive right now. (Researcher: So, tell me a little bit about what it's like to reel in a fish.) A fish? Eh, not so exciting. But a shark? Now there we go. It's a pure adrenaline rush for me. Some people like drugs. I hate drugs. If I was an addict, sharks would be my crack. I feed off of it. I love it. I shake-it's so much fun, I shake when it's all said and done. Small one, big one, it doesn't matter. It's fun as hell. I love it. [I was] tired of catching freshwater fish, 'cause

that's pretty much all you can do over there in central Texas. We got online and shark fishing—me and my buddies [decided to] start catching the biggest, baddest fish in the ocean. That's where we met all of our buddies. (Researcher: What makes you want to catch the biggest, baddest fish?) They're just more beautiful. I mean the small ones are beautiful, but the bigger ones are absolutely gorgeous. Just the pure size; how old they are. Danger factor a little bit, but it's not too dangerous if you know what you're doing. I don't know. Interview 18, Local Angler).

More often than not, anglers do not know what they will catch, but it is the pursuit, the intrigue of not knowing what tugs at the end of the line that becomes a part of why they return to the PINS to fish, time and time again:

Something I like about the National Seashore, mostly, is you never know what's on the end of the line. You hardly ever know what's on the end of the line. It may be a big catfish, it may be a big redfish, it may be, you know, mackerel. You just never know. You hope for a big trout, big red, and that's actually what I really...I like drum.... you never know what you're going to catch. There's always a new bunch of fish come down. One year, we had a bunch of bluefish come, and that's from up on the east coast. And it's just amazing that every now and then we get such diversity. And they're not common. Next year, they won't be there. And what else do I like about it...I like the idea that you can almost always catch something down there (Interview 1, Local Angler).

And you don't get this kind of fishing in Iowa. You never know what you got on your line until you get it up out of the water. And then I still don't know what a lot of them are....You can catch so many different types of fish down here. I don't know how many different types you got, but I wanna say there's probably 50 different species you got to catch out there (Interview 2, Winter Texan).

Being in and experiencing the outdoors can, at times, hold equal, if not more importance to some anglers than fishing itself. In the following quote, an old-time fisherman of the PINS explains that fishing becomes an addiction because it provides a way for him to experience the outdoors:

[I learned to fish] through my parents, I guess. They came from the Valley and they always fished at South Padre and stuff, and that goes back to the 60s. They were mainly bay fishermen. Then me and my dad started fishing, starting off in the bay, then to off-shore, then to surf...it just grows. It's a bad addiction.

*(Researcher: What about it is addicting?)* Mainly just being outdoors, I guess. I don't like to sit at home on the weekends and be inside. That's the main thing. It's not so much about catching fish for me. Although, I mean, it's always great, but I mean, it's not the most important thing (Interview 14, Local Angler).

The catch, weather, surf, seaweed, and beach driving conditions are just some of the factors that can make for the perfect or worst fishing trip. Some fishermen go down island when they can, according to their work schedules, and others have flexible schedules that allow them to be more selective over when they can make a trip down island. Sometimes, people head down island to fish at a moment's notice, while others plan days in advance, depending upon the type of fishing experience they intend to have while on the island. For those who go at a moment's notice, Mother Nature can hold many surprises in store:

[A friend of mine] promised me that he was gonna, you know, put me on a shark. So, we went to the 20 or something and he was setting out lines, and we looked back towards Corpus Christi. We were about the 20, and there were some dark clouds coming towards us. And we had on waders, and I said, "What in the hell?" and he said, "Aw, it's nothing—just a squall, just a squall." Well, about the time this squall started in, the line started going, "Click, click, click, click, click, click." So, he got out and I was putting on a harness, and he struck that thing—and he struck that fish. And I had waders on and all that sort of thing, and he gave it to me. I'm fighting that damn fish, and she started running like you cannot believe. And I was standing out there, and I said, "I am not going to lose this goddamn shark!" So I sat there and I fought him, and the rain just kept coming in; filled my waders clear to the rim with water. Well, I finally got the shark in (Interview 1, Local Angler).

#### 4.2.2 Connection to Nature

Participants in this study varied in their levels of how they prioritized fishing. Whether a serious angler or an angler who has priorities other than fishing at the PINS; whether they grew up fishing freshwater in Chicago or on the PINS itself, the anglers

unanimously agreed that the PINS is a particularly outstanding place for fishing. The wonder of the outdoors and connecting to nature provides a significant part of why anglers prefer the PINS as a fishing place. The fishing experience provides opportunities for fishing and immersing oneself in the outdoors:

The fishing, I think, was a great piece of it because you never knew what you were going to bring in. For me, casting out and bringing out four, five, or six different species in a day was really cool. And something that I always remember was just the wonder of it. It was bigger than me, and to a certain extent it still is, you know. You can still see things out there that you don't see anywhere else. I have yet to find a nesting turtle, but one of the things I always find when I go out there is to do it. I guess it's just the wonder of being out there-making a fire and enjoying the outdoors. You know, the stars out there, they go on forever. And one of the only places around here that you can go out and see the night sky (Interview 20, Local Angler).

To others, fishing provides a holistic sense of appreciation for the surroundings and the places to which fishing exposes an individual. For this individual, the PINS was one of the places that made fishing special, and he loved to discover new places while fishing:

Well, I guess how that happened, my whole saltwater origin on the Texas Coast originated when I was living in Austin, growing up, a teenager or whatever. I fished freshwater up there, but there'd be times when my family would want to come down and take a trip...the more I kept coming down, the more I kept wanting to come down. It's fishing, for me, just being out there, it's kind of like a drug, you know. I hate to say it that way, but it really is. It's real addictive. A lot of times you'll do what you have to do just so you can do it. The pay-off is even greater than a drug would be, I guess you could say. It's fantastic, I love it, and the whole-it's continual, you know. Being able to just go different places, discover new places. By going to one place or destination down here, or you hear about something else and you can move on, try something else (Interview 17, Local Angler).

According to some anglers, the wildness of PINS is also inherently a part of us, as humans. Extended trips down island can be not only challenging, but hazardous, as

well, without the proper preparation. Not even the vehicle that takes an angler down there can be reliable. The further down island one travels, the deeper into the wild they go with only themselves, their provisions, and the island to help them survive. And so, the down island adventure re-connects them to a time when humans had to survive solely on raw human instinct, knowledge, and their surroundings for survival. The island, then, provides for freedom from modern society, the crowds, and man-made noises, buildings and schedules, and connects them to the “primitive” past, as well as the wild:

*(Example 1):* The coyotes out there, some of them get close, and I like that idea. It’s kind of scary, but it’s neat at the same time. It’s just a proximity to nature that you get out there that you don’t get other places. *(Researcher: I love hearing them sing.)* It’s amazing. It’s the creepiest sound. *(Researcher: It makes the hair stand up on your back.)* And think, that’s been doing the same thing to people for hundreds of thousands of years. People have been feeling that same feeling forever, and so you have this connectedness to the past, as well, early humans. Out there, you’re experiencing some of the same hardships they’ve dealt with: the harshness of the sun, the lack of water, the salty air, the abrasive sand. I mean, these are primitive things man dealt with. And I like to think that I could have made it back then. You know, I like to think of myself as a modern-day Indian. And so that’s what I like about it....Turn back the clock a little bit (Interview 10, Local Angler).

*(Example 2):* It’s a return to a simpler way of life, I think, is the big thing for most of us...there’s businesses and there’s work and there’s bills and there’s mortgage...And sometimes we just want to go back to a simpler time, you know, whenever all you needed was a roof over your head and food and water. And you could find ways to entertain yourself otherwise. I like the fact that there’s no T.V. I don’t mind a radio, but I don’t mind not having a radio down there either. There’s no television, there’s no video games, you know. It’s just simpler. This is human beings when they were at their greatest; when they were having to survive as a species...We’ve got a big brain, and that’s how you survive...I guess just the idea that it’s primitive (Interview 10, Local Angler).

Along with the thrill, adrenaline, and excitement, however, the drive to fish can also be derivative of a need for relaxation and self-satisfaction. Each of us can relate to



an intrinsic desire and need to experience freedom and serenity, and participate in activities that satiate such needs. The angler below has been visiting the PINS for ten years, and he “appreciated” the PINS as a peaceful place, offering a “gift” of freedom and peace:

*(Example 1):* I’ve been fishing down there at the National Seashore, well, since before I actually moved down here when I was living in Austin. I would drive down [to camp for the] whole weekend, whether it was with myself or a friend or my brother. It was kind of a get-away. It was that whole sense of being not dependent—I’m trying to think of the right expression I want to use when I say this, but it’s more of a—you know, you feel more—you appreciate things more. When you come down, a lot of times by yourself, or you just get away and try new stuff, you appreciate it more. I can’t really explain it. I’ve been coming down for at least ten years. Well, just the fact that you can come down and go to these places, especially, you know, the National Seashore. There’s not many places in the country anymore that you can actually do that. I’ve been to Florida quite a bit, I’ve fished a lot and it’s just so populated. There’s so many restrictions. It’s all developed. You can’t really do what you want to do. You don’t have the freedom; you don’t have the isolation that you do here. [We] take it for granted. It’s peaceful. It’s a real gift to have to be able to come down here (Interview 17, Local Angler).

*(Example 2):* I am very hyperactive and I’m an old adrenaline junky, and fish soothes me. The sound of the surf calms me. People relax in different ways. A lot of people like to throw a rod out and sit back in the lawn chair, and maybe think, maybe breathe, maybe do nothing, maybe drink beer. If the rod bends over, they catch a fish. Others don’t have the patience for that, and they tend to be lure throwers, and they’ll be on the move all the time. And there’s something about that constant movement that’s very soothing. Fly fishermen are especially that way. It’s almost a religion with them; it’s that fluid motion. There’s as much satisfaction in making this awesome cast as there is the fish that you catch when you make that cast (Interview 12, Local Angler).

*(Example 3):* The PINS the beach, you know. I mean, just the beach. I always loved the beach, even when I was a kid. I was like an A.D.D. child—super hyper. My mom would take me to the beach and it literally calmed me. I was a different child at the beach. It soothes my soul. I mean it really cleanses it. I can just forget about work and all my problems. As soon as I touch the sand I don’t even think about work or any of my issues in life. So really the beach, mainly, and then catching big sharks, of course (Interview 18, Local Angler).

Anglers, in many cases, choose fishing as an activity that allows them to experience freedom, solitude, and serenity, but to many, Padre Island additionally fulfills a sense of spirituality. Because Padre Island fulfills such essential aspects of being, many consider the island to be a sacred place for experiencing spirituality, and they protect it as such.

*(Example 1):* What do I like about fishing? Mostly the catching. No, I don't know. There's always something almost meditative about it. Same thing with painting. I kind of look at it the same way. It's one of those things. If I'm not doing it, I can kind of tell there's something wrong with just the way I'm living (Interview 16, Local Angler)?

*(Example 2):* It is like, to me, I consider it-this might be kind of hokey-but just a blessing to be able to go out there and be able to catch something, even if it's small, you know. Even if I have to throw it back, to be able to do that. And to have, one, the time to be able to go out and do that, and two, to have an actual place to go and do that (Interview 19, Local Angler).

*(Example 3):* And I guess the remoteness of it has a lot to do with it. You can always find a place down there that's not crowded. And you can't always do that now, of course. I mean-just the feeling, you know, the longest uninterrupted area in the world, I think. I don't know, it's just a way to relax and you've got to communicate with your higher power someway. I'm not much of a religion guy, but I do have a higher power (Interview 1, Local Angler).

*(Example 4):* And if there was ever a better place to just-if you really love to commiserate with nature, I enjoy the desert as you do in Arizona and west Texas and places like that, but there is a spirituality. The Native American believed that there were spiritual places. Grand Canyon was one of them and the famous canyon that the Cheyenne call Palo Duro Canyon in north Texas. They held those places as sacred, and to me this place is sacred (Interview 12, Local Angler).

*(Example 5): (Researcher: Why do you like fishing?)* The outdoors is number one, being outside. I mean, I could go down PINS even without a fishing rod and I'd be perfectly happy for a week, you know. Except I'd have to eat, so I'd take one just to eat, but it's just being outside that does it for most of us. We call it going to church. Most of us are not real religious, but that is our church. It's not really about being around people and tithing and putting money in a plate. It's

more about feeling close to God or earth or whatever you want to call it. (Researcher: What would you call it?) I don't have a name for it. Nature...And I'm not a real spiritual person, but that's how I see it-as a spiritual experience. I love that place. Like I said, it's church for us. It's where we go to clear our heads (Interview 10, Local Angler).

(*Example 6*): I never leave trash on the beach. Even, say a piece of fishing line comes out of my pocket or something, I'll pick it up, because I think It's bad karma-I know it sounds ridiculous, but you know I have to pick it up. I don't like leaving any of that....We do not kill anything we don't eat or use, and that's not to do with the park. It's a karma thing between us and God. (Interview 6, Local Angler).

### 4.2.3 Anglers as Naturalists

With the different seasons, new plants bloom and grow, and different animals make their presence known by their calls or tracks. Varying species of fish arrive and depart with seasonal changes in water temperature. Some people fish casually, not caring if they catch something, while others make fishing a more serious leisure activity. Those who fish regularly have learned to make observations in their surroundings to help them discern poor fishing spots from the good ones. They also use observations to identify patterns in fish and other wildlife behavior from one year to another+. One old-time angler, for example, said that he could set his calendar by the types of birds that are present on the island during seasonal migrations. Similarly, anglers observe patterns in fish migrations and changes in the fish populations:

The jackfish is another big fish here, and they're here already. They were here in February, which is not right. The Spanish are here, too, already, so they're a month early. Global climate change is what most people are attributing it to. It could just be a natural cycle and who knows....If it is a natural cycle, it's probably expedited by manmade sources. The fish that are migratory species—the Spanish, the jacks, the tarpon, the bluefish, the ladyfish to some extent—they're all migratory species, and the water temperature has to be 70 degrees

before those fish occur off the beach, and in a lot of these cases, closer to 75 for a lot of these fish. Dusty Anchovies [are the] basis of that whole food chain out there. So your tarpon, your sharks, your jacks, ladyfish—all your migratory fish tend to follow those anchovies. The water temperature got warmer this year than it normally does. If the temperature's not up to 70, those fish won't be here (Interview 10, Local Angler).

Some long-time anglers, and others who have a devoted interest in the island, document such changes in the island. Observing and documenting changes witnessed by the fishermen is necessary to becoming a good angler. In most cases, local anglers know how to read the water and the dynamics of the beach. They keep their eyes out for frenzying fish or birds feeding on bait fish, and they can translate those observations to identify good versus bad fishing places.

I've found that as a fishermen and a writer that it's become important to record what's going on down the beach and how it's changing over the few years I've been there. I've seen a lot of changes. The environment is changing. The fishing is definitely becoming more difficult. I have researched the red tides and the sargassum increasing we've had, so we are seeing changes definitely. I've been recording them. I'm recording them and watching them closely. When I say recording, I'm trying to make other people aware of the changes as well. [The fishing] getting more and more difficult. And I definitely believe it's from the red tide about three years ago (Interview 6, Local Angler).

The island is ever-changing, from 4,000 years ago when the island existed as a small, underwater sandbar to its current, staggering 113 miles of sand dunes, mudflats, beach, and grasslands. Its shape is frequently shifting with the winds and currents, and tidal surges from storms are constantly carving and reshaping it. As the following quote shows, the anglers know the island intimately, and they are familiar with wind and wave actions, and how to cast and fish in various conditions. This local angler's knowledge and close awareness of all the structures enabled him to fish in a way that others couldn't:

My favorite fishing spot is from the 26 through to the 45. It's where the beach bends and it becomes more easterly, okay, that point. It's also the high bank area which stops a lot of people from getting through it. Lot of people turn back before that. And as the beach turns, course we're mainly dealing with southerly winds, it becomes more offshore than on shore. Because we're normally at a southeasterly, so we go around that bend and it leaves the wind more, makes it breezier fishing. And the structure is better there. The sand bars, the pinches, the holes, they're more visible to someone who's aware of them. Less traffic is what I'm getting at. The more onshore the wind is, the more dead in your face—the rougher—it is, because the wave action is coming straight at the beach. So if you go around the corner, it then becomes a side-shore breeze and you can cast further—you can throw easier into it (Interview 6, Local Angler).

Such levels of experience and knowledge and consequential concerns are discussed in greater detail in Chapter V. Many people have dedicated years of their lives to learning and understanding how to fish the island, along with learning about the island itself. These observations and knowledge that surround the island and fishing on the island, are part of what makes fishing on Padre Island so significant and important to the fishermen. However, as important as fishing is to experiencing Padre Island, there are other experiences that help to paint the big picture of what makes the PINS a special place.

#### **4.2.4 Beyond Fishing**

Major currents that flow throughout the Gulf of Mexico converge on the shores of Padre Island. These currents are what initially formed the island and continue to carry myriad items from the world's oceans and continents far away. For example, seeds may fall from trees and vines in coastal and tropical rainforests, wash into the Amazon River, spill into the ocean, and ultimately be carried by ocean currents to the shore of Padre Island, hundreds of miles away. Fossils from prehistoric times, and artifacts from

shipwrecks hundreds of years ago, can become uncovered and swept away by these same currents to be possibly discovered for the first time since they were swallowed by the Gulf. Even in the short year that I have lived on the island, I have encountered marlins, dolphins, and whales that were rejected by the sea and carried far from home. To many, the mystery of what may be found or experienced is a significant part of what lures people back, time and time again, to satisfy our innate curiosity or attraction to the unknown. A new, young leader in the shark fishing community explained:

There is such a diverse range of fish species you could actually encounter and it's a big mystery, you know. You never know what you're going to go out there and see and hook into, you know, or get to experience. That's my main enjoyment factor is the mystery (Interview 17, Local Angler).

Recognizing the National Seashore as a remarkable place for exploration does not require having a multi-generational heritage or "local" status. A winter Texan even commented:

There's all kinds of stuff on the beach that you can pick up—treasures I call them, but wife calls them junk (Interview 2, Winter Texan).

While walking along the beach within the first five miles, I encountered a father fishing with his two sons. Even though they were fishing that day, they hardly consider fishing to be the most important part of their experience, or primary goal, when visiting Padre Island. At times, fishing is the prioritized activity, however, on separate occasions, they also go to explore and spend time together, and fishing may be an activity that they add to the other activities they engage in while on the beach:

You find more debris and all sorts of things washed up. I just love to explore. When we go to the beach, that's almost always what we do (Interview 3, Local Angler).

He continued by giving an example of how he explores and the types of adventures and surprises that he and his family have experienced there. Further, these types of adventures are enhanced with the access to the more remote and primitive sections of the island:

...for an extra 20 minutes drive, we can get down there and fish, and usually, you get to see a lot more if you go down there. You know, I mean, where else—you're going to see deer, fawns, sometimes you can see dolphins, but where else are you going to see—I'm mean, you should see we've got piles of pumice at home. We find tons there. We bring it home. We've gotten so bad we only take the nice pieces back with us.

[My son] and I, [my girlfriend] and some friends of ours went out there camping. That was a real good. We've been camping a couple times out there, but that one camping trip we decided to hike. What I wanted to do was hike from the sea to the lagoon to explore. We didn't make it, because...everybody kept turning back. Pretty soon, it was just me and one other guy, and so...we went back, too. But we came across a fawn—just two feet away from us popped up, sitting out there with [my son] and his friend. They were doing exercises that they do in school. Everybody was laughing, having fun. They were up on the dunes, like on a stage, doing a little dance, and above them on the dunes there were like three coyotes just watching them (Interview 3, Local Angler).

One long-time angler who has fished the beach since his childhood describes the types of exploration experiences he shared with his parents when he was a child. The types of things they encountered or observed on the beach show the mystery that abounds at the National Seashore. You never know what you are going to find down there. Today, he continues to visit the beach with his own children who are ages eight and 10.

We used to find these giant, weird light bulbs when I was a kid...I don't know what kind of thing it was, but we would always find them. And my mom would pick them up and act like she was the Statue of Liberty...I've seen some cars that have been uncovered by shifting sands. That was pretty weird. And I've always been kind of interested in the Nic (the shipwreck of The Nicaragua) and the history of that. It seemed like sometimes we'd go down there and couldn't

see it, and sometimes we'd go down there and it was sticking up. That was kind of interesting to look at. Well, my dad would say, "Well, it's supposed to be right here, and it's always been there." And it wouldn't be sticking up (Interview 20, Local Angler).

### **4.3 Experiencing the "Social" Island**

While the fishing and catching are good at locations outside of the National Seashore, the anglers who frequent the National Seashore look for something beyond just the fishing. The special "essence" of Padre Island, as described by the anglers above, is largely what creates—and satisfies—the types of experiences that anglers desire that make this place special to them. Closely complementing the physically grounded attributes and experiences, are the social experiences that are also important to the anglers in my study. This section of this thesis will describe the types of experiences that anglers have while fishing the beach at Padre Island National Seashore that reveal its sociality and dovetail with the place-based qualities described above.

#### **4.3.1 Family, Friends, and Childhoods**

During the interviews, I asked the participating anglers how long they had been fishing and when they had begun fishing. Without hesitation or variation between participants, each and every individual has fished since his childhood and learned to fish with his family. The ways in which fishing was passed down varied. For example, some individuals' parents fished commercially; some were avid recreational fishermen, while others went every once in awhile; and some grew up fishing saltwater, while



others learned to fish in freshwater. Some extended their love of fishing to their enjoyment of experiencing the outdoors, in general.

The family social-sharing experiences in the outdoors vary from case to case. When practical, fishing with the family remains an activity that is still pursued well into adulthood. In many cases, individuals bring their own families to visit so that grandchildren, children (now adults), and parents (now grandparents) may experience fishing together. Long after children are raised into adulthood and have set out on their independent journeys, fishing remains an activity that unifies family members when they are together again. A long-time fishermen on the beach at Padre Island shared:

I've been coming to Corpus since I was a kid. Yeah, I'm a big outdoor man, and I taught my children to be that way. We would always camp and fish and all that, and they're still doing it. I've got one son that's 50. He's still dove hunting, he's still deer hunting and all that, still fishing (Interview 1, Local Old-timer).

Another angler I encountered was fishing within in the first five miles of driving beach, and he had recently moved to the area from North Carolina, but was familiar with saltwater fishing from his childhood in New Jersey. He, along with all of the other anglers with children, has taught his own children to fish, and it remains an important family social activity. He shared:

[I've been fishing since] I was probably three or four. My dad used to surf fish in New Jersey. I didn't fish when I was that young, but he would fish and we would always pay attention to what he was doing. Then we started growing up, and we fished in the Atlantic, the back bays and the ocean for flounder, stripers, crab and stuff. We did a lot of crabbing. We had a 19-ft Mako growing up, and we—my dad—still has it. We did a lot of fishing from it. I'm the youngest of 10 kids, and we're all one year apart, so we had plenty of time on the boat. Two brothers are biologists, the one who works in Vermont and the other is a teacher, but in the summer time he captains private charter boats. So I fish with [my brothers] offshore quite a bit. And my kids love to fish, too. We freshwater fish

mostly where we live recently, so I'm very anxious to get them here to start fishing (Interview 7, Recently Local Angler).

One angler, who grew up in New Hampshire and moved to Corpus Christi 30 years ago, described how he learned to fish in freshwater, but was generally more interested in being at the beach.

Freshwater, we started out freshwater. We lived in a little town in southern New Hampshire. So we'd go out on the rowboat on the pond and catch pickerel and little bass and perch. [The ponds] have a different smell. It's not a bad smell; it's a different smell. [Since I moved here], I've never been gung-ho on fishing. I was more gung-ho on going to the beach and hanging out. And I just thought, "Oh I might as well start fishing, too." I've always enjoyed fishing. But it was just one more activity to do down there. I've never been real fanatic fisherman (Interview Interview 3, Local Angler).

Fishermen also use fishing and experiencing the outdoors with their families as a way to instill in their children certain values, for instance, values related to non-consumerism and stewardship:

I saw a big bird scavenging something in the middle of the road. I think it's great. It adds to the charm of being in the outdoors. (*Researcher asks: "What do you like about being in the outdoors?"*) It's natural. It's having fun without spending money or using electronics or anything else. It's just good, wholesome fun, and that's why I like taking the kids places like that. They need to learn how to do stuff without spending a whole lot of money. I'll probably get them down there to clean the beach and stuff like that (Interview 7, Recently Local Angler).

A local fisherman, who serves on the board for a local fishing conservation organization, also uses fishing and beach experiences to make an impression in his children's lives regarding the importance of conservation, the value of nature, and living with the outdoors.

Getting away from the general public, getting away from the telephone service, getting away from-the sense of adventure is probably a major part of it, and providing food for my family is part of it, as well. We definitely encourage and educate our children to keep what they catch and eat what they catch and release

what they don't. At this time with young children, I see it as an opportunity to teach them about life and give them an opportunity to see nature, and learn about the importance of conservation for the future-for their future. You can teach them so much about not polluting the waters, you can teach them about the need to organize as a group, to get positive things done for the entire community, not for a single person. It ties in a little bit with hunting, just being able to get out, see what's happening in the world other than the concrete jungle that we live in (Interview 11, Local Angler).

Fishing can also serve as a way to establish togetherness or to emphasize the importance of spending time with the family, according to a local guide who has spent his lifetime fishing coastal Texas, a practice that was instilled in him by his grandfather.

I grew up on a small farm-I was adopted by my grandparents-I grew up on a small farm 58 miles from the coast, and my granddad loved to fish. We lived in the country and he felt like he needed some activity that we could share as a family. And so he started bringing us to the coast when I was 8 years old. And I've fished ever since....For several years we didn't have a boat and we would frequent the piers and jetties and fish places like that. And then, when I was about 11, he bought a boat and we would start fishing in the Laguna Madre as well. And he loved to trout fish in the bays, and I was crazy about the Gulf and the big fish. And so we were at conflict, but we were the only fishing partner the other one had. So we cut a deal where I would fish with him one weekend in the bay and then the following weekend he took me to Bob Hall Pier. However, I had to maintain an acceptable grade average in school or there was no fishing until the next report card (Interview 12, Island Guide).

In some cases, the desire to fish is more instinctual from childhood, and the discovery of this hidden desire is revealed when some fishermen are introduced to the activity by their parents, most often their fathers.

*(Example 1)* I grew up in Ohio, outside of Delaware, actually, out in the middle of nowhere on a farm. And at the bottom of the hill and at the back of the back 40, we had a creek. It was a branch of the Siota River up there, by Columbus. And as early as I can remember, my dad was always out fishing and hunting. You know, that's kind of what you do up there. And so I would grab the poles and when I was young, young, young I would walk down there and just started teaching myself how to fish. I learned a little bit from Dad and, of course, stole his hooks and stole a couple lures and that stuff down there, and bobbers. But,

yeah, I just really got into it. I was just drawn to the water. Some kind of magnetism at an early, early age (Interview 13, Local Angler).

(*Example 2*) I grew up on a lake in upstate New York. I had a house on a lake—my family did. And it wasn't real populated, so to speak, and so I mean I had friends and everything, spaced out here and there. My brother—my older half-brother—fished a lot, my dad fished, and that's kind of where my whole basis for fishing—my foundation—started. And every—I don't want to say every day, but quite often, especially during the summertime, I would fish a couple days a week, few days a week, whenever I could, you know, or whenever my parents would let me. I was quite young at the time, and it just became—I became fascinated, you know, with the whole aquatic world in terms of everything: the life, fish, birds, plants, everything. I just became real keen on a lot of stuff and real, I guess, dedicated to being a part of it any way I could (Interview 17, Local Angler).

As fishermen shared their stories about their families and how they began fishing, I sensed that they were expressing a certain nostalgia for those memories and times. By going fishing and telling stories about fishing experiences, they are able to keep memories vivid and present, and they can keep the importance of fishing relevant.

Favorite fishing memory...yeah, I do. When I was—I want to say 8 or 9, my dad had waded out to the third sandbar and he was casting out a shark bait, because we didn't have kayaks then, we didn't have boats or anything, so we kind of swam between the bars and a helicopter flew over and was telling people to get out of the water, because there was a shark migration going on. And my dad jumped over a wave and he went to cast, and he landed on the back of a shark out there. And he, I swear, it was like he walked on water to get out of there, and none of us really knew what was going on until he came out and said, "Did you see the helicopter flying over?" But, you know, they had a blow horn, but we couldn't hear what they were saying. He said, "They were telling everybody to get out of the water, and I landed on a shark at the same time." It was so funny to watch him, because his eyes were this big. He was running, trying to keep his bait out there and he just—it was pretty funny (Interview 20, Local Angler).

Another particularly touching story was shared by one of the two remaining old-time fishermen of the beach. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, I have inserted a pseudonym in place of his friend's name.

Well, all of the old-timers, but myself and Buddy, are dead. We're the only Old-time fishermen left who used to run the beach. Buddy's wife died and he hasn't been on the beach since. He quit. She was in there every time he went fishing....Real nice lady. Old Buddy's still living....I remember one time, I was in a hole in the water, Buddy and his wife drove up, and I told them to get out; there's some trout in this hole and I've been missing them. He put a broken back on there and bam, he caught a big trout....I said, "Give me one of them." He did and I threw it out there and caught a 34-inch trout, and his wife comes running down there with a yard stick to measure it. I took that plug off and give it back to him real quick. Old Buddy. Hahaha. He caught... a lot of fish, but there's nobody left. Him and I are the only ones (Interview 15, Local Angler).

Fishermen have developed a collective identity and sense of camaraderie based upon their shared experiences at the National Seashore. As shown above, experiences down island and connecting to nature with friends and family also foster a sharing of knowledge, ideas, and practices that are used towards conservation and protection of the beach. A university graduate student shares that he is a part of a fishing group that behaves a certain way on the beach, demonstrating self-regulating conservation behavior, respect for the resource, and other experiences on the beach with other surf anglers.

*(Researcher: So, you're lumping yourself with the trout fishermen?)* Well, just as a group of beach fishermen—just a way of doing it on the beach....The camaraderie is great, being around these guys that share similar interests, share a similar respect. Most of the guys I fish with, the respect of the resource is the big thing with us. It's not here for us. It just happens to be here and if we can enjoy it, great, but it's not ours to take. It's not ours to ruin. I don't have kids, but when I do, I want them to be able to do the same things, you know. Obviously, the beer drinking and the bullshitting and the campfires is great, you know. Eating food on the beach is wonderful. Food cooked on the beach always tastes better. And then the fishing is the icing on the cake (Interview 10, Local Angler).

### 4.3.2 Nicknames and Stories, Connectedness and Belonging

Fishermen tell stories to illustrate a number of points: conservation, camaraderie, competition, commitment, etc. These stories are what connect people to one another and to the beach, allowing them to collectively identify with one another as fishermen and more specifically, particular groups of fishermen. Within social groups, anglers use nicknames in person and on the online message boards. Nicknames, in a way, indicate a sense of belonging in a particular group of island fishermen.

Mine's Tigerboy. After that Tiger incident I just told you about, [a friend of mine] just started calling me Tigerboy, Tigerboy in that pirate voice. It just kind of stuck and I started using that. Same with everybody else. They've got their own handles their buddies made up, they've got a crazy story that happens to them, and there goes their name. Usually after some crazy story (Interview 18, Local Angler).

Another characteristic that creates unity among the island's fishermen are stories of commitment and dedication. As these stories are told, and individual reputations are created, anglers become more connected to a particular way of fishing and relating to one another through shared beliefs and values surrounding fishing:

I like dedication stories. When I first met Max, he was very introverted and didn't quite warm up to anybody. He was kind of quiet, just kept to himself. But I heard a story about him that he hooked a big shark from the beach, and it broke off. And we used buoys attached to our leaders so if they do break off we can go get our buoy and bring the shark back so we can release it so we don't kill it. So his buoy broke off and he jumped in his kayak and chased this buoy several miles down the beach, attached it to his kayak, paddled it up current, upwind, back those several miles, took those pictures, took the hooks and everything out, released it, happy and fine. To me, I love it. That takes a lot. That's dedication. That takes a lot of effort. He got my respect when I heard that story. He's done a lot of things like that, but that'd be one of them (Interview 18, Local Angler).

### 4.3.3 Anglers and the Internet

The Internet plays an important role in informing the fishermen of today. Three sites are used by avid anglers who fish the PINS on nearly a daily basis: (1) <http://www.breakawayusa.com/>, (2) <http://corpusfishing.com/>, and (3) <http://www.extremecoast.com/>. With these sites, fishermen have access to weather and wind conditions, tide charts, and lunar calendars to help predict tides. They additionally use the Internet to share information with one another. This information is shared on the messaging forums or report boards and describes conditions that are specific to the PINS with which anglers should be concerned or interested. Such reports include, sargassum seaweed levels, beach driving conditions, wind conditions, and tide levels.

These websites also allow individuals to share their fishing journals and reports. People write stories and post pictures from their trips, and others are able to comment on these stories or reports. Anglers are therefore able to better understand when certain fish species are caught, what species can be caught, how they may be caught, and where they may be caught. These issues and concerns will be further discussed in Chapter V. The Internet contributes to not only anglers' connection to the island, but also their sense of belonging and connectivity to one another in the greater PINS surf fishing community. Through this website they share jokes, triumphs, challenges, and sorrows. Sometimes, they do not even talk about fishing. For example, one post on the online forum was a father asking the greater angling network to pray for and support his son who was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Within this information sharing medium, anglers also share other types of information from their reports, including their issues and concerns surrounding fishing, conservation, and management of their favorite fishing place, the PINS. While the online fishing world is generally focused on fishing itself, greater elements surrounding the activity are also popularized through the internet, including education and conservation practices.

#### 4.4 Conservation

Teddy Roosevelt was a founder of the wildlife conservation movement and an avid hunter, with the significant recognition that his love of hunting and way of enjoying and experiencing the outdoors would become endangered, along with the animals he so loved to hunt if efforts towards conservation were not initiated. Similarly, many of the fishermen who visit Padre Island, are involved in local and nationwide fishing and wildlife/nature conservation organizations, including the Coastal Conservation Association and the Audubon Society. A board member of the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) described the mission of the organization and the role of fishermen within that organization.

We are a nation-wide chapter of a local organization that was basically started by some anglers between here and Galveston. CCA is a grassroots, volunteer organization that's originated for Redfish. There were thousands and thousands of Redfish being commercially harvested through trot lines, gill nets, and various other means. There were no limits that were being put upon these people, and they were just decimating the fish population of Redfish. And CCA came in late '70s...and got together and got to lobbying, and got Redfish classified as a game fish. And at that point they could no longer be commercially harvested, and it was there for a recreational game fish now. We've also been strong in starting to build and understand the process of raising these flounder, which is a



monumental task, because they grow so much slower. And we've also been instrumental and involved and vocal at legislative levels on passing of the current flounder regulations and the numbers of harvest. And they're currently allowing you to harvest flounder prior to their sexual maturity, so they're unable to reproduce before they're being stuck by giggers and commercial fishermen (Interview 11, Local Angler).

Thousands of fishermen nationwide belong to the Coastal Conservation Association, which promotes conservation for the well-being of a broad spectrum of natural resources within coastal and marine systems. As an organization, they utilize outdoor enthusiasts' (primarily angler) opinions and scientific research to inform their positions on natural resource management issues. Further, they collaborate with governing agencies in order to work towards creating effective and scientifically justified rules and regulations that balance with the intent to allow for future generations of anglers to continue to fish.

We've always been concerned about the things that are washing up on the beach; we're very active in beach clean-up issues. Our understanding of the trash on the beach is it's affecting the birds, so Coastal isn't all about fish. It's about everything that's living on the coast, including the humans... We're not an organization that says fishing's bad. We want people to catch fish and catch more fish, and we want fishing to be there for generations to come... Redfish, they were almost gone, we did something about it... There's a tremendous amount of Redfish now. We'd like to see the same thing happen with snapper. We'd like to see the same thing happen with Ling (Cobia). We'd like to see the tarpon populations come back... A lot of times they pick on the recreational fishermen when it's commercial being a big, big part of the problem. And we're here to represent the recreational fishermen and the general public (Interview 11, Local Angler).

In the field of interpretation and education, we are trained to facilitate hands-on experiences with nature. By interacting with nature, rather than reading an article or watching a movie about a natural area, people are able to do more than learn about a place, they are able to experience and care about it. I had the privilege of interviewing

anglers who viewed visiting and exploring the National Seashore as an educational experience. They do not necessarily participate in interpretive programs offered by the park, because they already know “the basics” just from experiencing it. Many of the anglers consider themselves naturalists and students, curious about nature and always learning something new by interacting and experiencing it through Padre Island, as discussed in Section 4.2.3. Fishing itself can be viewed as a lesson. In many ways, and over time, anglers have developed a set of ethics surrounding fishing. One Winter Texan shared a story about an experience he had on a fishing charter out of nearby port, in which his fishing ethic was contradicted and challenged.

Before we went out, they said legal length on a snapper is 16 inches, but if you catch one, you put it in the cooler with the shrimp, so just to be legal when they get back, they’re not going to keep anything under 17. You know, that’s great. So, we’re out there fishing, and everybody’s got their little poles and their place to stand and you’ve got something to put your fish in. Well, my wife and I, we were there and had a fish in there and deckhand come along and grabbed the fish, and it’d been probably laying in the basket for 20 minutes; it was dead. And he stuck the ice pick in there for the air bladder and threw it back over...That’s illegal where I come from. If you catch it and it’s dead, you take it home and eat it. I wasn’t real happy about that. ...You know, I wasn’t brought up to waste nothing. That’s not right, and I don’t do things like that (Interview 2, Winter Texan).

The same visitor to Padre Island, despite the limited amount of time he spent in the area, took the time to clean the beach. In his following quotes, this winter Texan gives a couple of examples to describe how he makes responsible decisions surrounding fishing, including catch-and-release fishing and cleaning the beach. He described how people notice and acknowledge when he cleans the beach, and how that helps him to feel like he has done something beneficial. Such positive reinforcement and self-satisfaction may encourage him to continue cleaning the beach in the future.

Guess whatever I catch I put back, and I usually take a trash bag and...cause they'll give you free trash bags, so why not. I come down here, you people come down here, it's your dollars bringing that front-end loader down there cleaning that beach up and they let me use it just as much as you all use it, so I figure if they're going to do that and provide it, the least I can do is pick up somebody's trash. Yeah, I see a lot of people doing that down there. And you'll be walking down there with a bag full of garbage or something, and somebody drives by in a car and slows down and will say, "Thanks." Makes it all worthwhile right there. Just the self-satisfaction makes it worthwhile (Interview 2, Winter Texan).

Many visitors and local residents participate in organized trash clean-ups. One event, in particular, the Big Shell Beach Clean-up, is an effort organized and supported largely by the fishermen. In 2009, this event brought around 500 people to clean a 10-mile stretch of beach from which participants removed around 800,000 pounds of debris washed in from Hurricane Ike. This is the one event that unites PAIS and the angling community each year, and strengthens the community of anglers who fish the PINS. This beach clean-up is a way to demonstrate how anglers take care of and protect their own beach and expect other users to respect it as their own. However, they also recognize that education is a critical part of individuals gaining a sense of responsibility to care for the beach. One angler discusses the above and suggests that events, such as the Big Shell Clean-up, serve as ways to educate the public and promote conservation of the beach.

I think if they have that right [to the beach], that means they also have the responsibility to be decent hosts. I mean, it's a public beach. It should be open to everyone. I'm just getting towards people who wouldn't be from here that just wouldn't know beach etiquette and speed limits. I would probably say just stronger public education. I mean, a lot of it is people talking about it as well, you know. From a fisherman's standpoint, I would rather have people around me who knew what they were doing if I'm fishing with my friends' families or friends, you know, my family, and a lot of it's just kind of knowing how to and how not to act on the beach. I'm just saying that doing things responsibly...should be the priority. And I think that having events on the beach

and being a part of things like the clean-up is just either a better way for people to get to know the beach or to put a little more thought and attention into taking care of it (Interview 16, Local Angler).

Numerous views surround the varying forms of marine debris that wash onto the beach at the National Seashore. One angler differentiated between the types of debris, and how some hold local and cultural significance, and have even become a part of the local knowledge and experience that so many anglers of the beach share:

I find [the marine debris] quite natural. And sometimes I don't. I find it an overzealous act to remove certain things that I enjoy looking at. I mean, there's some old buoys down there and some stuff that really are markers, as far as I'm concerned. You know, there's some bits of trash that become quite famous. Like the Big Yellow Pencil at the 34, there's the Eight Ball...they're just old buoys and things that all the fishermen use them as their reference point. The plastics and stuff, I think, should be removed. But I like them big bits of metal washed up; I think they're real interesting. I like looking at them. I like an old buoy. I like an old boat. I don't like the plastic bottles. I don't like to see beer cans down there. That pisses me off. Human waste trash drives me nuts (Interview 6, Local Angler).

The level of conservation education and awareness varies among the anglers who fish the beach. There are those fishermen who take pride in their commitment to protecting the beach, keeping it clean, and who regard all species with utmost respect, and have fishing practices that are reflective of their beliefs. This respect even encompasses Hardhead catfish, which are considered by many fishermen to be pests because they are not considered good to eat by most.

I've found that as a fishermen and a writer that it's become important to record what's going on down the beach and how it's changing over the few years I've been there. I've seen a lot of changes—the environment is changing. The fishing is definitely becoming more difficult. I have researched the red tides and the Sargassum increasing we've had, so we are seeing changes definitely. I've been recording them. I'm recording them and watching them closely, and when I say recording...I'm trying to make other people aware of the changes as well. I use YouTube a lot. I do a lot of seminars, from Florida all the way up to—I've

flown all the way up to New Jersey and New York. I go and give talks on beach fishing....A lot of people kill what they consider shouldn't be there. They kill a Hardhead and they'll throw it on the beach. A lot of people don't understand that it has its place where it was. It's lack of education. I really believe that rules are broken inside the park and people doing stuff like that it's because they are unaware (Interview 6, Local Angler).

Another angler who utilizes the beach as a learning tool for himself and his children, and who picks up trash on the beach also engages in some fishing behaviors that would be frowned upon and rebuked by other fishermen, as seen above. While I observed very little of this behavior on the beach, it does exist and is in violation of a park rule that is not actively enforced by law enforcement.

I don't catch more than I can keep. Only thing I'm guilty of...I do kill some of the Hardheads. They're just so damn frustrating. They're trash fish....So, yes, I am guilty of that, but as far as I'm concerned there's no regulation against killing a Hardhead. ...You know, they'll swallow a hook and you have to cut their mouth out just to get the hook out. You can't use them for bait.... (Interview 8, Local Angler).

Despite the few figurative sour grapes who fish the beach, cleaning up trash and following the regulations are the primary ways in which anglers demonstrate ethical outdoor and fishing behaviors. In many cases, fishermen are aware of why certain regulations have been set on specific fish species, as there is scientific justification for the regulation. Anglers are able to stay informed through membership in various organizations, major events, friends employed by fish and game agencies, magazines, and online fishing forums. These education channels promote and demonstrate ethical fishing practices, such as catch-and-release fishing, without compromising the value and heritage of catching fish for food. As such, people are shifting from subsistence fishing

to catch-and-release fishing, allowing them to continue enjoying the activity and the other experiences that are so closely linked to it.

*(Example 1)* I might [try shark fishing] if I limit out early enough. Sure, I'll catch some bait, cut it up, put it out. Anything edible, I keep and eat. I throw back all the big drum. They generally have worms, so. Anything over about 5 or 6 pounds on the drum I'll throw back. But all the slot fish I keep—the Reds, I keep those. If I catch anything other than a Black tip or a—I think it's a Bull shark—anything other than those two, I'll release them. I would eat those. There's enough of those that I would keep them. Shark meat is good, but they don't reproduce very fast. So rather than keep them, I just release them (Interview 9, Visiting Angler).

*(Example 2)* Conservation...uh...I guess as long as I'm not making a mess of the beach and stuff like that. One day I picked up a bunch of trash, but as far as the fishing goes, if it's a fish I can eat, I would take it home to eat, probably not a shark. I wouldn't kill a shark. No use. I wouldn't eat it, so I wouldn't kill it. I would say pick up the book and read the book and make sure you follow the rules, like size of fish and netting, cast nets and that kind of stuff. I feel fine if I get my permit, follow the rules, keep fish I'm allowed to keep. I feel fine. I haven't met anybody yet that I felt like were cheating the system (Interview 7, Recently Local Angler).

*(Example 3)* I like to eat fish, but I don't keep every fish I catch, even the ones that are legal. Sometimes I don't feel like going home and cleaning fish. So I just, you know, throw them all back. Once and awhile I keep one or two, just enough for dinner for myself. I like to be considered a good steward in the resource and not be wasteful. (*Researcher:* How are you a good steward for the resource and what resources specifically?) Anywhere I fish on the beach, you know, on either side of me, I pick up the trash. And one other thing I pride myself on is people who do come up to me from out of town or out of state, I've made it a point to stop what I'm doing and sit there and talk with them [to help them] gain an appreciation. It's kind of more education (Interview 19, Local Angler).

*(Example 4)* Going back, like when I first started beach fishing, say in the early 90s, it was a different mindset, as far as fishing regulations. It used to be stick a gaff in every fish. It didn't matter what it was. It could have been a Tiger or a Blacktip. I think a lot of that's changed in the last 10-15 years. I mean, everything. The majority of people now are catch-and-release minded, which I think is a great thing. In the future, I think it's only going to be greater. I think it's about education. People need to be aware and respecting the resource, period. Like I said, I think people's attitudes—fisherman, particularly—they're

attitudes have changed drastically over the last decade. And that's a good thing (Interview 14, Local Angler).

Different groups of anglers identify with one another, and are recognized by other anglers, by the ways in which they fish and the conservation practices that they utilize. These groups of fishermen are leaders throughout the Corpus Christi and Texas coastal fishing areas. Choice of fishing equipment and deciding how many/what size fish to keep are examples of the types of decisions anglers make based on their conservation education and fishing ethic.

We use a lot of circle hooks, rather than j-hooks. Well, a J-hook is the old type of fishing hook which a fish could swallow badly and injure himself to where he couldn't be successfully released. [A circle hook] will catch on a corner of a mouth, and thusly allow that fish to be rather quickly and unhurt released. I will allow customers to keep one Blacktip shark per charter, even though the state regs say they can keep one a piece. I won't let them keep one a piece. And I try as hard as I can to carry a message of conservation. I try to make my clients more aware of issues out here and the need for conservation of that resource if they want their children and their grandchildren to be able to utilize it (Interview 12, Local Angler).

Along with the Big Shell Beach Clean-up, many local anglers and leaders in the angling community view Sharkathon, a catch-and-release fishing tournament, and the Big Shell Beach Clean-up as a way to educate the public on appropriate and conservation practices and sustainable fishing practices, at the same time it exposes them to more than just fishing the beach at the PINS. One of the organizers of Sharkathon talks about having to limit the number of participants in 2008 to minimize "strain on the resource:"

My friends and I started Sharkathon...to help people understand the value of releasing the fish and being rewarded significantly for doing so (*Researcher: What do you think the role of Sharkathon is?*) Education. Definitely. To bring

more people-you know, it's kind of an oxymoron, I guess. You bring more people to the beach, so that more fish are released. But in the event, you've still brought more people to the beach, which then causes more strain on the resource, and so on. And so that's why we had to cap the number of people that can be in the tournament, because we don't want just everybody on the planet coming down there at the same time. But definitely education and teaching people how to release fish successfully. And to give them some value in doing so...And each year those folks come and they spend maybe their camping trip for the year down there. They go and hang out with friends and get to experience not only fishing, but wildlife as well (Interview 20, Local Angler).

Local magazines, word-of-mouth, online fishing forums, and major events have made the catch-and-release world of fishing an iconic and popular movement. One angler talks about the importance of the internet and word-of-mouth in promoting conservation, along with events like Sharkathon, and compares the old generation of fishing to the modern, technology-oriented generation of anglers:

Word of mouth is probably the biggest defense than anything. Preaching conservation through the internet and through your friends and through everybody else....If you put it on the internet, preach it that way, thousands of people. Sharkathon has a huge, huge impact. It's catch-photo-release. We're using modern technology now, because we're in a modern age. And all these old-timers, they're going to have to go and get a camera and start using this new-fangled thing called a computer and start logging their fish that way, through photos, instead of through mounts and through jaws. Our trophy's now are pictures. You don't need to kill these sharks anymore, or fish (Interview 18, Local Angler).

Many anglers at the PINS, as seen above, regulate their own fishing behaviors and have developed conservation practices of their own in order to protect the beach. These behaviors and practices are passed down generationally from parents to children. This knowledge is also transferred between social circles and from local leaders and fishing guides to anyone who may be interested in fishing or the outdoors through events, magazines, newspapers, and the internet. Because they consider the PINS a



special place, and desire their children to be able to have the same experiences on the PINS, they seek to protect and take care of the PINS.

Their person values and personal conservation mission as a user group are similar and related to the values and mission of the National Park Service. Today, they seek to prove to the park that they are defenders of the beach and that they can be valuable assets to the park as educators and promoters of conservation on the beach at the PINS. They do this because of certain issues and concerns that challenge their ability to experience the PINS as described in this chapter. Chapter V will address the issues and concerns that have initiated such fervent and desperate efforts.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANGLERS' ISSUES AND CONCERNS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter IV introduced to the reader the ways in which the beach at Padre Island National Seashore is meaningful to the anglers, in addition to the types of experiences it enables them to have. Had Padre Island never fallen under the protection of the National Park Service, it is likely that it would have either become developed with condominiums and businesses or it may have fallen under private ownership, along with the greater than 90% of Texas. While it remains a park for the public, the National Park Service is charged with managing and protecting its natural resources, while providing an experience for the visitors to the National Seashore.

Through repeated experiences at the PINS, long-time anglers have developed a sense of ownership, and consequential guardianship, over the natural resources of Padre Island. These feelings apply especially to the beach which is an integral facilitator of their experiences and connection/relationship to the outdoors. At times, this can raise concern for how the beach is being managed by another entity (the NPS), and it raises concern for a desire to be able to participate in decisions affecting angler use of the beach.

Concerns that the anglers have also revolve around safety, increased visitation and other types of visitors, new regulations, and a lack of communication. Inarguably the most critical issues at this juncture are the anglers' worries and fears surrounding a

possible loss of access to the beach. Chapter V serves to discuss the angler relationship with the National Park Service, along with the aforementioned issues and concerns. In response, Chapter VI makes practical suggestions to the National Park Service for addressing current conflict and mitigating an anticipated escalation of opposition.

## 5.2 Anglers Relationships to the National Park Service

When I first consulted with park personnel in regards to conducting this study, the superintendent was curious to see how anglers view the National Park Service and Padre Island National Seashore within the national park system. In many cases, Padre Island was the only exposure to the national parks that anglers had experienced; however, they had a general knowledge of the NPS and shared that the PINS is a unique place within the park system. Those who had previous experiences at other national parks consider it to be just as special as what they described as the monumental parks (e.g. Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, etc.). Furthermore, they are very much aware of the mission of the NPS and have a great appreciation for the role that it plays in providing access to and protecting their sacred place at the PINS.

I haven't seen enough of the National Park System, but I will say, as far as I'm concerned the proximity, I don't think it could be any better. If that were private land down there, you know, you'd never have access down there. I have fished up and down the Texas coast, starting with Mexico basically down in there, all the way up to Louisiana. I fished all up and straight to Louisiana. And, of course, this is one of my favorite spots. And I guess the remoteness of it has a lot to do with it. You can always find a place down there that's not crowded. And you can't always do that now, of course. Just the feeling, you know. Sixty miles of-the longest uninterrupted area in the world (Interview 1, Local Angler).

### 5.2.1 PINS as a Unique Park in the National Park System

As seen in the quote above, the proximity of having a national park so nearby, that provides remoteness, is one theme that emerged constantly when anglers described what they appreciated about the National Park Service. A couple of anglers compared PAIS to other parks within the NPS to which they had been exposed, and the ability to drive and access the PINS is a unique feature of the National Park Service:

*(Researcher: How do you view the PINS within the National Park Service?)*  
Very rare. Very rare. I mean I love the fact that we are able to drive on the national park and you can't really go off-roading in Rocky Mountain National Park, you know, or any other state park. So this is a special park, for sure. I mean we're able to build fires when they say we are. We'll drive and I mean what other park are you able to do that? I mean it's a beach, too. I mean, God...perfect! Perfect (Interview 18, Local Angler).

The PINS is also unique compared to other beaches, according to a visiting angler from San Antonio. He agreed that having access to a remote, lightly visited beach is important, but he also enjoys being able to experience the beach for a small cost and sharing it with people of his choice:

I enjoy the access to the land. I don't have the money to go buy something like this, probably never will. And having the access to it and you can bring other people out and show it to them—I just enjoy it. That's access to big, open expanses of land. Otherwise, I'd have to like a city beach, like Port Aransas where you're parking with everybody else. Being on a beach with everybody else, or having to pay to go somewhere that's not like here where you have to get a pass, but you've got huge expanses of open land. It's remote. It's relatively unchanged. That's what I enjoy about it (Interview 9, Visiting Angler).

One local angler had spent a number of years in Florida, where he said access was often limited on the beaches, and there were so many beaches that had been developed. He appreciates the role of the National Park Service in keeping the PINS

wild and undeveloped, features he values in a beach he chooses to experience over others:

And so that was a large decision of why I moved back [to Texas], because we have places like the Seashore. Federally protected, you know. There's been a lot of development and other stuff that goes on up here on the upper end on the sea wall on Closed Beaches. That area kind of feels spoiled. Down there at the Seashore, we all know there's not going to be anything developed—there's not going to be condos lining the dunes down there. And so that's kind of like the last great frontier. And the fact that it is 60 some odd miles just after you hit the asphalt...go for it. And it's really wild; there's nothing on it (Interview 13, Local Angler).

### **5.2.2 Anglers' Feelings Towards the National Park Service**

Because of their experience at the PINS and other outdoor and national parks, anglers are very familiar with what national parks are intended to provide for visitors and the role that they play in local communities. In general, national parks provide a place for people to recreate in ways that are alternative to popular culture today, and to select from the diversity of environments the NPS manages. Furthermore, one angler described how national parks are largely successful at providing such experiences and maintaining their parks and facilities accordingly:

It's also extremely important for—people need an outlet, they need recreation. And for those of us that would actually prefer to go outside and do something other than living vicariously or being entertained by characters in the idiot box, which a little is okay—we watch T.V., too, but you need a place to go. Some people would prefer the mountains. Some people would prefer the beach. But it's important that everybody have some amount of access. The National Park Service seems to do a good job of that. When I was at Grand Canyon and Zion, those all seem to be well-run, well-maintained, seems like they're doing a good job (Interview 3, Local Angler).

One angler recognized and described the importance of national parks, not just in terms of protecting habitat and wildlife, but also in terms of education in local and surrounding communities, and the value of promoting the park in order to subsequently promote and recruit public support of conserving natural areas.

It's a different environment. You've got mountain national parks. I've been to Big Bend. You've got rock national parks. You've got water national parks. This is, actually, I think as, if not more, diverse than any of those parks. Most people see it as sand and water and grasses. The wildlife that is there is just so abundant. It is imperative that it is maintained. And I don't think there's any individual or business or private enterprise that can do what the government can do to protect the national parks. So I feel that it is imperative that we have a national park system to maintain those parks. And pay those park employees properly. And I do see a lot of your park staff as teachers. They're eager to learn. And you do get teachers here. The park staff all are educators. People don't have a clue that live here what is out there, and it's up to your park staff to educate these people (Interview 11, Local Angler).

While the National Park Service is acknowledged by community members as an important tool in educating the community of Corpus Christi and visitors in ways to help protect their beach, one long-time fisherman who works to collaborate between the park and local anglers shared:

[The NPS] move[s] [park rangers] around a lot. They move them into a lot of very diverse areas, from one assignment to the other. It can take decades to really get a handle on any particular ecosystem. They've got two to three years in a location and then they're in Montana. And then maybe they're on the east coast somewhere, and it never gives them the chance to really master that location, but also to get that spiritual feeling that the long-time user does (Interview 12, Local Angler).

The following sections include and describe other prevalent issues and concerns facing the anglers who fish the beach at the PINS.

## 5.3 Safety and Changes at the PINS

### 5.3.1 Safety Issues

While the trip down island invokes such positive feelings as serenity and enjoyment, the respondents in this study expressed a concern for the safety of themselves and their families while they were down island, especially at night when there is no presence from NPS law enforcement and no ability to contact emergency services. The Department of Homeland Security has recently required that all national parks bordering Mexico have security cameras at their entrance station to better monitor illegal activity, including the trafficking of drugs and illegal immigration. Some anglers have shared stories with me about their encounters with such illegal activity and that they have reported such happenings to the park. Other anglers remain apprehensive during their trips to the PINS because of the latter examples and because of other crimes that occur at the park:

I feel a little unsafe at times. I hear about the stories of the illegals walking up the beach. I hear the stories of the drugs coming on the beach. I think they've done a fine job recently by having the cameras at the entrance. It's been a long time [since I have been]in and out of Bird Island, both windsurfing and fishing and taking my children. I've had my vehicle broken into a number of times. Maybe it's just getting older. In the past you really didn't think those things would happen, but some of those stories I've heard over the years on the true beach part of it, I've been a little concerned about that, so that's something I'd like to see PINS work on. And I think they're doing it, actually. I haven't heard as much recently. I do feel that you're always going to be watching what's going on around down there. You need to be real careful (Interview 11, Local Angler).

Many other anglers shared these concerns and offered their opinions for how these matters could be addressed by the park. Suggestions included NPS patrols at night, partnering with other law enforcement agencies to help cover and patrol the beach,

and keeping the public aware of occurrences on the beach and what the NPS is doing to deal with such activities.

The other major concern relating to safety down island, especially from anglers with families, was a lack of communication for responding to emergencies, if the park is unable to provide more patrols down island. Along the lines of communication, many anglers desire improved enforcement of driving regulations and etiquette on the beach. They are mainly concerned that people are unaware of the driving regulations, because they are unfamiliar with driving on the beach altogether. They are further concerned with people driving too fast and irresponsibly near camps and families recreating on the beach:

In Texas, the right-of-way is above the water line. Another 50 feet above that is drivable space. See, what happens is guys come down and park their car next to the water and you can't get by. You have to go up the wall again and a lot of times you got to go through sand and get stuck. And people don't know that that's the right-of-way. And lot of times it's ignorance on their part, but there have been some real confrontations down there (Interview 1, Local Angler).

### **5.3.2 Changes at the PINS**

Anglers, as observers, are keen to notice changes when they affect how they are using or experiencing the beach. Observations in fishery drop-offs continue to be a concern for anglers, which the anglers attribute largely to global climate change and commercial fishing practices. While a strong conservation ethic, discussed in Chapter IV, is held by many long-time surf anglers at the PINS, they recognize that there are some individuals who fish the PINS who are lacking in conservation education. While recruiting anglers to participate in this study, I did observe examples of such behavior



that concerns anglers who seek to protect natural resources through informed fishing conservation practices.

Another major concern that can affect how anglers enjoy the beach is increased visitation. Anglers share stories of being able to drive to the PINS and not seeing one person around, including park rangers. Today, visitation rates are close to 700,000 and the beaches are becoming increasingly more crowded. Anglers have observed that the high beach section has eroded and dropped in height over the years, and anglers do not know if this is due to storms or increased driving. This will be an important example of how anglers and the scientific community can work with the park to address these and other related issues

The challenges to driving the beach, as discussed in Chapter IV, continue to allow access to the remote and wild areas of the beach to only a few people, limiting inexperienced and unequipped visitors to the first five miles of South Beach, the two-wheel drive section. However, anglers are still concerned for the encroachment of visitors on their now not-so-secret places down island, which may have implications for the serenity, spirituality, and calm that they covet so dearly in the down island stretches of beach.

One angler referred specifically to a potential change that has been considered by the park for mitigating driving impacts on the beach. One option that has been—and continues to be—discussed is paving a road down the center of the island to continue to provide access to the beach, but to leave the beach as a protected nesting area for sea

turtles. In response, this angler is concerned for the encroachment of a different type of visitor other than himself and other anglers who work to protect the beach:

Paving the beach is also unacceptable, because—and this gets into if you don't have four-wheel drive you can't use the beach. That's what makes it great is that not just everybody can go down there in droves, you know. I think if we had a paved road, PINS would die. There's been talk about having a road behind the dune there. We've talked about that, and I think you're just going to see an influx in users that are not the ideal people you want down here. Go out to Packery one day this summer and watch how people behave down there, and you'll notice certain people are throwing every single fish they catch in their bucket or their cooler. No matter what fish it is, how big it is. They have no regard for state laws. I have a feeling that with the road on PINS we're going to have those same people down there. I think the only thing that keeps them out of there is that it is bad driving. It's not easy to get down there, but that's one thing that those of us who really love it love about it. With a road you just get rid of that, you get a different kind of people that you don't want using the beach. I mean it'd be like Surfcats all year. I don't think those are the people that we want on the beach (Interview 10, Local Angler).

In Section 5.4, I will further address management challenges associated with the relationship between driving and endangered species on the beach, along with other challenges and issues that anglers face that threaten their experiences at the PINS.

#### **5.4 Challenged Values and Associated Management Challenges**

When regulations implemented by the National Park Service (NPS) management team contradict or inhibit anglers' experiences or the ways in which they value the park, there is often a public surge of dissent. The anglers view themselves as protectors of the beach, and become frustrated when the NPS fails to recognize and utilize them as partners in protecting and conserving natural resources. Similar contestation has emerged in response to new regulations that were implemented prior to public input and scientific justification and research to inform the regulations. This section will also

discuss in detail the worries, fear, and anger revolving around driving access and rights to the beach, along with a failure to communicate with the park.

#### **5.4.1 Regulations**

Escalating tension has risen in the angling community as a reflection of their disapproval for the lack of scientific justification and public input to inform regulations that have already been implemented. This disapproval has also been expressed during casual conversation with fellow park employees who feel equally uninformed about new regulations and how they are informed and abruptly implemented. Varying opinions surround the appropriateness of the four primary regulations, depending upon how they affect the fishing practices of anglers who use the beach. What is consistent, however, is the resentment felt towards park management in regards to a lack of public input and uninformed policies that seem to have no legitimate basis other than speculation. They are further concerned that the NPS is making regulations for the sake of maintaining consistency in regulations and policies in parks nationwide. As the National Seashore has its own unique environment and user groups, they are concerned that such regulations are not being appropriately modified.

As a park employee, I observed that a determination, rather than a justification, for the various regulations was made public, after the regulations had already been implemented. The determinations were made in response to anglers' vocal disapproval for the regulations, but they still remain scientifically unjustifiable. Furthermore, the determinations remain vague and do not address specific and circumstantial exceptions

that could have been determined appropriate had public input been allowed or had the rules been modified according to information provided by scientific research. The following regulations that have caused such disapproval are listed in the table below:

**Table 6. PAIS Beach User Regulations**

<b>Regulation</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Determination</b>
Wildlife Protection 2.2(e)(i)	This park is closed to the use of artificial light for the viewing of wildlife. This includes any spotlights, flood lights, homemade or purchased light poles with more than one light, or any type of lighting systems that would disrupt or affect the wildlife, (E.g. bird, fish and turtle species) and the dark night sky.	This order is intended to provide a measure of protection to wildlife and fish species which may be subject to unlawful taking during other than lawful hunting hours or by persons who are otherwise engaged in unlawful wildlife activities. It is also intended to assure that the natural habits or activities of animals are not adversely affected while being artificially illuminated nor that animals be unduly harassed, which may affect feeding, resting, or mating. The proliferation of poor quality outdoor lighting is the principle threat to the night sky. Reducing the number of multiple lighting systems will allow for activities focused on public enjoyment of dark skies.
Fishing 2.3(d)(1)	The number of fishing poles is limited to 6 per person. All fishing poles and lines will be maintained at the surf's edge.	Restricting the number of fishing poles per person helps ensure that fish populations are not negatively impacted as a result of increased fishing pressure. Regulating the location of the fishing poles and number of poles will improve visitor safety.
Fishing 2.3(d)(1)(6)	Digging for bait is illegal (this includes the use of sand pumps for ghost shrimp).	Individuals taking non-game baitfish for bait purposes does not significantly impact species populations. Restricting the size of nets used for gathering baitfish discourages those who would harvest baitfish for commercial purpose, which could impact species populations.
Seasonal Speed Limit Reduction	The speed limit for the entire length of the beach is 15 miles per hour from April 1 through July 31.	The Kemp's ridley turtles nest during this time of year, and if you are not paying attention, you may miss the opportunity to witness a nesting event and to provide for the safety of visitors.

The regulations listed in Table 6 (National Park Service 2008b) were accessed from the PAIS Park Management webpage. The regulation regarding the seasonal speed reduction was recently implemented and has not yet be included in the Superintendent's Compendium, which features a list of all PAIS regulations. This particular regulation has driven such a force of opposition towards park management in recent months, because, to the anglers, this regulation represents another step in park management towards closure of the beach to driving.

This regulation is an indirect reflection of the park management's views towards beach driving. As stated by Donna Shaver, the Chief of the Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery, in the Spring 2009 edition of the PAIS Gulf Breeze newspaper, beach driving causes undetected turtle eggs to perish, due to crushing from passing vehicles on the beach:

Each year, a few nests go undetected at egg laying and are found while hatching by visitors. Unfortunately, at many of these sites, mortality has occurred due to predation of eggs or hatchlings, and crushing of hatchlings by passing vehicles (Shaver 2009).

There is no reference to previously conducted research that can prove this statistic, and no present effort exists to locate nests that have not been previously detected to assess the survival rate of the eggs within those nests. Further, should a nest be located during such a study, one would have to assume the ratio of eggs consumed by predators versus those crushed by passing vehicles. Instead, this quote serves as a way to sway public opinion and gain support of the turtle hatchlings and opinions against driving on the beach. Park management should be aware that these kinds of statements

and assumptions are certain to arouse vocal dissent from the public towards not the endangered sea turtle, but the management of Padre Island National Seashore.

#### 5.4.2 Who/What Has “Rights” to the Beach?

The ability to drive on the beach is absolutely fundamental to the way in which anglers experience the PINS, because it provides access to the undeveloped and remote locations that provide for the coveted sense of serenity, escape, and freedom that they seek. The ability to drive on the beach is how many individuals define their sense of having a “right” to the beach. Their right to drive on the beach also, therefore, facilitates their right to experience the beach in the ways in which they have a tradition of relating to and using it.

Convenience is a major player in the tradition of driving on the beach. One angler who talks about the convenience of driving agrees that it provides access to the beach. He recently moved to the area from North Carolina and grew up fishing the beaches of New Jersey, where driving on the beach is prohibited. His background is not as closely tied to beach driving, therefore, as local anglers who have experienced a tradition of driving on the beach. However, he shares that he would not otherwise have access to the beach:

I do like to drive on the beach. It does make everything easier. But, I think it takes away the natural part of it when there's traffic all the time. The further I got down into the park, though, it was more quiet, which was nice. I would never go there if I couldn't drive on the beach, so that's nice (Interview 7, Recently Local Angler).

His opinions regarding the abundance of traffic is shared with long time anglers who have seen their beach go from being vastly untraveled to an increased presence of vehicles. He also recognized the benefits of travelling further down island in his vehicle for the purposes of accessing those less-frequently visited parts, where he could experience serenity and escape from the crowds. One local angler shared that driving on the beach for him allows convenient access to the PINS as a one-of-a-kind beach:

It's the last free beach in the U.S., as far as I know. I mean, for things like this for beach fishermen. I mean, there are places that I know in Delaware, where it's about \$300-400 for a beach permit where you can actually drive on the beach, but they're really rare, really hard to find. It's just such a populated area of the country, they don't want people getting all over there. So it would just be nice not to have to lug everything around, you know. Places like Florida and all that, you're running all your gear over sand dunes if you're going to be fishing on the beach. And the sand [at the PINS] is a lot different. The sand is a little more conducive [to driving] just because of the way it's packed and all that (Interview 16, Local Angler).

Driving on the beach also provides opportunities to experience the beach in more ways than fishing. A winter Texan, newly experiencing driving on the beach explained that his ability to drive on the beach had alerted him to his new-found interest in fishing on the beach. Following the interview, this individual shared that he was particularly keen on returning solely for the purposes of fishing the beach, because he does not know of any other place like the PINS:

Driving on the beach, that's really the best part. [Driving] kind of allows you to stay on the beach. Just driving and camping on the beach, that's the main feature. I don't know any place in the United States where you can do it. I just love to fish the beach now (Interview 4, Winter Texan).

Two additional reasons that anglers enjoy driving the beach are: (1) access to observing fishing locations and (2) escape from the crowds. The PINS is unique in that

fishermen are able to catch off-shore game fish from the beach, instead of having to take a boat off-shore, an expensive hobby. From the beach, fishermen can identify a good fishing spot by driving up and down the beach. For example, from their vehicle they can locate fish and birds frenzying or pockets, referred to as a “pinch” or a “hole” in which fish congregate in a sandbar-enclosed section of surf waters against the beach.

To me, the importance of driving on the beach is such that I don't go to beaches that I can't drive on because I am bored to tears. I've been to the Florida beaches and the Florida beaches are pristine, nice and white, but I'm on that beach for about an hour and I'm off it for the rest of the time. Mainly because I like to drive up and down, seeing number one where to fish and number two to get away from people (Interview 19, Local Angler).

Similarly, another angler explained that the rights to drive on the beach are applicable throughout the whole Texas coast. He defines the right to drive on the beach as a freedom and luxury to be able to experience the beach.

Recall from Chapter III that the Kemp's ridley sea turtle is an endangered species that nests on the beach between late April and early August. According to anglers who fish the PINS, this is also the best time to fish the surf. While the anglers largely support the turtle program, they worry that increasing numbers of sea turtles nesting on the beach will eventually lead to closures of driving on the beach, because they are concerned that the park will give priority to the turtles' right to the beach. One local graduate student and long-time angler explained that both people and turtles should have a right to the beach, but those who harm the beach with willful intention should be judged separately. He further defines driving the beach at the PINS as a *privilege* because the beach there falls under federal jurisdiction, not state jurisdiction. Under Texas state law, the Texas Open Beaches Act, the public has the *right* to drive on the beach. This is a transitioning



mindset, though, and is not widely held throughout the fishing community. As can be recalled from Chapter III, anglers have had a history of fishing *and* driving on the beach prior to its designation as a National Seashore, and NPS management should be sensitive to this history and tradition in order to soften the transition (to be further discussed in Chapter VI):

A lot of people believe that the turtle has first rights. I think we all have equal rights. I'm not saying people have any more right to the beach than the turtle does, but I also don't think the turtle's got more right than we do. And mostly I say that for that turtle because he never historically nested there, from what I've read. But I've talked to lots of people, I've read about everything I can, and what they say is historically Mexico and Florida are the breeding sites for the Kemp's ridley. So I disagree with some people. They believe that the turtle has rights to that beach over us. I don't believe that. As a national park, we all have to understand that it's a privilege to drive on the beach. Our public beaches, we have a right to them. That's the Texas Open Beaches Act. PINS doesn't fall under the Texas Open Beaches Act because it's a federal beach, so I think it's important to understand that it's a privilege to use PINS; it's not our right to go out there. They could take that privilege from us. It's within the authority of the park service to do that. If they see that it's not sustainable or economical—if they don't have the funds to keep it open, they could do that, and they'd be within their rights of doing it, because it's a privilege for us to use the federal park service. Now, obviously, if you abuse it, [you have] no right to the beach in my opinion because [you] don't protect the resource.

In the above quote, the angler further points out that some people in the angling community share the opinion that the Kemp's ridley is an introduced species, not a native species. As an interpreter, I was told that the Kemp's ridley has a history of having nested at Padre Island, but people do not know to what extent they nested on the beaches. At Rancho Nuevo in Tamaulipas, Mexico, the primary nesting beach of the Kemp's ridley, numbers of nesting turtles overshadow the nesting trends at Padre Island. At present, figures of worldwide nesting statistics are not made known by the National Park Service, nor has there been made publicly known an established goal for the

number of nesting sea turtles that would deem the population healthy and re-established. This is a source of distrust towards the NPS felt by a part of the fishing community of the PINS, and has implications for a need for improved communication and information sharing between PAIS and the public.

### **5.5 Issues of Communication and Inclusion**

The angling community of the PINS has a deep-seeded desire to assist PAIS with community education, along with protection and conservation of natural resources at the PINS. Further, they want the park to be able to understand and accept the anglers as valuable resources to the NPS and to the PINS so that they will not be forced away from their beach.

Anglers record data in their journals, local magazines, newspapers, and online fishing reports and forums. They use these medium as mechanisms for information sharing, and because they are so tightly related to the PINS, they want PAIS management to recognize the value of this information. They also want PAIS to utilize these media streams as ways to share information not only amongst themselves, but for bridging the communication gap between the anglers and the park, as well. Without communication between the park and anglers, there is no opportunity for anglers to give input to regulations before they are implemented. One angler describes the importance of remaining informed and having a communication link between the park and angling community in regards to the regulations listed in the previous section. They desire

opportunities to show PAIS management that they understand their perspective on certain issues, but that there are other perspectives worth considering:

What really got people last year, some new policy came out and no one knew anything about it. And all of a sudden, guys are starting to get ticketed for things by the rangers, things that were legal in the past but are not. The spotlight thing's a big deal. If you've ever tried to pull in a 12-foot shark at one in the morning without a light, you understand, it's not easy. To get a four-foot shark in the dark without a light is not easy. And I understand why they did that with the spotlights. What they're saying is you cannot use a spotlight to draw in fish. And that makes sense, and that's how a lot of our trout disappeared. These guys would set up a big light and they would catch shrimp and they would catch trout all night long at that light, and they'd keep them all. That's-I understand that. But the shark fishing light falls under that category. You don't leave the light on the whole time. The light is on whenever you need to see what you're doing. But because it is technically a spotlight, it's not allowed. I feel like that's probably something that should have been addressed with the public first. We just feel like we're being left in the dark by the Feds as if they're really not interested in what we think. They've got an idea for what they want for the park and that's what they're going to do, regardless of what we think. And I was so excited to hear of somebody doing something like [your research], you know, in hopes to increase communication between the users and the Feds. These surf guys, when they say "Fed" that's negative. They're not using that in a good way. And it mostly comes from this feeling [the Feds are] letting us use the park, but they're really not asking us how to manage it. We're the ones that are down there. We know what's going on (Interview 10, Local Angler).

At present, distrust of the actions of NPS management surrounding the beach at the PINS is such that anglers are concerned that PAIS may not want their angler involvement, and they may not want an angler presence at the National Seashore:

I don't know if [PAIS management] is working with us or against us, to be honest. I sometimes feel that stuff the Park Service is doing might be to have the park as a place for them. You know? I mean, it's like no one's there and sometimes I feel like that. I love the personnel, the ones I know. The ones that are on the beach, we've got a great relationship with them. You know, they all stop and we talk and we're always sharing information. I consider myself one of the eyes of the beach for them, but there is this upper level that does scare me (Interview 6, Local Angler).

Fear and worry are translating to anger and backlash from the angling community. Issues experienced by the anglers at the PINS, particularly those concerning safety, uninformed regulations, and lack of communication and public input, will be important for PAIS management to consider should they choose to improve relations between the park and anglers. Chapter VI will address these issues and provide suggestions for the park in mitigating tension and conflict, while considering the values held by the user group and the significant relationships that exist between the beach at the PINS and the anglers.

## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY: STUDY IMPLICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT DIRECTIONS

#### 6.1 Review of Research Results

Chapter IV illustrated the ways the beach at Padre Island National Seashore holds importance to those who fish it. Anglers experience a sense of belonging, familiarity, and identity with the PINS, along with an attachment to this place because of the types of experiences and relationships they have there. Their sense of the specialness of this place, the PINS, has been well-established by a long history of use of the beach on Padre Island by anglers. Their familiarity to it is enhanced by this longevity and their knowledge base that has built from their interactions with the beach at the PINS (see Appleyard 1969). A common theme that ran through the interviews was their perception of the PINS as remote, undeveloped, and wild, yet accessible due to the ability to drive on the beach and go down island (which added to the uniqueness of the place, making it special to them). Their love of fishing (which for many could be traced back to childhood), their love of fishing at the PINS, and the special characteristics of the PINS are all interwoven aspects of the total value and experience this place. In addition to their personal feelings about the PINS as Chapter IV shows, also significant is the multi-generational tradition and heritage of anglers having experienced the beach with their families and friends. When individuals experience a place socially with family and friends, there is an even more deeply rooted sense of attachment to that place (Guest and Lee, 1983), described by anglers as a sense of “connection” or “belonging.”

At the same time, the PINS holds other meanings for the anglers beyond their deep personal feelings about the place itself and the social relationships that added further to making it special to them. They value also the ecosystems and habitats that constitute the PINS, and felt strongly about conservation issues. While access was extremely important and losing it a strong concern, it appears that this issue is also connected to their perceptions of how the National Parks Service at the PINS institutes regulations. In many instances, as discussed in Chapter V, they felt that decisions related to turtle nesting (for example) and potential beach closure were not made on the basis of science. Their feelings about park management do not involve the park employees they interact with regularly and are on good terms with on the beach. It is their perception of the management of the park (particularly with respect to how regulations are created and implemented) and their fears about possible future loss of access that seem to be a major source of tension between the anglers and the park managers. This aspect is addressed in greater detail later in this chapter, with respect to practical suggestions on managing the relationship between the NPS and the anglers.

Anglers perceive the PINS as a special place to which they belong. It is like a home to some, and to many others it is like a church space, spiritual and serene. Such intangible values as heritage and spirituality that anglers associate with the beach at the PINS are not obvious, and require being a part of a cultural group that belongs to the PINS. It also requires taking the time to ask and understand these values, as has been attempted in this thesis. National parks, such as Mount Rushmore or Devil's Tower hold spiritual and cultural significance to Native American groups. Traditions, cultural

practices, and beliefs exist and are experienced because of the existence of those natural landmarks. The beach at the PINS has long been exalted as a sacred place by anglers and they continue to experience it for those intangible reasons.

Fishing and driving on the beach at the PINS is a way of not only experiencing the PINS, but a way of being at the PINS. These activities help to facilitate the intangible values that are experienced at the PINS, and they help to reinforce tradition and a heritage of fishing on the beach. People seek to protect natural places of cultural spiritual significance (Taylor and Geffen 2003), and outsider (e.g., National Park Service) efforts to protect such places can be often intertwined with dispute. For example, should a paved road be constructed to cut through the center of island or the beach be closed to driving, anglers with their long-standing history of fishing and driving on the beach would be forced to experience the PINS outside of their cultural boundaries. Instead, they would be forced to become tourists of the National Seashore and consequently forced from their “home” and “church” as they know it.

While national parks are charged with protecting natural *and* cultural resources as tourist destinations, it can be difficult to recognize certain cultural resources among a visitor population. When management decisions threaten or damage any of the above relationships to a place, anger as a consequence of fear and worry is heard by management. When park management remains uninformed of the significance of a place to a group of people, misunderstandings and miscommunications can occur. The importance of the park to the public has to be viewed in terms of both culture and conservation. Based on the information presented in Chapters IV and V, it is argued that

park management must view the PINS as (1) a cultural resource, (2) a knowledge database, (3) as a place of community education, and (4) a special place to which the NPS serves as protector of the PINS. The rest of this chapter, therefore, provides suggestions for managing and mitigating conflict between PAIS and the surf anglers, in order to begin acknowledging the anglers as an important and valuable visitor and user group at the PINS.

## **6.2 Addressing Angler Issues and Concerns**

Environmentally sensitive tourist destinations with diverse interests and values associated with them are inclined to involve some level of conflict among stakeholders when one groups' interests or values are not fulfilled or acknowledged during decision-making processes (Jamal 2004). As such, it is important for PAIS management to understand the values and meanings ascribed to PAIS by beach anglers and park employees. Collaborative processes must ensure adequate representation of "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's purpose (Freeman 1984:52 as cited by Jamal, Stein, and Harper 2002)." In the PAIS domain, the anglers, area residents, NGOs involved in bird, turtle, and park conservation issues, various levels of government, and the NPS itself are important stakeholders.

The captivating stories and illuminating information that were shared by anglers and PAIS employees during this research reveal not only the significance of national parks as places that conserve heritage and culture, but also the challenges faced by communities surrounding national parks and those who are tasked with managing them.



Within the fields of natural resource protection and conflict management, recent literature argues that ecological systems must incorporate a cultural and social dimension for successful management of natural resources (Daniels and Walker 2001; Capitini, Tissot, Carroll, Walsh, and Peck 2004). As shown in Chapter IV, people become attached to places and associate meanings and values to places. Meanings and values of places can differ (and even conflict) between individuals and groups of people who use them. This sometimes creates political challenges in determining how places should be used, especially in tourist destinations. Even the mission of national parks which is “to *preserve and protect* natural resources *for the enjoyment* of future generations,” can be confusing for a few reasons: (1) *Preservation* refers to environmental protection through the prohibition of human use; and (2) Different types of users enjoy the outdoors in varying ways; and (3) National parks are protecting a natural area *for* the public, yet there exists concern that a single species can compromise the public’s use of the area.

Managers of protected areas, such as PAIS, are presented with a growing number of challenges as they seek to create a balance between visitation to protected areas and maintaining ecological integrity (Jamal, Stein, and Harper 2002). Since the conception of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916, the NPS has been charged with

...conserv[ing] the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life 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 (NPS 2008c).

The data revealed by surf anglers sheds light on numerous issues surrounding the National Seashore. Mainly, the issues stem from regulations and policies that interfere with the ways in which long-time anglers value and experience the beach. Additionally,

the regulations that have recently been enforced by the management at PAIS seem to be implemented with no prior scientific justification or public input. As such, dissent has been expressed by the anglers, at times in the form of anger that stems from fear and worry that their ability to drive and access the beach will be affected by current management. This anger, in some cases, has resulted in some of the anglers' lack of trust and respect for the current management and law enforcement, not the National Seashore itself.

In order to address the current level of conflict between the park and the anglers, in addition to mitigating future conflict, my recommendations include consulting the vast body of literature on conflict management and learning from other similar situations in protected areas, including the beach management issues at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. PAIS, along with similar parks, often fail to utilize the resources that most closely surround them. Based on the research conducted in this study, some practical observations and suggestions are offered below to (1) Reinstate public meetings, (2) Utilize moderated roundtable discussion techniques at public meetings, and (3) Involve the scientific community, stakeholder groups, and angler knowledge in informing decisions.

### **6.2.1 Communication and Public Outreach**

PAIS management is seeking to better understand their visitors in order to help strengthen the relationship between the park and its users, many of whom originate in surrounding communities. Employees from numerous PAIS divisions, including

management, Science and Natural Resources and Sea Turtle Science and Recovery, and Interpretation and Education believe that strengthening relationships with nearby communities will help PAIS to raise awareness of natural resource-based concerns at PAIS, ultimately resulting in increased community stewardship.

Natural resource managers conduct environmental assessments to determine the recreational carrying capacity—“the level of recreational use an area can withstand while providing a sustained quality of recreation” (Wagar 1964, as cited by Symmonds, Hammitt, and Quisenberry 2000:549)—of their parks. But, national parks continue to struggle to incorporate the social and cultural dimensions of measuring recreational carrying capacity due to limited funding and staffing, as well as a lack of guidance for design[ing] processes that effectively involve the public (Dalton 2006).

According to Dalton (2006), successful participatory processes include active stakeholder involvement, positive participant interactions, decisions based on complete information, fair decision making, and efficient administration. In order to ensure stakeholder involvement, PAIS needs to work to identify key stakeholders surrounding particular issues. Once the stakeholders are identified, the park must make significant efforts towards making sure they provide a clear avenue for communication and recruit participation in ways that are amenable to the stakeholders, as well as making information easily available and convenient to access. Table 7 outlines a rudimentary list of suggestions for the park to be able to reach the anglers and keeping anglers informed of regulations, park news, and opportunities for recruiting public involvement

in decision-making processes. The following section will address Dalton's other recommendations for successful participatory processes.

**Table 7. Angler Community Outreach Media in Corpus Christi**

<b>Local News Media</b>	<b>Online Media</b>	<b>Local Magazines</b>	<b>Community Media</b>
The Moon	<a href="http://www.extremecoast.com">www.extremecoast.com</a>	Texas Saltwater Fishing	Local bait and tackle shops
Caller Times	<a href="http://corpusfishing.com">http://corpusfishing.com</a>	Saltwater Angler	Kayak & other fishing stores
KIII News	<a href="http://www.breakawayusa.com">www.breakawayusa.com</a>	Texas Outdoors	Corpus Christi CVB
			CBBEP
			TPWD
			Coastal Conservation Association

### **6.2.2 Potential Conflict Management Strategies**

Interviews with not only anglers, but also former and current PAIS employees, and employees at the CBBEP have suggested that decisions and policies are not being made with adequate information on anglers' direct impacts on the resource, nor have they taken into consideration angler's cultural and historic relationships (experience and use) with the beach at PAIS, or the values, meanings, and memories that different groups of visitors associate with the beach. These informants have shared that some anglers continue to have negative feelings and attitudes towards the park management. As or when individual park divisions see a need for new regulations, the park management team should work together to (1) Compile complete information scientifically justifying why a regulation is thought to be needed, (2) Conduct an analysis of the implications

(environmental, social, and cultural) of implementing a specific regulation, (3) Identify stakeholders who may need to be involved to provide a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the potential implications, and (4) identify appropriate ways of including the public in decision-making processes.

Collaborative meetings involving key stakeholders in the angling community of PAIS can take place in a number of settings and can take a number of approaches. Ideas surrounding collaboration by Daniels and Walker (2001), Jamal and Getz (1995), and Dalton (2006), do not assume that conflict resolution should be the ultimate goal of collaborative processes. Instead, conflict management processes and consensus-based decision making can be means by which effective policies are made and conflict between stakeholder groups is minimized. The important point here is to facilitate face-to-face meetings between the anglers and the NPS to address the specific issues, worries, and concerns identified in Chapter V, including the contentious issue of beach rights and access to drive on the beach.

Jamal, Stein, and Harper (2002) studied roundtable processes surrounding tourism-environmental conflicts and Banff National Park in Canada. They first identified stakeholder groups, which they defined as a “group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s purpose (Freeman 1984:52),” to participate in the multiparty roundtable discussion. Then, they assigned a meeting to ensure that ground rules and interest statements were established and followed. At the roundtable discussion, stakeholders developed a shared vision for the Banff-Bow Valley. During tourism-environmental conflicts that ensue in protected

areas, focusing on shared visions and values can often be key to successful consensus-based decision making processes.

Meetings between PAIS and the public in the past have been largely unsuccessful, as shared by anglers and two former PAIS chiefs for the Division of Science and Natural Resources Management (DSNRM). One of the DSNRM chiefs had explained that there was no particular reason that the park had selected six fishing rods for the regulation and that it was an arbitrary number they had selected. Such regulations are immediately recognized by those who are affected by that and other regulations as being uninformed by science and completely unjustifiable.

The other chief had emphasized that the park was making efforts to educate the anglers. As shown in Chapter IV, many anglers feel they are more familiar with the natural resource and conservation issues on the island than park employees, and do not wish for park rangers with a two-year familiarity with the island to educate them about the island with which they have spent a lifetime educating themselves. However, there are still some anglers, and other visitors, who do not have a well-informed conservation ethic. In such situations, it may benefit the park to utilize the angler group to promote conservation by participating in collaborative education efforts. PAIS-public relations could greatly benefit by the park consulting with the anglers on the best ways to promote conservation through education and to even acknowledge and utilize anglers themselves as community educators. Such actions may have holistically positive results that benefit both the natural resources on the beach help the anglers to feel welcome, appreciated, and valued as an asset by PAIS management.

Dalton sought to understand participants' perspectives of successful participatory processes, and determined in her study that "conflicting perspectives of participants, exhaustive technical details, and lack of fairness promote negative views towards a process (p. 353)." One angler shared that past meetings with PAIS were challenging because it was difficult to speak to a large entity like the National Park Service, especially when it seemed as though the park had already made its decision, and there were no opportunities for discussion. Even still, other anglers said that those meetings were preferable to the limited communication and no PAIS public outreach that exists at present. If they exist, transcriptions or notes from previous public meetings should be reviewed and analyzed to identify positive and negative features that could help to improve future meetings.

Should conflict management efforts be implemented, it is recommended that the park monitor participants' attitudes towards the selected process to develop and improve conflict management strategies. In order to improve the methods that have been formerly used by PAIS management to present new policies and regulations, the park may benefit by employing a conflict management specialist or meeting moderators on an "as-needed" basis. Current positions exist in the federal hiring system, and include responsibilities, such as (1) Creating conflict management methods; (2) Identifying, communicating with, and maintaining relationships with stakeholder groups; (3) Evaluating conflict management processes; and (4) Working with other park divisions in developing effective ways to promote conservation through user and community-wide education.

### 6.3 Concluding Comments

While conflicts between communities and national parks can be complicated and frustrating, parks such as Padre Island National Seashore should embrace the heritage and close-knit communities that surround them. Within these communities are people who have an intrinsic appreciation for the national parks which serve to protect areas that harbor such great meaning to their identities and shape their values. Communities with a heritage of use in such protected areas present myriad opportunities for parks to establish solidarity between themselves and the community. This solidarity, however, is not possible without inclusion of community input and acknowledgement of the community's stake in the protected area.

Diverse efforts for promoting conservation through education at the National Seashore have been minimally explored, with potential limitless opportunities existing. With an established Interpretation and Education division, the park's role in the community should be visible and evident to members of the community. This research has revealed that Padre Island has been a learning environment for themselves, their friends, and their families. Their fear for their ability to continue accessing the National Seashore as the sea turtle recovery program continues to grow has implications for such education opportunities and other valuable experiences that they have at Padre Island. Thus, it is imperative that PAIS management utilize the unity that exists among the Padre Island angling family and their ability to collaborate and connect to the surrounding Corpus Christi and other Texas communities. Their suggestions to the park have the potential to be invaluable.



In conclusion, the types of intangible human-environment relationships summarized above, as by Camargo, Lane, and Jamal (2008) are oftentimes the most difficult to include in management of protected natural areas. To recall, such relationships include subsistence, places, heritage, rituals/health, spiritual, values/beliefs/virtues, ancestral/community relationships, and knowledge. These relationships were discussed in the context of the PINS surf anglers in Chapter IV. Defining the ways in which anglers relate to and experience the beach at the PINS is significant and critical to explaining why they have the issues and concerns that were described in Chapter V. Chapter VI has offered some practical directions for managing some of the issues and tensions between park management and the angling community. By including anglers and identifying a shared mission and values, the PAIS management team will be following its own mission to the utmost extent. As an infinitely rewarding result, acknowledging value in the angling community and empowering them to participate, there is great potential for popularizing stewardship and conservation for Padre Island National Seashore, its natural resources, and generations of anglers to come.

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## APPENDIX

### Padre Island National Seashore Questionnaire

**Please fill in or check the appropriate answer.**

**1. How long are you staying on the beach during this visit?**

Just Today       One       Two       Three       \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please  
Night      Nights      Nights      specify number of nights)

**2. Who did you come to Padre Island National Seashore (PAIS) with during this stay? (Check all that apply)**

Spouse/Partner       Children       Relatives       Friends       Self       Other \_\_\_\_\_   
(please specify)

**3. Where are you staying at during this visit to PAIS?**

Camping on South Beach       Camping on North Beach       Camping at Malaquite  
Campground

Camping at Bird Island Basin       Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Including this visit, how many times have you visited PAIS?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. What are the main reasons for your visit to PAIS (Rank the following reasons with 1 being the most important, 2 being the next most important, etc.)**

Camping \_\_\_\_\_      Fishing \_\_\_\_\_      Wildlife Watching \_\_\_\_\_

Rest and Relaxation \_\_\_\_\_      Walking \_\_\_\_\_      Driving \_\_\_\_\_

Be with Family and Friends \_\_\_\_\_      Other (please specify)

**6. How do you identify yourself?**

**7. In what year were you born?** \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Where are you visiting from?** \_\_\_\_\_

**9. If you are from the U.S., what is your home zip code?** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

Some High School  High School  Some University  University   
Some Graduate School  Graduate School

**11. What is your primary occupation?**

Professional  Technical  Managerial  Clerical  Sales

Laborer  Craftsman  Military  Student  Not Working

**12. Gender:** Female  Male **13. How satisfied are you with your overall visit to PAIS?**

1 2 3 4 5  
Totally unsatisfied Unsatisfied Neutral Satisfied Totally Satisfied

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your participation is greatly appreciated!**



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