

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# **SITE ASSESSMENT**

## INTRODUCTION

In June 1945, Virginia Beach was established in response to a direct action protest held in May 1945 at Baker's Haulover Beach, where Miami activist Judge Lawson Thomas staged a "wade-in" to demand access for African Americans to the county's whites-only beaches. Establishment of the "colored" beach was a significant early victory in the civil rights movement and the beach park served as a cherished amenity to the community until the park was transferred to the City of Miami and closed in 1982. In 2000, citizen protest against plans for development of a private ecotourism resort on the site of the historically significant beach park led to the establishment of the Virginia Key Beach Park Civil Rights Task Force. The Miami City Commission established the Task Force in order to permit the public to participate in identifying an appropriate use of the park property. The Task Force held a public planning charette in which the participants reached consensus on the principles that should guide future development of the park. The Civil Rights Task Force established goals that included historic preservation, commemoration of the park's history, and provision of educational and recreational opportunities. In 2002, the Miami City Commission established the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust to oversee the development of the historic park property and to implement the goals established by the Task Force.

The objective of this Site Assessment is to provide the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust with a general inventory and evaluation of the man-made and natural features of Virginia Key Beach Park. The site assessment is intended to serve as a basis for the preparation of the Master Plan for the park's preservation and future use and development. In 2002, Virginia Key Beach Park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as "a property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of our history." The Designation was in recognition of the property's significance in the areas of Ethnic Heritage, Recreation and Social History and is based on development of the park during the period 1945-53. Features of the park dating from this period of significance, including the park's landscape setting, require preservation in order to retain the National Register designation. The site assessment reflects the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* for documenting the character defining features of a landscape. This methodology provides a basis for evaluation of continuity and change in the landscape and helps to establish the historic significance of existing landscape features. Comparison of existing conditions with historic site plans helps to identify features of significance and integrity that contribute to the historic significance of the landscape. Safeguarding the integrity of these landscape features is a primary objective of the Master Plan. The natural resources of the site are of special significance, both as character defining features of the historic setting and as sensitive and protected natural resources of inherent value. Inventory and evaluation of these resources reflects requirements for cultural landscape evaluation according to the *Secretary's Standards* as well as requirements for natural resource protection, restoration, interpretation and recreational use. This site assessment provides a history of the site and an inventory of the character defining features of the landscape with significance and integrity. The history is drawn from the following sources:

*National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form; Vicki L. Cole and Gary V. Goodwin, Bureau of Historic Preservation, May 2002*  
*An Archeological Survey of the Old County Park Parcel, Virginia Key, Miami, Florida; Jeff Ransom, BA John Beriault, BA. Mark Lance, MA and Robert S. Carr, MS Archeological and Historical Conservancy, September 2001*

*Ecosystem Restoration Report with Draft Environmental Assessment; US Army Corps of Engineers, February 2003*  
*Shoreline Stabilization Report with Draft Environmental Assessment; US Army Corps of Engineers, February 2003*

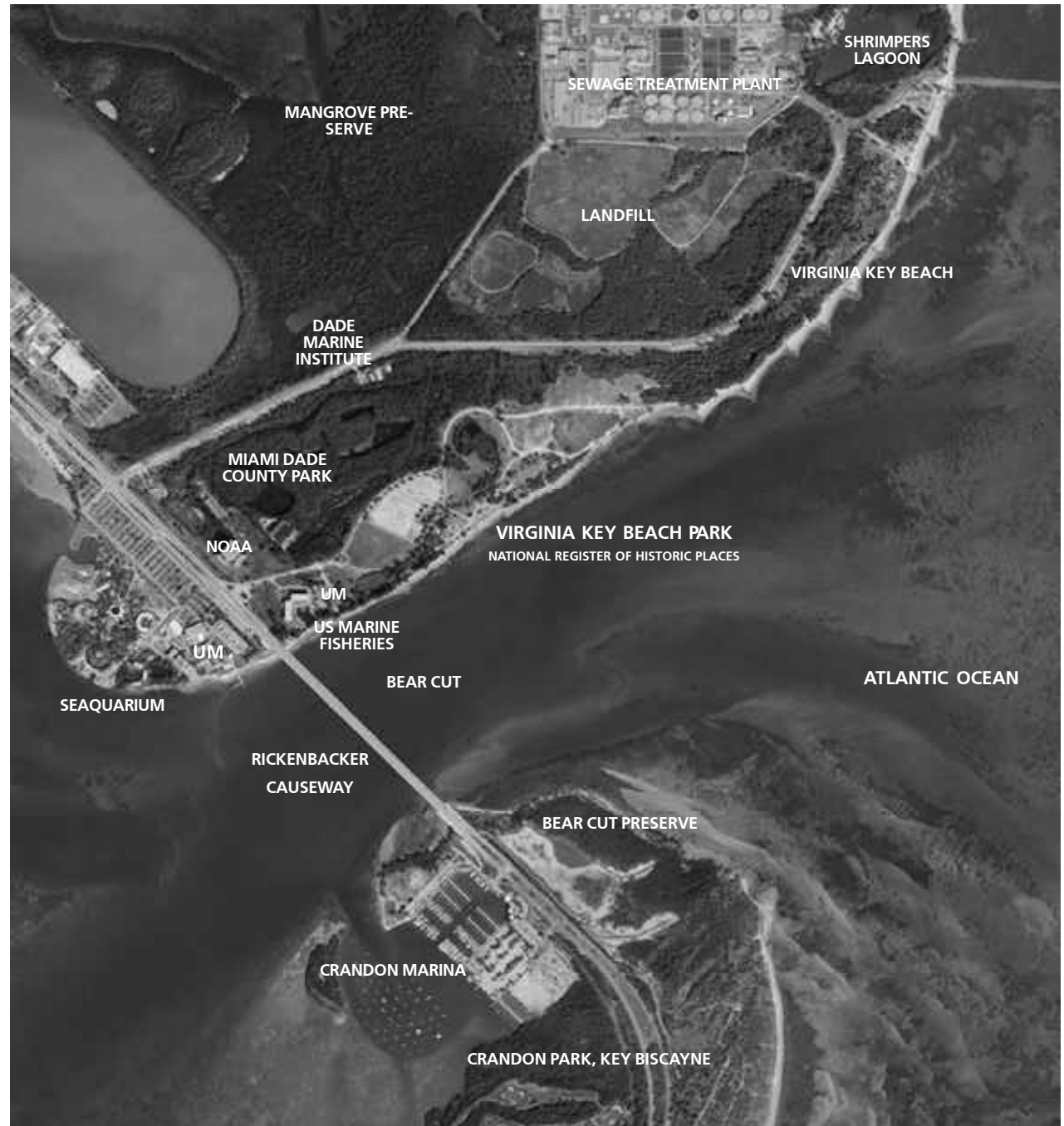
*Key Biscayne - A History of Miami's Tropical Island and the Cape Florida Lighthouse; Joan Gill Blan*

*A History of Overtown: Vibrant Early Life Followed by Social and Physical Deterioration; The Overtown Collective*  
*South Florida Historical Museum, Miami, Florida*

*Barnacle State Historic Site, Coconut Grove, Florida*

*Oral histories collected during the Public Site Planning Session held November 2002-May 2003*

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE PARK



*Aerial map of Virginia Key Beach Park and its vicinity today*



**THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BARRIER ISLAND**

Virginia Key is part of a chain of barrier islands that extend along the Florida coast from Miami south to Key West. Of the many islands in Biscayne Bay, only Virginia Key, Key Biscayne and Miami Beach are part of this natural island chain that forms the northeastern boundary of Biscayne Bay. As a barrier island, Virginia Key is part of an evolving landscape where ocean currents and hurricanes deposit sand and sweep it away. The island chain has evolved over its known history, with Virginia Key taking shape as a separate island only in the 1830s following a hurricane that opened the Norris Cut and separated Virginia Key from Miami Beach. Manmade changes have also influenced the island. In 1896, the same year that the Flagler East Coast Railroad reached the small village of Miami, a channel was dug from Cape Florida to the Miami River and the port of Miami was opened. In 1902, Government Cut was created to establish direct ocean access to the new port and Miami quickly developed as the major seaport on Biscayne Bay. Urbanization of the bay followed, altering the landscape around the island and causing changes to the island itself.

Sand dredged from Government Cut and deposited on Virginia Key has extended the once mangrove-rimmed northern tip of the island. The new channel also changed the way currents and sand move along the barrier islands. The sand that currents once carried down the Atlantic shoreline, creating the beaches and dunes that characterized Biscayne Bay’s three barrier islands, was swept into Government Cut or swept past it to be deposited on Key Biscayne, bypassing Virginia Key. The Key Biscayne shore developed the growing dune and marine hammock community that can be seen at Bear Cut Preserve while the beach along the Atlantic shore of Virginia Key has diminished, scoured by currents sweeping through Bear Cut and without a natural source of sand replenishment. A series of groins was placed along the shore in the 1950s and the 1970s to stabilize the beach but currents continued to erode the segment of the beach between the two stabilization projects and scoured away a cove. The island’s relatively narrow, eroding beach, a lack of access and the swift currents in Bear Cut left Virginia Key less suitable than surrounding islands for resort development and as a result, Virginia Key has retained much of its natural character.



The plant communities that had once occupied the entire barrier island chain along northern Biscayne Bay remain largely intact only on Virginia Key and Key Biscayne. While the mangroves of Miami Beach were cut down and their habitat filled to permit development of resorts, Virginia Key retained most of the mangroves on its western Biscayne Bay shoreline. This area has been designated a Critical Wildlife Habitat and protected from human activity of any kind. The plant communities that verge Virginia Key’s Atlantic shoreline include one of the oldest surviving Coastal Band Mangrove communities in Miami Dade County. A giant Red Mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) can be seen near the beach in the eastern end of Virginia Key Beach Park and gives some indication of the age of this vestige of the barrier islands’ original plant community. In addition to mangroves, the Atlantic shore is fringed with fresh water wetlands, tropical marine hammock, coastal strand, and sea grass communities. These plant communities provide valuable habitat areas for wildlife, including several threatened and endangered species. Federally protected species present at Virginia Key include the Hawks-bill Sea Turtle (*Eretomochelys imbricata*) and the Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*), which nests on the island, the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), which is frequently observed in the near off-shore waters, and the American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), which has been observed in the lake at Virginia Key Beach Park. The island also provides suitable habitat for other threatened and endangered species including the Gopher Tortoise and a variety of shore and sea bird species, including the Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork and Piping Plover. The island is a stop-over for migratory song birds. Together, the coastal plant and animal communities along the Virginia Key shore represent an important vestige of the natural heritage of Biscayne Bay.

Although it retains much of its original vegetation and character, Virginia Key has been heavily impacted by human activity. Along with the large deposit of dredge spoils on its northern tip, the center of the island is occupied by a large sewage treatment plant and a

Virginia Key Beach Park seen from Bear Cut Preserve (above); 1848 map of Bear Cut





*Virginia Key in the context of its urban environment .*

closed landfill. The mangroves on the Atlantic Ocean side of Virginia Key have also been filled in a series of projects associated with construction of the various public facilities on the island, with only isolated remnants surviving. Water channels were created within the Coastal Band as part of a mosquito control project. This and other drainage projects removed most of the original mangroves along the Sewage Treatment Plant Road and altered the water regime of the remaining mangroves. A tidal connection remains, however, and mangrove species have colonized the artificial water bodies. The entire island is heavily infested with exotic vegetation, including extensive stands of Australian Pine, which gives the island a profile very different from undisturbed barrier islands. The Bear Cut Preserve on Key Biscayne's northern tip directly opposite Virginia Key Beach Park has been cleared of exotic vegetation and bears a closer resemblance to the original natural character of the barrier islands.

Virginia Key's role in the urban context is unique in that very little private development has occurred on the island. Together with the sewage plant and landfill, less unsavory public facilities dominate the island, including the publicly owned Miami Marine Stadium and recreational areas operated by Miami Dade County. A number of research institutions and schools occupy the island as well, including the National Marine Fisheries Institute, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science and the MAST Academy. Miami Seaquarium is the only large private enterprise on the island. Other private enterprises include restaurants and concessions providing recreational equipment rental. Environmental groups have long advocated against private development on the island and in 1999 community activists opposed the development of a private resort on the site of the Virginia Key Beach Park, which had been closed since the park was transferred from the county to the city of Miami in the early 1980s. The Virginia Key Beach Park Civil Rights Task Force was formed to guide land use decisions for the proposed development site, which was subsequently listed in the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of the significance of the beach park's establishment, in 1945, as the only public beach accommodations for African Americans in Miami Dade County. Virginia Key remains the only site within Miami city limits where it is possible to see the natural character of Miami's ecological context.

### **EARLY INHABITANTS AND USES**

There is no archeological evidence of Native American occupation of Virginia Key. However, artifacts from the Tequesta Indians, who were the earliest inhabitants of the region have been found on Key Biscayne and at the mouth of the Miami River, where the Miami Circle indicates the location of a significant trading post or ceremonial center. In addition, Spanish records indicate that Key Biscayne, which was continuous with Virginia Key until the formation of Bear Cut, was inhabited by members of the Tequesta tribe. Spanish records refer to the island's inhabitants as *Vizcaynos*, after a Spanish castaway named Vizcayno who washed ashore on the island in the 1540s following the wreck of a large Spanish Galleon. Vizcayno adopted the lifestyle of the Tequesta inhabitants, took a wife and had a son before eventually returning to Spain. The island and its inhabitants were thereafter known to the Spanish by his name, which was later anglicized to Biscayne. Earlier European encounters with the island included a stop in 1513 by Ponce de Leon, who landed at Cape Florida and named the island Santa Marta.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the waters around Virginia Key were frequented by Spanish treasure ships returning to Spain from Central and South America through the Florida Straights, frequently wrecking on the reefs along the Florida coast and providing opportunities for plunder. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century a pirate named Black Caesar operated out of Elliot Key until he was captured by the British navy together with his collaborator Blackbeard. In the early 1800s a pirate calling himself Black Caesar II plundered the region until Andrew Jackson captured him in 1828. During this time, runaway slaves, disgruntled sailors and disinherited young men gathered in wild places around Florida frequented by pirate ships and established recruiting centers. There is some indication that a recruiting settlement of this type existed on Key Biscayne. Salvaging foundered ships by less piratical means continued to be an important



*Bear Cut Preserve at Crandon Park on Key Biscayne, showing the natural condition of Miami's barrier islands.*



*Pirates once plied the waters off Virginia Key.*

activity for early settlers in Coconut Grove, including both Bahamians and Americans. The home of one such early settler, The Barnacle State Historic Site in Coconut Grove, commands views of Biscayne Bay and the waters beyond and provides a glimpse of this era when Key Biscayne and Virginia Key were wild, outlying islands at the center of a pioneering maritime lifestyle that once characterized Miami. The islands' isolated position and access to the Caribbean Ocean continued to make for convenient landing and jumping off points for a variety of clandestine activities long after the cessation of pirate and salvage activity. According to oral histories of residents who used the beach in the 1930's during the era of prohibition, bootleggers ran rum into Miami by way of Virginia Key.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AT VIRGINIA KEY**

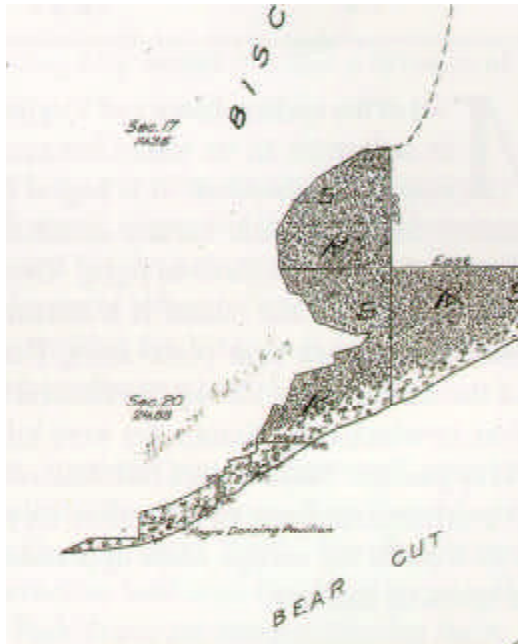
Virginia Key has served as a clandestine haven for African Americans throughout the last three centuries. In addition to the pirate recruiting centers that offered a means of escape to runaway slaves, there is also some suggestion that African Americans made temporary, secret encampments on Key Biscayne and possibly Virginia Key during the 19th century, where they were picked up by ships bound for Nassau. The Bahamas, where slavery was abolished in 1834, was an important destination on the "Underground Railroad." The island continues to the present to provide a landing place for refugees in search of freedom making the reverse journey from Caribbean Islands.

African Americans have also participated in a long history of resistance and refuge that has frequently touched Virginia Key and its environs. During the Spanish colonial period, slavery, in its American form, was illegal in Florida and north Florida became a haven for Africans and Native Americans escaping from Georgia and South Carolina. The native tribes of north Florida, called Seminoles (possibly derived from the Spanish word *cimarones*, meaning runaways) included many members and allies of African descent. During the First Seminole War (1817-1818), when the Seminoles were expelled from northern Florida by Andrew Jackson, African refugees joined forces with native tribes in resistance. Transfer of Florida from Spanish to American control in 1821 introduced harsh slave policies to north Florida and during this transition, the Seminoles, including the Black Seminoles, migrated to the wilder regions of Florida, including especially the Everglades. During the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), resistance to American policies of enslavement and removal of native peoples prompted Seminole attacks on American settlers throughout Florida, including the Miami area, where the legalization of slavery permitted South Carolina planter Richard Fitzpatrick to establish and operate, with slave labor, a plantation on the Miami River. Fort Dallas, located on the north bank of the Miami River at about SE 2nd Avenue, was established on Fitzpatrick's plantation to defend it from Seminole attacks. (The slave quarters from this plantation have been relocated from their original location to Lummus Park.) The Seminole raids included an attack on early settlers at Key Biscayne, who had established a small settlement near the Cape Florida lighthouse, Miami's first built structure. Seminole resistance checked settlement in the area until the end of the Second Seminole War in 1842, when American settlers resumed settlement in the area. (The Wagner House, also relocated from its original location to Lummus Park, was the home of a settler who came to the area in the 1840s.) Settlement on Key Biscayne did not take hold until well into the 1950s, however and was never established on Virginia Key. The single exception to this was the Johnson family, who lived at Virginia Key Beach Park, where Mr. Johnson served as Park Superintendent. The Superintendent's house, the only private dwelling ever established on Virginia Key, was destroyed in the 1980s during filming of an episode of Miami Vice.



*Seminoles settled in south Florida after being expelled from north Florida.*

While the Johnson family were the first official African American inhabitants of Virginia Key, the official presence of African Americans on the island had begun during World War II, when the island's long history of use by the community was factored into the way the island was used during the war effort. On May 14, 1942, a Nazi submarine sank a tanker off the coast of Key Biscayne. As American involvement in World War II geared up, Miami Beach became a major training place for soldiers, with over 500,000 soldiers trained on the beaches and barracked in the commandeered hotels. The Gulf Sea Frontier, the Seventh Naval District headquarters, the Subma-



1918 map of Virginia Key; the notation of a "Negro Dancing Pavilion" may be a later addition. The African American community boated out to Bear Cut during the 1920s and 1930s.

rine Chaser Training Center and a U.S. Naval Air Station to house and service blimps were all established in Miami. The hotels and beaches of Miami Beach were converted to barracks and training grounds by the Army Air Force. Because Dade County code prohibited African Americans from entering the water along the county's world-famous beaches, the US Army established segregated training facilities for black soldiers on Virginia Key, where custom had ceded an isolated segment of the shoreline to use by African Americans. A note on a map prepared in 1918 indicates a "Negro Dancing Pavilion" on the shores of Bear Cut. While this notation may be a later addition, oral histories indicate that during the 1920s and 1930s, residents of Miami visited Virginia Key by boat with some regularity, establishing an association between the island and the community.

Following the war, African American soldiers returning to the United States began to demand acknowledgement of their contributions during the war effort. In 1944, the Committee on Racial Equality was formed and advocated the use of direct action protest to demand civil rights. The same year the Dade County Interracial Task Force was created and in 1945 the Negro Service Council was created by three Miami professionals, Judge Lawson Thomas, Dr. Ira Davis and Father John Culmer, who had been active since the 1920s as an advocate for improved living conditions for Miami's African American citizens. The trio conceived a direct action protest to demand access to the county's beaches and in May Judge Thomas staged a "Wade-in" at the whites-only beach at Baker's Haulover. Prepared to be arrested, Judge Thomas was instead invited by county officials to discuss the issues. Within a month, the Director of Parks announced a compromise – the creation of a "colored only" beach at Virginia Key.

#### AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN MIAMI DADE COUNTY

Like other southern counties, Dade County laws included many codes designed to isolate and demean Americans of African descent. In the same year as the city of Miami's incorporation, 1896, the Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* established the doctrine of "separate but equal" as a legal construct to replace the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which guaranteed equal access to public accommodations for all American citizens, regardless of race or origin and which the Supreme Court had nullified in 1883. The ruling opened the door for local, state and federal laws that dictated the separation of black and white society. Miami and Dade County's segregationist "Jim Crow" laws were similar to those in other regions of the southern United States. Separate residential districts for black citizens were established and withstood legal challenge. A special state legislative act in 1937 upheld the legality of segregated residential districts, limiting the areas where blacks could own property. Throughout the county, a number of black subdivisions were established to isolate the region's black citizens. One of the earliest was known as the "Central Colored District" and was located on the west side of the Florida East Coast Railroad. Workers recruited to the area from the Bahamas and the southern states to work on the new rail line were required to live in the designated district on the west side of the rail line. The self-contained town that developed within this district came to be known as "Color Town" and later as Overtown, in recognition of its location "over the tracks." Establishment of "colored only" ghettos over the tracks was a technique used throughout the United States that took advantage of the rail line in each town as a convenient and readily recognized barrier.



Virginia Beach was the only beach park open to the county's African American citizens until the 1960s.

The city's restricted "colored" districts suffered from overcrowding and a lack of public services including clean water, sanitation, paved streets, health care facilities, adequate housing and economic opportunities. In 1920, blacks made up 32 percent of the city's population but occupied only 10 percent of its space. Church leaders were active in efforts to improve living conditions within these isolated communities. Overtown, like the other segregated districts, was severely overcrowded and throughout the 1920s Father John Culmer, of St. Agnes Episcopal Church in Overtown, was instrumental in exposing the human toll taken by the city's segregation. In 1929, instigated by Father Culmer's campaign, the Miami Herald published a series of articles exposing the unhealthy living conditions in the neighborhood. National exposure of the conditions as well as increasing activism throughout the United States during the 1930s



– including the activity in Miami – influenced the New Deal policies of the Roosevelt administration. (Eleanor Roosevelt met with the community activists in Overtown on several occasions.) In response to the national attention initiated by Father Culmer, President Roosevelt sent officials from the Works Project Administration to Miami to investigate. The result was the first federally funded housing project at Liberty Square, which provided all the services that Overtown lacked and marked one of the first federal interventions on behalf of African Americans.



Custom and manners also isolated African Americans from mainstream society and Miami’s black neighborhoods coexisted with white society as a parallel, alternative society. Many of the founders of the city of Miami, including early settlers in Coconut Grove, Overtown and Lemon City, made significant investment in the creation of a community that included business, social and civic organizations as well as active churches, which played a central role in black community life and attracted members from the many neighborhoods throughout the county. Despite a degree of prosperity, black life in Miami continued through the 1930s and 1940s to be defined by restrictive laws and customs. During this period, Overtown grew, through consistent activity on the part of the community’s many religious, civic, business and social organizations, into a vibrant community. Many businesses in Overtown were owned by blacks and together with a black professional community of doctors, lawyers, architects and educators, served an almost exclusively black clientele. The community also enjoyed an entertainment district centered on NW 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue that drew national headliners – including white and black performers – to its many clubs and nightspots. The name of one such establishment, the Zebra Club acknowledged this realm of integration, as white and black patrons alike made Overtown an entertainment destination. Still, black performers of international stature who were making Miami Beach one of the hottest resort destinations in the world, were required, if black, to seek accommodation in “colored only” hotels in Overtown. Similarly, black patrons of mainstream businesses were denied full service – blacks were disallowed from trying on shoes or dresses before purchase and were denied service at “whites only” dining facilities. In addition, blacks were subjected to intimidation by white hate groups. The Ku Klux Klan was active in Miami and in 1925 held a parade on Flagler Street. While good for Overtown business, the persistence of segregation in Miami created a harsh, hostile environment for black citizens.



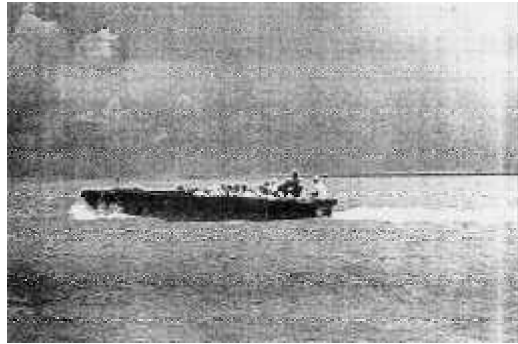
Among the restrictions and deprivations imposed on Miami’s black citizens was exclusion from the county’s world-famous beaches. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the community evaded this restriction by boating out to Virginia Key, where an unofficial “Negro beach” was tolerated on the isolated and inaccessible island’s Bear Cut shoreline. The beach provided the community with a much needed respite from the harsh realities of life in the city of Miami. Its laid back, natural ambiance recalled the Caribbean islands, which a majority of Miami’s black community counted as their place of origin. Miami’s black immigrants came from the Bahamans, Trinidad, Tobago, Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti and other nations. The beach offered a place where people from all the disparate neighborhoods and islands could come together as one community and strengthen their bonds with one another as well as with the place they now called home. Creating a sense of belonging was difficult in a place which offered little welcome and undermined the community’s sense of being at home by providing daily reminders of outsider status. The beach permitted people to reconnect with the natural world and renew their sense of belonging to a natural order that was beautiful and embracing instead of harsh, ugly and rejecting. The beauty of the natural setting and the stark contrast this made with the crowded, unhealthy conditions of the inner city neighborhoods was a balm for the community. Children ordinarily cooped up in the impoverished atmosphere of inner city neighborhoods were able to discover the same joys that privileged white Miamians and resort visitors enjoyed at the county’s other beaches: splashing in the surf, exploring the natural world, discovering sights and experiences to fuel their curiosity and imagination. Without the pressure of white harassment, the community was able to relax and enjoy one another’s company. In addition, the beach offered a place where baptisms could be performed. With no other place in the county available for this centrally important ceremony in the community’s



religious life, Virginia Key filled an important gap. Church groups from throughout the county made their way to this secret, free place of refuge to enjoy this important ritual of spiritual renewal. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the beach was the community's Paradise.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK**

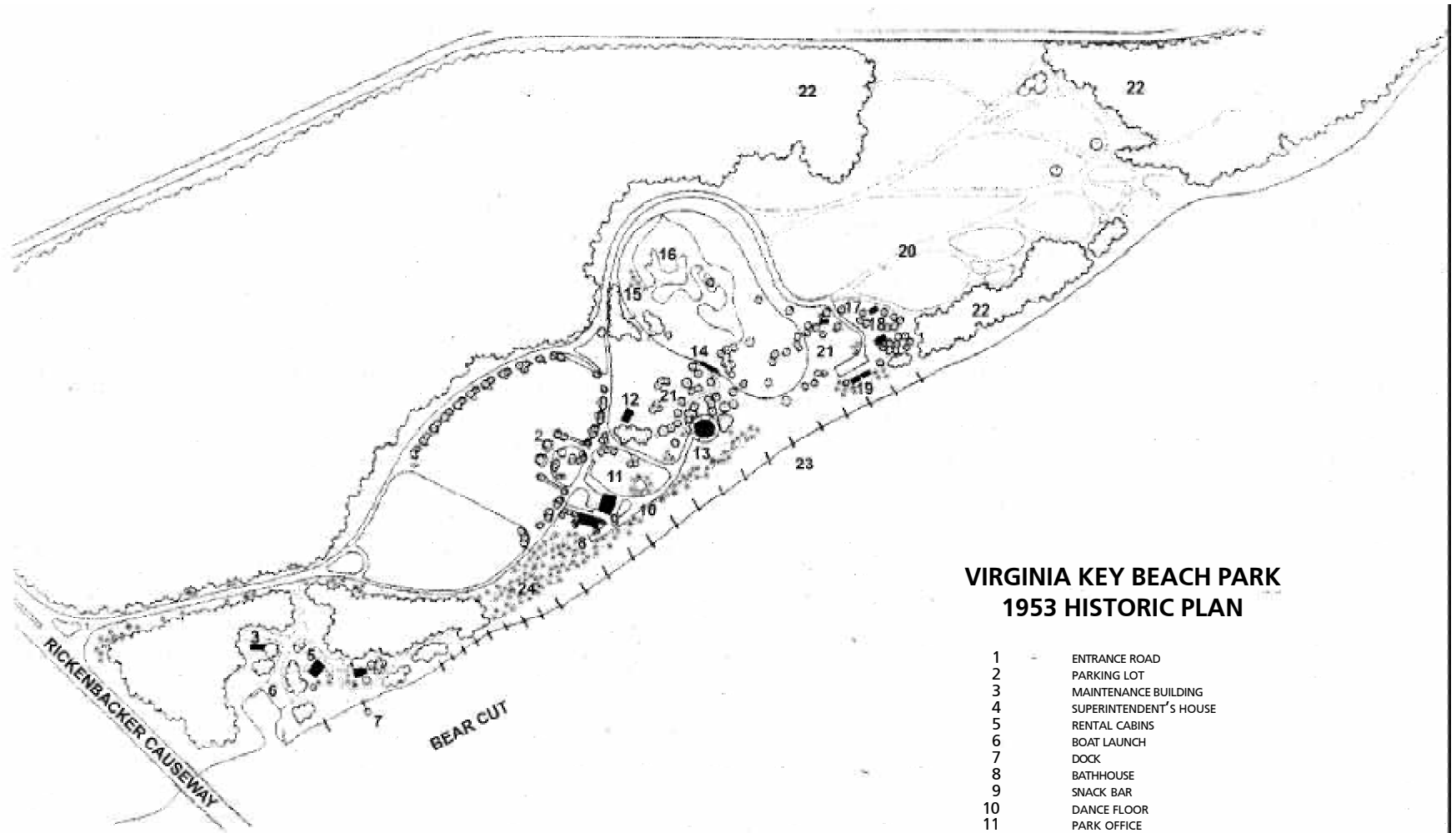
One of the earliest victories in the post-war Civil Rights movement was the establishment of Virginia Key Beach Park in response to the Negro Service Council protest in May of 1945. Improvements to the park made between 1945-1953 were reflective of the post-war period's optimistic spirit. The general prosperity of the post war years extended to the black community. Increasing confidence and determination regarding civil rights within the community was supported by increasing recognition by mainstream society. In 1946, the Florida Supreme Court ruled illegal the Dade County codes establishing segregated residential districts. Black contributions to the war effort were impossible to ignore and in 1948 President Harry S. Truman desegregated the American military. The direct action protest movement was gaining ground and by the mid-fifties, the Civil Rights movement lead by black religious leaders would be in full swing.



The new park that ushered in this era of change encompassed the shoreline of Bear Cut which had been the community's informal refuge throughout the preceding decades. Improvements to the park at its opening in 1945 consisted of a pier, picnic tables scattered among the shade trees and a few small surplus army buildings used as a park office and changing cabanas. Access to the beach was by boat, as it had been during the previous decades. In the same year, planning was underway for a causeway linking Key Biscayne and the mainland. Rickenbacker Causeway, opened on November 9, 1947, was built by Miami Dade County in exchange for land on Key Biscayne owned by the Matheson family, who had purchased Key Biscayne in 1909 and established an unsuccessful coconut plantation. In return for the bridge, the Matheson heirs deeded 900 acres of land to the county to be used as a public park to allow (almost) all of Miami Dade county's residents to enjoy the island's unusual beauty. As plans for the Causeway and Crandon Park were being developed, plans for improvements were being generated for Virginia Key. By 1949, Virginia Beach had a paved access road from the Rickenbacker Causeway and unpaved parking facilities for 1,200 cars, as well as changing cabanas and a wood frame house for the park superintendent. A hurricane the following year destroyed all of the park structures. Plans for new facilities to replace those lost in the hurricane were designed to provide facilities identical to those at Crandon Park. Completed between 1950 and 1953, these facilities included a new, more carefully designed, paved entrance drive, a paved parking lot for 660 cars, a boat launch, rental cabins, changing cabanas, a park office and first aid station, lawn picnic areas with shelters, a concession building and bathhouse and a smaller restroom building. A concrete dance floor, surrounded by coconut palms recalled the "Negro dance pavilion" noted on the island during the beach's era of unofficial use. Also installed during this period were a carousel, identical in every detail to the carousel at Crandon Park, as well as a miniature train ride that encircled a lake, which was a scaled down version of the miniature train and zoo at Crandon Park. During this period, visitors to Virginia Key were also invited to visit Crandon Park Zoo, where separate "whites only" and "colored only" restroom facilities were provided. (These separate facilities were maintained through the 1960s, when the separate designations were changed to "men" and "women.") The park facilities surviving from this period are listed in the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of their significance in the civil rights struggle of Miami Dade County's African American community. Public expenditure for high-quality recreational facilities for African Americans initiated a significant change in the status and quality of life of the community.



*Black Miamians waiting at a boat landing on the Miami River for a launch out to Virginia Key; the boat ride out to the beach; the earliest park facilities included a pier and picnic area.*



**VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK  
1953 HISTORIC PLAN**

- 1 ENTRANCE ROAD
- 2 PARKING LOT
- 3 MAINTENANCE BUILDING
- 4 SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE
- 5 RENTAL CABINS
- 6 BOAT LAUNCH
- 7 DOCK
- 8 BATHHOUSE
- 9 SNACK BAR
- 10 DANCE FLOOR
- 11 PARK OFFICE
- 12 PICNIC SHELTER
- 13 CAROUSEL
- 14 MINITRAIN STATION, TRACKS
- 15 MINITRAIN TUNNEL
- 16 LAKE
- 17 PICNIC SHELTERS
- 18 RESTROOMS
- 19 CABANAS
- 20 SAND PATHS
- 21 LAWN AND SHADE TREES
- 22 NATIVE VEGETATION
- 23 BEACH GROINS
- 24 COCONUT GROVE

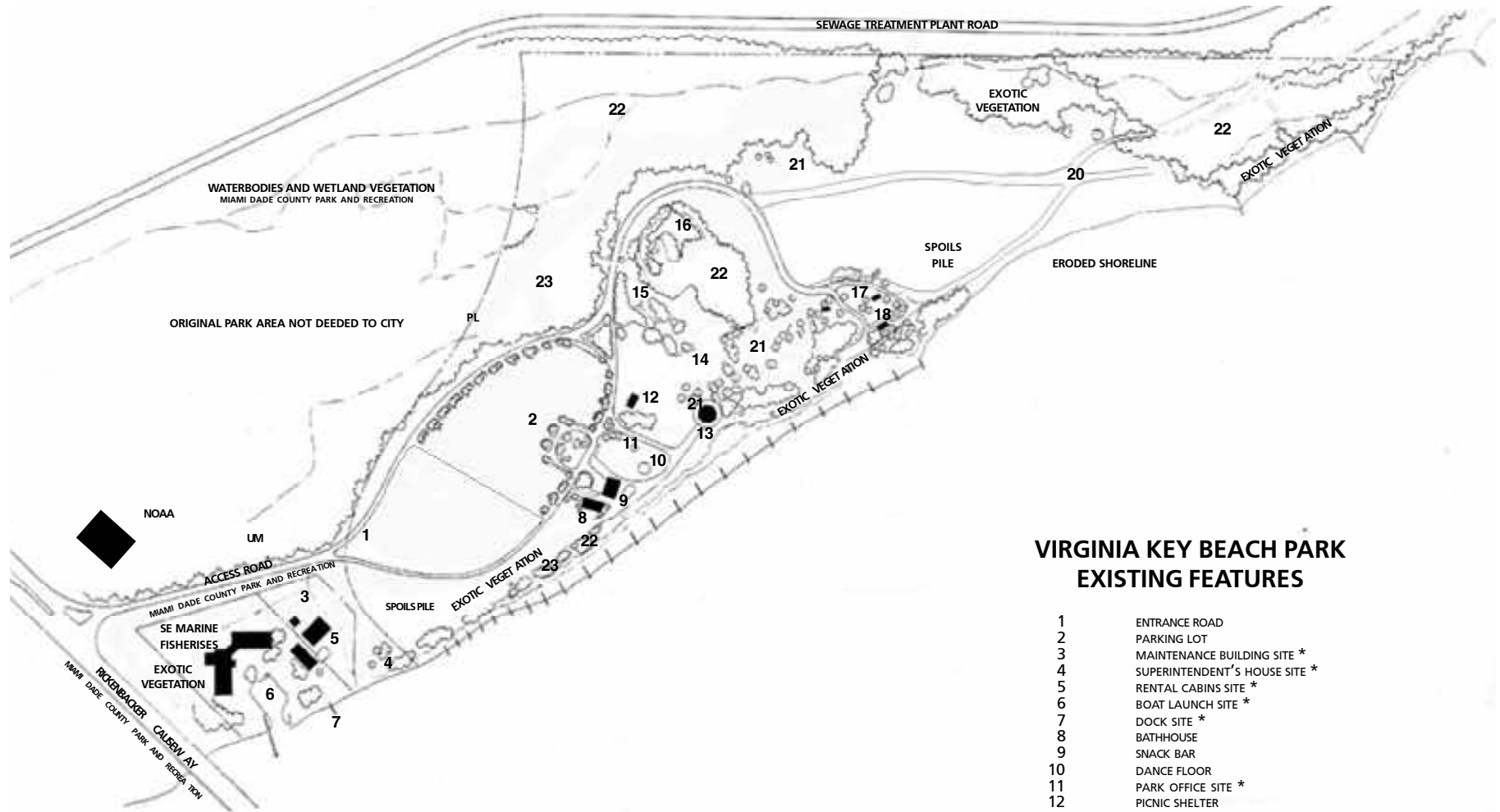


Sources:  
1977 aerial photo montage, USCOE Shoreline Stabilization Project Report

"Virginia Beach Cabana Area Development"  
1"=40' 5/9/56  
Board of County Commissioners, Dade County, Florida  
Department of Parks, A.D. Barnes, Director

"Virginia Beach Proposed Lake Layout and Grading Plan"  
1"=40' 6/9/58  
Dade County Department of Parks NC 243

"Virginia Beach Pavement and Water Line Extension to Service Area"  
1"=40' 5/27/57  
Dade County Department of Parks



### VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK EXISTING FEATURES

- 1 ENTRANCE ROAD
- 2 PARKING LOT
- 3 MAINTENANCE BUILDING SITE \*
- 4 SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE SITE \*
- 5 RENTAL CABINS SITE \*
- 6 BOAT LAUNCH SITE \*
- 7 DOCK SITE \*
- 8 BATHHOUSE
- 9 SNACK BAR
- 10 DANCE FLOOR
- 11 PARK OFFICE SITE \*
- 12 PICNIC SHELTER
- 13 CAROUSEL
- 14 MINITRAIN STATION, TRACKS SITE \*
- 15 MINITRAIN TUNNEL
- 16 LAKE
- 17 PICNIC SHELTERS
- 18 RESTROOMS
- 19 CABANAS SITE \*
- 20 SAND PATHS
- 21 LAWN AND SHADE TREES
- 22 NATIVE VEGETATION
- 23 BEACH GROINS



\* FEATURE LOST

## CHARACTER DEFINING FEATURES

### SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND PATTERNS

During its period of significance and throughout its history of human use, the Atlantic Ocean shoreline has remained the central organizing element of the beach park site, with facilities and outdoor spaces all organized along the water's edge. The park is bounded on the north by a tree line and divided into two distinct areas by a lake in the center of the park, now surrounded by a dense mass of vegetation. The park's built facilities are concentrated in the area west of the lake.

During the park's period of significance, the shoreline of the western area was defined by a band of coconut trees along the water's edge. This grove, of which only scattered remnants remain, was a significant feature of the park's spatial organization. The grove served as an "outdoor room" that provided a shaded area for seating and circulation that was continuous with the beach and which permitted views of the water's edge from the interior of the park. In the area east of the lake, a band of more natural coastal vegetation, since lost to shoreline erosion, separated a large open meadow from the shoreline and defined a more inward focused space. Paths and occasional breaks in the vegetation mass provided views and access to the water's edge. Cabanas occupied a position at one such break. During the time since the park's period of significance, growth of vegetation along the northern boundary of the park has separated this area from the road, to which it was formerly open. Shade tree clusters and picnic facilities were scattered on the landward side of the coastal vegetation and defined small "outdoor rooms" used as shaded picnic areas.





*Historic shoreline vegetation defined "outdoor rooms": the coconut grove (above); Seagrape trees (below) .*



*Historic vegetation masses defined the park's spatial organization: the historic coconut grove and lawn areas oriented toward the shoreline*



*Native shade trees still define outdoor rooms along the park's shoreline but native and exotic vegetation has replaced the coconut grove*



### VIEWS AND VANTAGE POINTS

Views and vantage points within Virginia Key Beach Park that are character defining features of significance and integrity are those that establish the relationship of the various cultural features to the natural setting and which establish the relationship of the park to the context of the ecological and urban environment.

The recreational and social importance of the park continues to be based on its natural features as a barrier island with considerable accessible shoreline and thus views that typify important characteristics of the topographical setting are key character defining features. The Atlantic Ocean provides an important backdrop from vantage points throughout the park, but especially from the shoreline. The juxtaposition of the recreational facilities with the ocean is visible from a variety of vantage points and places the recreational facilities within the unique ecological context of the region. Several vantage points within the park offer views of the natural state of the shoreline and provide an important contrast to the more manicured area in the vicinity of the concession building, restroom and carousel. These vantage points include the area of the park east of the lake and mini-train track, where remnants of vegetation typical of barrier islands remain. Views of the eastern shore of the park are evocative of natural barrier island dune and coastal hammock communities, although infestation with Australian Pine has significantly altered the character of the vegetation.

No significant development is visible from within the park, establishing the park's unique place within the urban context. The park is visible within its undeveloped context from vantage points on Key Biscayne, the Rickenbacker Causeway and the water.

Another significant vantage point within the park is the entrance, which is important for providing an overview of the context of the recreational facilities and their relationship to one another. The approach from Rickenbacker Causeway has been altered by adjacent development. The view from the current entrance encompasses a large area of the park and establishes its generous size as a first impression. The view includes the curving entrance drive, the manicured lawn area and parking lot within the entrance drive loop, glimpses of the ocean and park facilities, groves of shade trees and the vegetated backdrops that define the park's spatial organization. Significant backdrops from this vantage point are the vegetation lining the curving entrance drive and the mass of vegetation surrounding the lake, which conceals the eastern half of the park from view and prevents the entire park from being visible from the entrance. This "concealing" of the full extent of the park evokes a place that has significant size and complexity and supports the impression that the park is generously proportioned, with much to be discovered. This vegetation mass was not present during the park's period of significance, although a dense cluster of trees between the lake and parking area in the vicinity of the mini-train tunnel would have had the same effect. The view of the gracious curve of the entrance road as it passes around the lake and disappears is also important in establishing the generous size of the park and the leisurely character of movement through the landscape.

Individual elements visible from multiple perspectives within the park are prominent landmarks representing the park's recreational function. The dance pavilion, once surrounded by a circle of coconut palms, was a significant landmark. The in-tact carousel, restroom, concession building and mini-train tunnel were also important landmarks during the park's period of significance. Foundations and other remnants remain of other important landmarks, including the cabanas, park office and mini-train tracks and station. The superintendent's house, rental cabins, pier and boat launch were important landmarks of which remnants remain off-site.



*Palm-shaded vantage points with views of the Atlantic Ocean were the park's most significant characteristic*



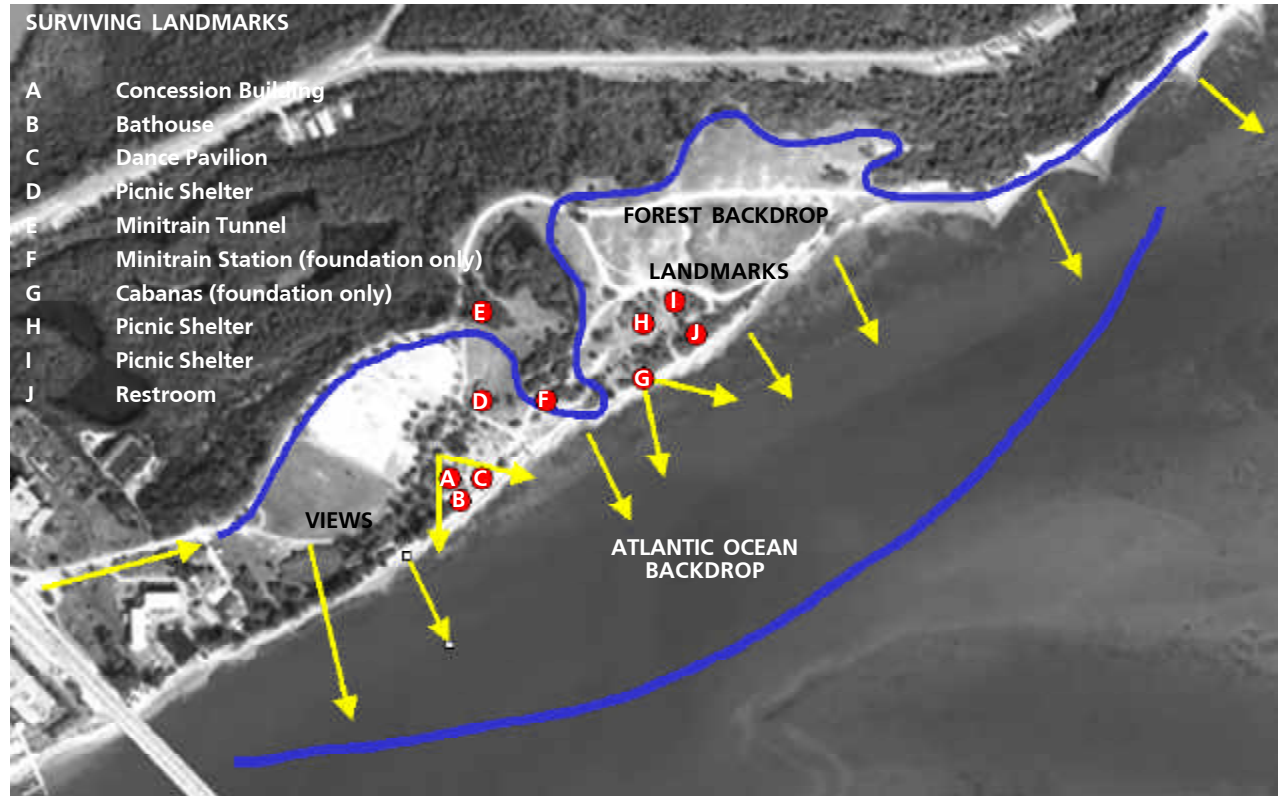
No significant urban development is visible from the park.



Vegetation masses remain as a backdrop through the park.



The Carousel is one of many remaining landmarks.



The Atlantic Ocean remains as the park's the most significant backdrop. Landmarks include many surviving historic structures.

### **TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE**

Virginia Key Beach Park's current topography consists, as it did in the period of significance, of a very slightly sloping expanse of fill that replaced much of the natural mangrove and dunes. Around the perimeter of the park there are man-made waterbodies constructed as part of a mosquito control system. The water bodies are noted on a survey dating from the 1960s but their date of construction is not known. Large mangrove trees in this area provide evidence that natural wetland topography existed before the creation of the channels. The channels are linked to the remnants of a natural coastal band mangrove community at the eastern end of the park, which includes a small pond. A cluster of large red and black mangrove trees near the shore marks the likely location of a connection between the coastal band mangrove and the ocean. There is an artificial lake in the center of the park with a peninsula extending into its center. The lake was constructed in 1958 as an enhancement to the minitrain ride. The lake is connected via a culvert to the channel system on the north side of the entrance road. The tidal connection of this drainage system is not clear. There is no evident tidal connection between the coastal band mangrove along the entire Atlantic shoreline of Virginia Key, though the wetlands are brackish and thus may be tidally influenced, perhaps from the north via culverts under the Sewage Treatment Plant Road.

The inland fill area was created incrementally in association with various building projects, including, possibly, training fields for African American soldiers during WWII. The entrance road is generally parallel to the extent of fill, which is more or less twenty yards north of the current tree line. The main recreational facilities are slightly lower than the rest of the park's inland filled area. There are two large spoils piles in the park that were placed there after the park's period of significance. Settlement of the filled areas has caused low spots and drainage problems to develop throughout the park since its period of significance.

Beach sand and groins were placed along the entire length of the shore in two separate shoreline modifications. The earlier of the two shoreline projects was completed in response to damage caused to the newly established park by a hurricane in 1950 and included the wooden groins along the western portion of the shore. In the 1970s granite groins were placed along the remaining shoreline of Virginia Key with the exception of a segment within the park to the east of the wooden groins. The second of the two shoreline modification projects increased beach erosion along the park's shoreline where no groins had been placed in either project. Much of the park's beach area and significant areas of coastal vegetation have been lost.

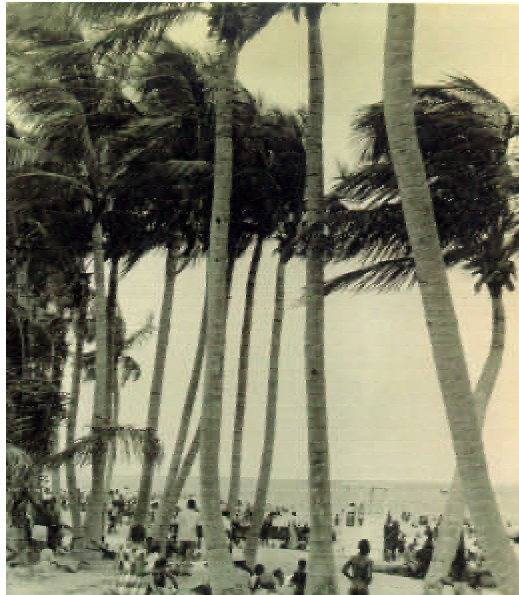
During the park's period of significance the area immediately behind the beach on the eastern end was occupied by coastal vegetation. Based on the coastal vegetation that is evident in historic photographs a dune berm similar to the existing vestige east of the carousel building can be assumed to have existed within this vegetation zone. A significant area of the shoreline, visible in historic photographs, consisted of a flat sand esplanade continuous with the beach. The US Army Corps of Engineers has planned a stabilization of the shoreline to be completed as the first element in the restoration of the park.

### **WATER FEATURES**

The lake at the center of the park is its only significant water feature. The lake was developed in 1958 as an enhancement of the mini-train feature and included two islands accessible from the shore by causeways. The mini-train tracks encircled the lake. In the time since the creation of the lake, mangrove vegetation has been established around the lake and obscured the causeways leading to the islands. The natural vegetation has fulfilled unrealized plans to create a "botanical garden" equal to the parallel entertainment feature at Crandon Park, where a mini-train made a circuit through the zoo and gardens.



*Historic topographic and drainage features: shoreline erosion, spoils piles and settlement in filled areas have altered the historic character. Settlement has created uneven, unstable areas in lawn areas as well as low points throughout the park that flood.*



A shoreline coconut grove was the park's most significant character defining feature. Only scattered trees remain.

**VEGETATION**

During the park's period of significance, its predominant vegetation consisted of extensive natural vegetation as well as park plantings that were important elements in the spatial definition of the park. Plantings included lawn areas and clusters of shade trees which were predominantly Seagrape, Buttonwood and Ficus. A grove of mature coconut palms existed along the entire sand esplanade in the western area of the site during the 1960s and likely dates from the period of significance. The palm grove was a significant character defining feature of the site's vegetation, as well as its spatial structure. The coconut grove provided shady walking and seating areas along the shore that significantly extended the usable area of the beach. The height of the trees and the extent of the grove were both magnificent and unusual and contributed significantly to the perception of the beach as a high quality recreational setting. The grove set the park apart as a unique and valued asset of the African American community. The circle of palms surrounding the dance pavilion was also a significant feature of the parks vegetation and a visual icon of the park.

Virtually no portion of the site vegetation is unaffected by invasive exotic vegetation that has established itself during the years since the park's period of significance. Human-related impacts to the site vegetation are abundantly obvious throughout the site, though there are a number of areas that contain what likely should be considered as historical remnant vegetation, i.e., vegetation that remains from the time prior to much of the site disturbance and development as a beach park. Individual trees can be identified as having been present during the park's period of significance. An important historical remnant is the Coastal Band Mangrove area at the park's eastern end. Mangrove and freshwater wetlands, coastal strand and tropical marine hammock communities can all be found within the park. These plant communities include a number of rare plants such as the Biscayne Prickly Ash, broad leaf spider lily, burrowing four o'clock, necklace pod, sea lavender and the Beach Jaquemontia, which are found in the coastal strand and hammock areas. The discovery of a both a male and female specimen of the federally protected Biscayne Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum coriaceum*) during exotics eradication has led to the reestablishment of the largest colony of the species in the United States in the restoration area north of Virginia Key Beach Park. The major plant communities present on the site include:

**Seagrass:** The Atlantic Ocean shoreline of the island is home of a seagrass bed that includes shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*), manatee grass (*Syrigodium filiforme*) and turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*), which provide important habitat for several endangered sea turtle species as well as manatees, wading birds and other sealife.

**Dune:** This association is characterized by vegetation typical of coastal, sandy sites in south Florida that have little foot traffic and are within the salt-spray zone. There are a number of plant species present here that are relatively typical of this situation, including railroad vine (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*), scaevola (*Scaevola plumieri*), dune sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*), sea purslane (*Sesuvium portulacastrum*), Seagrape (*Cocoloba uvifera*) and a limited population of sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*). These species are typical of this harsh pioneer zone. Historic photographs indicate that during the park's period of significance, this area was used as a sand esplanade with heavy foot traffic and included little beach strand vegetation west of the cabanas. This community has an exotic species component which includes Wedelia, Brazilian pepper, earleaf acacia and Australian pine. Much of the Scaevola in this zone is the exotic species (*Scaevola sericea*), a listed pest species.

**Coastal Strand:** This association is a higher-elevation area that parallels the dune. This association is heavily invaded by Australian pines and Brazilian pepper. In addition to these two species, other canopy components include Coconut, Seagrape, and Seaside Mahoe. Some plants remain from the time when the site was in use as a park, including remnants of the Coconut grove that was once here and Seagrape trees. Individual trees can be identified as having been present when the site was in use. Understory plants

include many of the species seen in the dune, as well as a strong component of coin vine. An occasional red mangrove seedling is present. The leeward side of this association generally borders on a sandy service road, and is extremely heavily invaded by exotic species.

**Wetland Forest:** The 1999 report for the park site prepared by DERM (Draft Virginia Key Biological Evaluation: DERM Environmentally Endangered Lands study) states that this area is tidally influenced and thus this association qualifies as jurisdictional wetlands. Based on historical aerial photographs and the 1960s survey which identifies “mosquito control ditches,” it is evident that this portion of the site represents a secondary growth wetland area. The area includes remnant natural wetland vegetation as well as native and exotic species established around ditches and water bodies related to earthwork. Virtually all of the vegetation surrounding the lake, with the exception of a cluster of coconut palms near the north exit of the minitrain tunnel has been established since the park’s period of significance.

Transects of the area between the disturbed edge and the ditch bordering the Sewage Treatment Plant Road characterize an association containing native species, including red and black mangroves – some quite large and representing historical remnant vegetation – as well as leather ferns, cabbage palms, etc. and a major component contributed by Australian pine and Brazilian pepper. As soon as the elevation drops off from the disturbed edge, leather fern begins to become a frequent component of the understory. Often, the ground is heavily covered by Australian pine needles, and this, the soil and water regime, coupled with the low light levels reaching the understory, likely contributes to the generally low species diversity in this association. There are watercourses present within portions of this association, as well as open, likely permanent, water bodies.

**Mixed Forest:** This association is found at the eastern end of the site, approximately at the level of the southerly parking lots associated with the Virginia Key Beach. The vegetation in this areas is, as all of the rest of this site, comprised of both native and exotic species. This area contains some of the species that are typical of coastal hammocks as well as of coastal band mangrove communities. Several extremely large mangrove specimens, including both Red Mangrove and a Black Mangrove, indicate an historically important remnant community, perhaps among the oldest in Miami Dade County.

**Disturbed Edge:** This association borders much of the open portions of the site adjacent to parking lots and other cleared and maintained areas that were modified from their original condition; earthwork, including grading and filling have contributed to the formation of this association. It is heavily invaded by exotic plant species including Brazilian pepper, crowfoot grass, colubrina, and Australian pine; it also includes many native species such as buttonwood, gray nickerbean, native morning glories. Comparison of the current treeline with historic photographs indicates that much of this association has been established since the park’s period of significance. The land north of this disturbed edge slopes down rapidly. The sharpness of this edge is the result of previous land contouring rather than any naturally occurring topographic feature.

Restoration of the native plant communities planned by the US Army Corps of Engineers and Miami Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management is based on removal of exotic vegetation throughout the park in addition to restoration of three natural plant communities, including Coastal Strand, Tropical Hardwood Hammock and Wetlands. A Freshwater Pond with a wetland fringe is also planned. The plant species identified by the US Army Corps of Engineers as native to the site include the following:



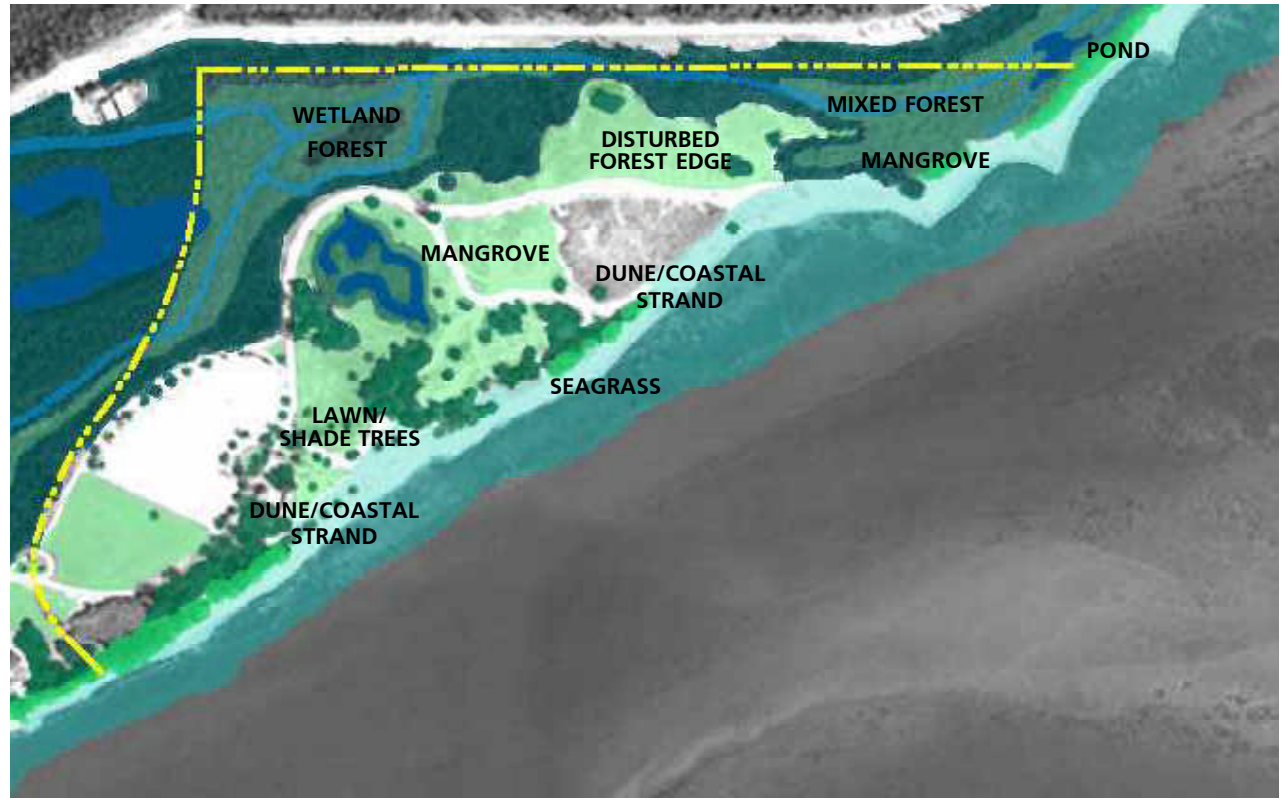
Coastal Strand: Seagrape and invasive Australian Pine



Mixed forest: Tropical Hardwood Hammock species, Mangroves and exotic vegetation



Remnants of the original coastal band mangrove: a giant red mangrove tree



Existing Vegetation



Mangroves surrounding the lake: a suitable habitat for the American Crocodile, which has been observed in the lake



The pond in the mixed forest





Seagrasses are found offshore along the entire park



Dune pioneer: Beach dune flower



Dune pioneer: sea oats

**PLANT SPECIES NATIVE TO VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK**

**Tidal Marsh**

- Gulf Cordgrass *Spartina spp.*
- Saltmarsh Cordgrass *Spartina alterniflora*
- Salt Wort *Batis maritima*
- Saltgrass *Distichlis spicata*

**Dune**

- Sea Oat *Uniola paniculata*
- Sea Oxeye Daisy *Borrchia frutescens*
- Sea lavender *Mallotonia gnaphalodes*
- Bay cedar *Suriana maritima*
- Salt Joint Grass *Paspalum vaginatum*
- Inkberry *Scaevola plumieri*
- Sea Purslane *Sesuvium portulacastrum*
- Baker's Cordgrass *Spartina spp.*
- Beach Creeper *Ernodea littoralis*
- Beach Elder *Iva imbricata*
- Dune Sunflower *Helianthus debilis*
- Beach Star *Remirea maritima*

**Coastal Strand**

- Seven year apple *Casasia clusiifolia*
- Fiddlewood *Cirharexylum fruticosum*
- Key Thatch Palm *Coccothrinax morrisii*
- Necklace pod *Sophora tomentosa*
- Cocoplum *Chrysobalanus icaco*
- Saw Palmetto *Serenoa repens*
- Silver Palm *Coccothrinax argentata*
- Cabbage Palm *Sabal palmetto*
- Varnish Leaf *Dodonaea viscosa*
- White Indigo Berry *Randia aculeata*
- Coral bean *Erythrina herbacea*
- Cats Claw *Pithecellobium guadalupense*
- Green Buttonwood *Conocarpus erectus*
- Beach Jaquemontia *Jaquemontia reclinata*
- Seagrape *Cocoloba uvifera*
- Myrsine *Myrsine quianensis*
- Island Marlberry *Ardisia escallonioides*
- Saltbush *Baccharis halimifolia*

**Tropical Hardwood Hammock**

- Cinnecord *Acacia choriophylla*
- Strangler Fig *Ficus aurea*
- Gumbo Limbo *Bursera simaruba*
- Florida privet *Forestiera segregata*
- Jamaica caper *Capparis cynophallophora*
- Lignum vitae *Guaiaicum sanctum*
- Satin Leaf *Chrysophyllum oliviforme*
- Blolly *Guapira dicolor*
- Pigeon Plum *Cocoloba diversifolia*
- Wild Tamarind *Lysiloma bahamensis*
- Mastic *Mastichodendron foetidissimum*
- Black Torch *Amyris elemifera*
- Joewood *Jacquinia keyensis Mez.*
- White stopper *Eugenia axillaris*
- Jamaica dogwood *Piscidia piscipula*
- Coral bean *Erythrina herbacea*
- Wild Coffee *Psychotria nervosa*
- Spanish Stopper *Eugenia foetida*
- Soapberry *Sapindus saponaria*
- Wild Lime *Zanthoxylum sp.*
- Mahogany *Swietenia mahogoni*
- Wax myrtle *Myrica cerifer*
- Beautyberry *Callicarpa americana*
- Red Bay *Persea borbonia*
- Black Ironwood *Krugiodendron ferreum*
- Firebush *Hamelia patens*

**Mangrove**

- Red Mangrove *Rhizophora mangle*
- Black Mangrove *Avicenna germinans*



The forest edge, consisting primarily of pest species, has encroached on historic lawn areas.



Manicured lawn areas have remained a part of the park landscape but undergrowth has engulfed most shade trees.



Invasive pest species will be removed from the site by the US Army Corps of Engineers: Brazilian Pepper (above) and Australian Pine are the most pervasive pests.



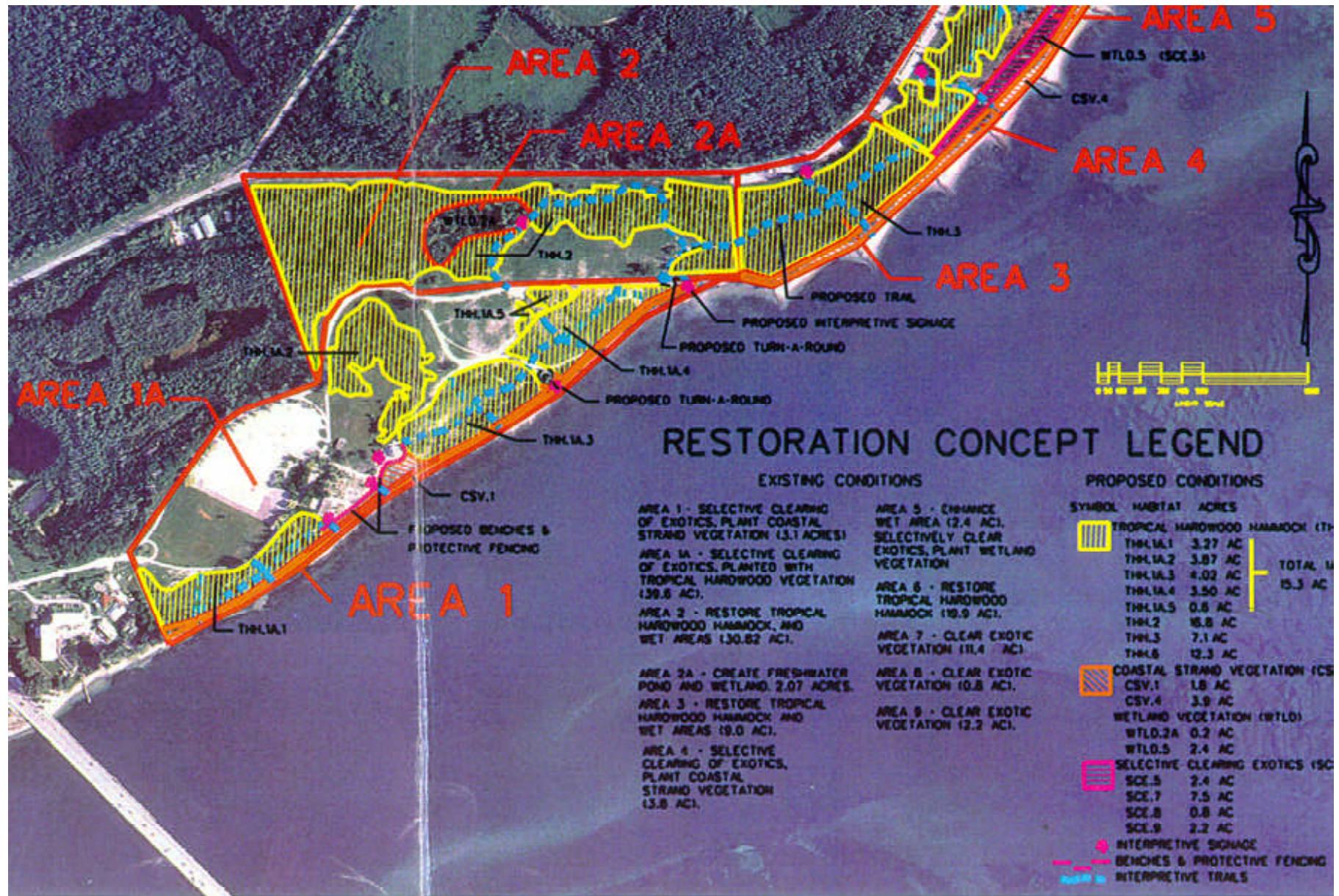
Historic vegetation massing: all of the park's historic vegetation has been altered by natural succession and invasion by pest species.



Native and exotic species have colonized the area of the coconut grove.



Historic coastal vegetation has been lost to shoreline erosion.



US Army Corps of Engineers Resoration Concept



*Significant historic circulation features included a sand promenade shaded by coconut trees. Sensitive native vegetation has replaced the sand esplanade*

### CIRCULATION

**Land:** Vehicular circulation features dating from the period of significance include a paved entrance drive that loops around a large, open parking area and continues around the lake in the center of the park. The entrance drive and parking lot are separated by a series of planting islands surrounded by hand-cast concrete curbs. East of the lake, vehicular circulation consisted of a meandering network of sandy beaten tracks which ended at the shoreline at the extreme east end and at a parking area for approximately ten cars to the north of the cabanas. Remnants of these remain except where a large spoils pile has been placed near the shore. A track extends into the forested area at the east end of the park and links to a trail leading to the beach. During the park’s period of significance, a small open area within this forested area, still visible in a 1960s aerial photograph, may have served as a parking or picnic area. A trail links this area to the STP Road along the park’s northern boundary. Two wooden bridges carry the trail over wetlands and water channels. Pedestrian circulation was primarily along a network of beaten foot paths. Circulation along the western shoreline consisted of a sand esplanade within the coconut grove. The recreational facilities and parking lot were linked by paved pathways. A bus stop pull-off was located at the terminus of the main pathway leading to the water’s edge. A paved road that follows the shoreline east of the spoils pile was established after the park’s period of significance.

The beach park’s surviving circulation system is a character defining feature of the landscape that evokes the park’s period of significance. The entrance drive, the large manicured lawn and the parking lot represent a landscape design aesthetic rooted in a particular time and are significant character defining site features that establish the place of the park within the social context of its era. The entrance drive, the large manicured lawn and the large parking area carried specific connotations during the park’s period of significance and were an important element of the park’s symbolic importance. Establishment of the park was a significant victory within the context of the civil rights struggle. As the first public beach recreation facilities for African Americans, the quality of the facilities was of great significance as an indicator of the improved status of the community. Within the context of 1950s American society, the park’s entrance landscape connoted quality and therefore status. The curvilinear entrance drive was typical of well-designed public parks throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The park’s well-manicured lawn, with its clearly evident requirement for diligent maintenance at public expense was a status symbol. Similarly, the large parking lot provided a showcase for the display of increasing prosperity within the community in the form of shiny new cars and was an indicator of the community’s new status. This kind of symbolism was typical of post-war American society in general and had resonance for Miami-Dade County’s African American community, which participated in the general post-war prosperity. The establishment of the park, and the quality of the facilities provided was part and parcel of the spirit of optimism of the park’s mid-century era of accomplishment, prosperity and progress. In addition, the size of the parking lot provided evidence of a large assembly of black citizens – a significant indicator of increasing civil rights for the community, which had not previously fully enjoyed the constitutionally guaranteed right of public assembly.

The “fifties” look of Virginia Key Beach Park also connotes a time when the relationship of people and their natural context was more easy-going. This is especially potent in Miami where the ‘fifties represent an era before over-development transformed the region. The meandering sand roads in the eastern area of the park, the casual parking areas, the hand-cast (versus machine extruded) curbing of the parking lot islands, the lack of curbs along the roadways, all evoke a less strained relationship between the automobile and the landscape and thus a more innocent, natural rapport between people and the environment.

**Sea:** Atlantic Ocean access and links to the Caribbean, especially links associated with flights of freedom, are character defining site features with both significance and integrity. The undeveloped character and isolation of Virginia Key’s Atlantic Ocean shoreline permits uncontrolled water linkages between the barrier island and the Caribbean and the mainland of Miami. Water transportation



*Sand footpath through native vegetation leading to the beach remains from the historic period*



*The entrance view has been altered by development along the entrance road.*



*The parking lot in the 1950s*



*Development along the entrance road visible in the background. The parking lot is in poor condition.*

was the primary linkage between the uninhabited island and the mainland of Miami during the park’s period of informal use as a recreational setting for African Americans until the construction of the Rickenbacker Causeway in 1947. In addition, Atlantic Ocean access played a role in the early use of Key Biscayne and Virginia Key as a recruitment center for pirate ships and as a point of embarkation for African Americans escaping to the Bahamas by ship on the Underground Railroad. The open character of the shoreline continues to permit access to the American shore for refugees from the Caribbean. Free access to an undeveloped shoreline is thus a significant feature of the historic circulation pattern of the site. Features associated with this water linkage include the entire shoreline of the site as well as structures associated with this water link with Miami, which are not in tact. These include remnants of the boat launch and pier as well as the foundation of the Superintendent’s house, which served as an arrival point for visitors to the island. These structures are outside the current park boundary. The foundation of the superintendent’s house is located in a county-owned parcel adjacent to the park. The boat launch, including the inlet and remnant pier, are part of the National Marine Fisheries facilities west of the park.

Also associated with this historic circulation system are launch sites along the Miami River. Oral histories indicate that during the 1920s and 1930s, residents of Miami visited Virginia Key by boat with some regularity. Photographs that date from this era show residents waiting at a boat landing on the Miami River. The landing is reported to have been located at SE 5th Avenue. Photographs and oral histories indicate that a variety of types of boat, including fishing boats and launch services, carried groups of residents to the island in the morning and returned at the end of the day to bring them back to the city. Once residents had arrived at the island, they were not able to leave until the boat returned for them.



*Track through the mixed forest remains from the historic period*



*A bridge across the waterway in the mixed forest and leads to the Sewarge Treatment Plant road and parking for Virginia Key Beach (north)*



*Dance Pavilion*



*Concession Building*



*Bathhouse/Restroom Building*



*Carousel building*

### STRUCTURES

Many structures remain from the park's period of significance. The condition of the structures is discussed in the Preservation Plan.

Structures remaining include:

- Dance floor (concrete slab only; coconut trees, benches and jukebox are lost)
- Concession Stand
- Carousel (structure only; carousel horses are lost)
- Bathroom/Restroom Building
- Picnic Pavilion
- Smaller Picnic Pavilions
- Restrooms
- Miniature Train Tunnel

Remnants remain of several significant structures.

- Park Office (foundation slab only)
- Cabanas (foundation slab only)
- Mini-train station (foundation slab only)

Several structures have been lost:

- Superintendent's house (foundation remains on Miami Dade County property)
- Boat launch and pier (remnants remain on National Marine Fisheries property)
- Rental Cabins
- Mini-train and tracks



*Restroom Building*



*Mini-train tunnel*



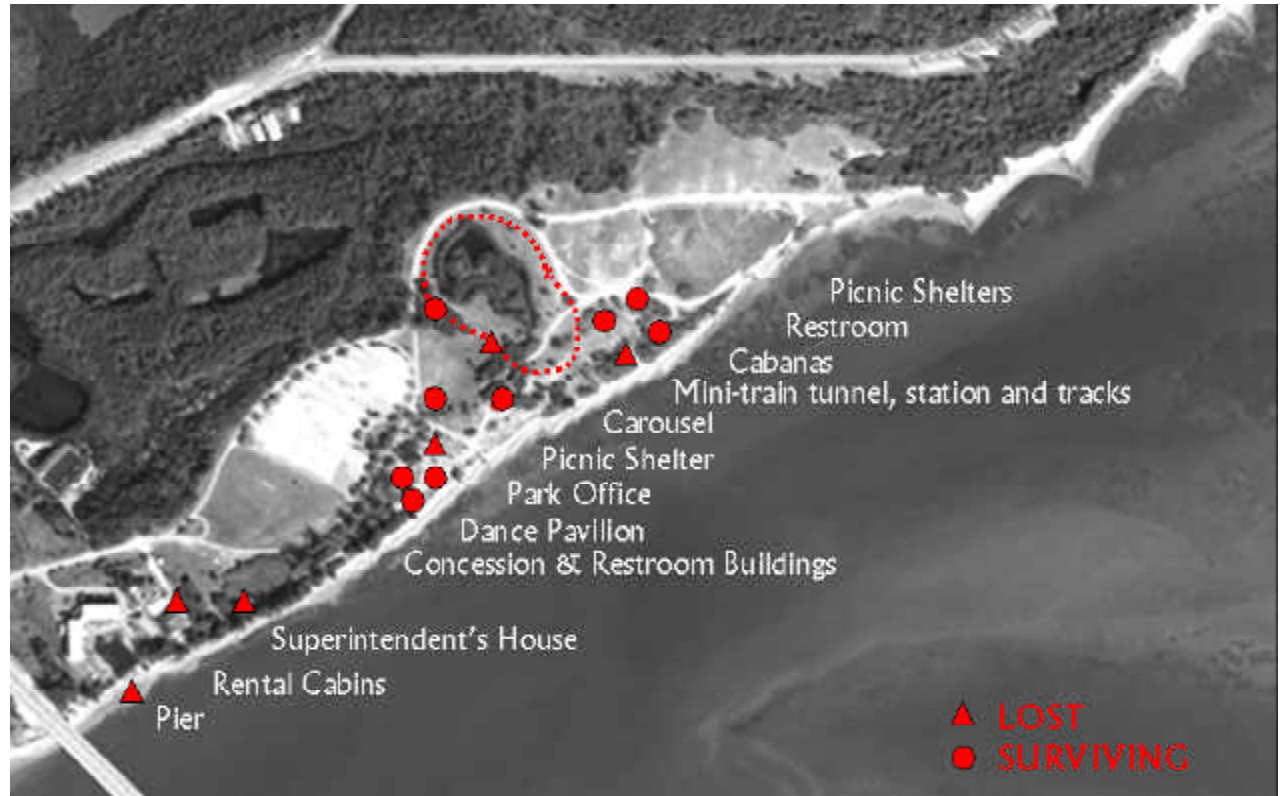
*Picnic Shelter*



Minitrain and Tracks



Rental cabins



Lost and Surviving Landmarks



The park's boat launch lagoon (incorporated into the National Marine Fisheries site) with the Superintendent's House on far right.



Carousel interior has been lost

**SITE FURNISHINGS**

There are no existing furnishings of significance or integrity on the site. Photographs from the park's period of significance show that standard park furnishings were used throughout the park, including benches with a concrete support and wooden slat seat and back, wooden picnic tables, wood and metal picnic tables, metal barbecue grills, signage with wooden post and signboard with routed lettering. Several distinctive site furnishings are evident from historic photographs as well, including a white-painted wooden lifeguard stand with a flat scalloped roof, metal cabanas with canvas awnings and rustic picnic shelters with palm-trunk posts and metal roofs.





## SITE CONSTRAINTS

**Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Agency Review:** As a coastal site with significant natural resources, Virginia Key Beach Park comes under the jurisdiction of the federal, state and local regulatory agencies. All improvements made at the park will be subject to significant permitting requirements which can take extended time periods to complete.

The US Army Corps of Engineers regulates coastal construction and restoration and also coordinates permit applications for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) coordinates permit applications for activities that affect air and water quality, storm water management and dredging and filling through the South Florida Water Management District. In addition, DEP regulates and issues permits for activities affecting marine fisheries and protected species, including habitat areas identified as State Aquatic Preserves (including Biscayne Bay) and species protection areas, including areas of the Miami River and Biscayne Bay covered by the Manatee Protection Plan. DEP also regulates and issues permits for coastal construction seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line and regulates activity on all beaches, including off-shore Motorboat Exclusion Zones, one of which has been established for the Atlantic Shore of Virginia Key Beach.

The Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resources Management regulates and issues permits for coastal construction including docks, marinas and bulkheads and any activity affecting mangroves or tidally influenced jurisdictional wetlands. In addition, DERM regulates activities that affect protected plant species, including regulation of invasive exotic species, which it actively seeks to remove in order to protect native plant species.

Protected natural resources at Virginia Key Beach Park include the site's plant communities: the Coastal Band Mangrove remnant at the park's eastern end; mangrove and freshwater wetlands, coastal strand and tropical marine hammock communities. These plant communities include a number of rare plants such as the Biscayne Prickly Ash, broad leaf spider lily, burrowing four o'clock, necklace pod, sea lavender and the Beach Jaquemontia, which are found in the coastal strand and hammock areas. These plant communities provide critical habitat areas for federally protected endangered species, including the Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretomochelys imbricata*) and the Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*), which nests on the island, the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*), which is frequently observed in the near off shore waters, and the American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*), which has been observed in the lake at Virginia Key Beach Park. The island also provides suitable habitat for other threatened and endangered species including the Gopher Tortoise and a variety of shore and sea bird species, including the Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Roseate Spoonbill, Wood Stork and Piping Plover. The island is a stop-over for migratory song birds. Other protected resources include jurisdictional wetlands and mangroves and both on-site and off-shore water quality.

Habitat protection for sea turtles includes the limitation of artificial night lighting. Because the shoreline at Virginia Key Beach Park is a turtle nesting habitat, artificial light must meet requirements for the protection of turtle hatchlings. Turtle hatchlings orient themselves to moonlight on water to guide them from the nest to the water and artificial shoreline light causes the hatchlings to head in the wrong direction.



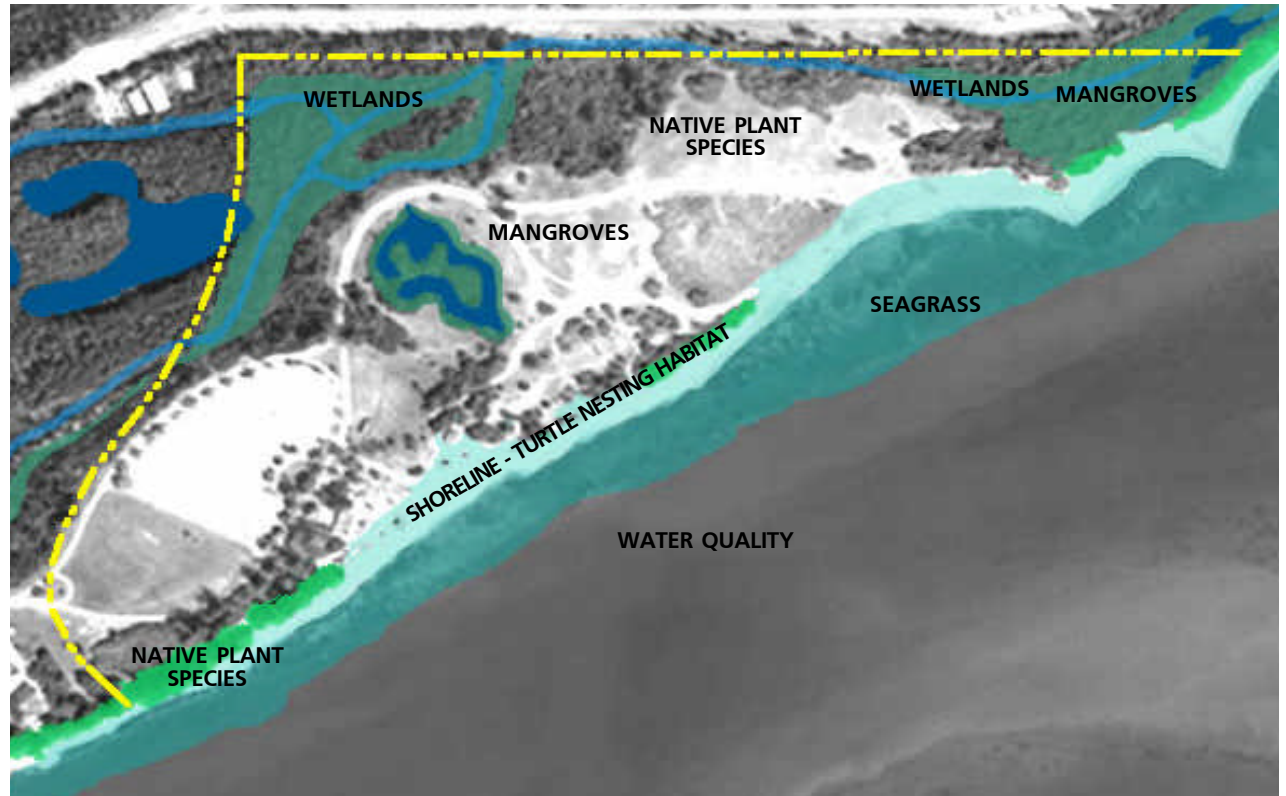
American Crocodile



Sea Turtle



West Indian Manatee



Protected Natural Resources



Native Plant Species



Mangroves and Wetlands

<b>VIRGINIA BEACH</b>	
(NEGRO) 162 ACRES	
ATTENDANCE LAST YEAR 295,314	
FACILITIES	
Apartments	Fireplaces (5)
Bath House	Miniature Railroad
Boat Livery	Picnic Tables (88)
Cabanes	Refreshment Pavilion
Dancing	Swimming
Fishing	Umbrellas & Chairs
FREE PARKING	

Statistics from the park's period of historic significance.

**Park "Carrying Capacity":** The total number of people who can be accommodated on the Virginia Key Beach Park site is limited by a number of factors, including natural resources protection, parking capacity, lifeguard capacity, safety related to currents in Bear Cut, number of restrooms, comfortable densities for events, and traffic management on Rickenbacker Causeway. Historically, the beach park accommodated as many as 2,400 people, based on the capacity of the parking lots, which was approximately 670 cars with 3-4 visitors per car. This capacity was distributed among the park's various recreational areas but was concentrated primarily along the shoreline in a combined picnic/beach area. During the period of significance, the shoreline esplanade considerably extended the usable area of the combined picnic/beach area but today establishment of native vegetation has reduced this area significantly. Daily attendance on a "peak use" day (exclusive of special cultural events) is thus limited primarily by environmental concerns that limit the overall size of picnic/beach areas appropriate within a sensitive environmental setting. This was not a concern during the park's period of significance because the primary function of the park was to accommodate all Miami Dade County African Americans. Annual attendance during the peak period was approximately 300,000 people. Crandon Park, by way of comparison, accommodates three times that number of visitors in ten times the space. Although demand for recreational opportunities at Virginia Key will likely be increased due to its special appeal as a heritage and cultural destination, it will be significantly lower than historic levels.

The area of the shoreline that is potentially appropriate for swimming is limited to 2,000lf at the eastern end of the park. (The suitability of the area for swimming will require reevaluation after the shoreline stabilization project is complete.) Based on the proposed width of the beach and the capacity of a lifeguard to monitor a maximum of 250 people at an average density of 240sf/person, the swimming beach can accommodate up to 500 people. Group camping sites sensitively located within areas of coastal vegetation can accommodate up to 60 people (based on 15 sites with an average of 4 people per site.) Additional picnic shelters can accommodate up to 90 people, based on the potential for new shelters to be located in appropriate locations in the park. The historic picnic/beach area can accommodate up to 412 people on a peak use day, based on the historic number of picnic tables/grills and picnic shelters in the area (88 picnic tables with an average of 4 people per table and 1 large historic shelter for 30 people and 2 small shelters for 15 people per shelter). The historic picnic/beach area shoreline will accommodate spill over from the picnic areas for activities such as wading but will not accommodate people at the densities expected along swimming beaches. Shore fishing along this shoreline can accommodate up to 50 surf casters along its 2,400lf. Recreational features such as trails and interpretive facilities will be used by a small percentage of visitors and these users will overlap with beach/picnic area users. Based on current standards and environmental considerations, the total "peak use" capacity of the park's recreational facilities is approximately 1,112 people. The capacity of the existing parking far exceeds this peak demand and can easily accommodate additional visitors to an interpretive center or cultural event.

The maximum size of a performance lawn is one acre based on distance to stage for the most distant viewer. A one-acre performance lawn accommodates between 4,800 (based on 9sf/person as at Wolftrap Farm Park and Gosman Amphitheatre in West Palm Beach) and 12,445 people (based on 3.5 sf/person as at Bayfront Park Amphitheatre in Miami). The total comfortable event density for the park is approximately 4,800, requiring 1,371 on-site parking spaces. Total parking demand for a peak event is approximately 3,560 cars. Between 1,500 and 2,000 cars can be parked on site in the parking lot, in overflow lawn areas and on the immediately adjacent STP Road ROW. Excess demand can be met in Virginia Key Beach lots further east along the STP Road and in shared, shuttle-serviced lots at adjacent facilities. Traffic management along Rickenbacker Causeway for an event of this size will require careful planning on the part of County and City officials to avoid congestion. Given the historic significance of the park as a venue for large gatherings, the development of effective traffic management strategies to permit successful events at Virginia Key Beach Park should be a priority. The successful management of the 250,000 visitor annual tennis event at Crandon Park sets a precedent.



The parking lot at Virginia Key Beach Park is recognized as historically significant because it represents an improvement in the status of black citizens of Miami Dade County who prior to the establishment of the park were not able to gather in large numbers without harrassment.



Park Use Areas and Access

**Peak Use Day Capacity**

Historic Picnic/beach area:	
Tables/grills (88 x 4 people)	352 people
Large Historic Shelter	30 people
2 Small Historic Shelters	30 people
Swimming Beach:	500 people
Group picnic/camping sites:	60 people
Additional picnic shelters:	90 people
Shore fishing (non-swimming beach):	50 people
Total park users - peak use day	1,112 people
Parking Requirement	317 cars
Parking Capacity	455 cars
Daily Lot -paved	225 cars
Daily Lot - grass overflow	230 cars

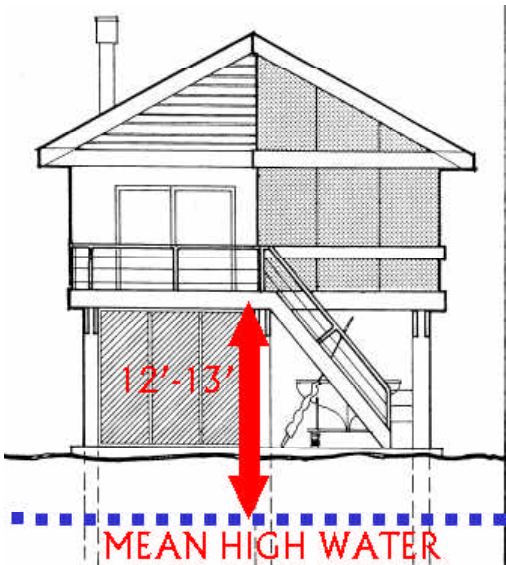
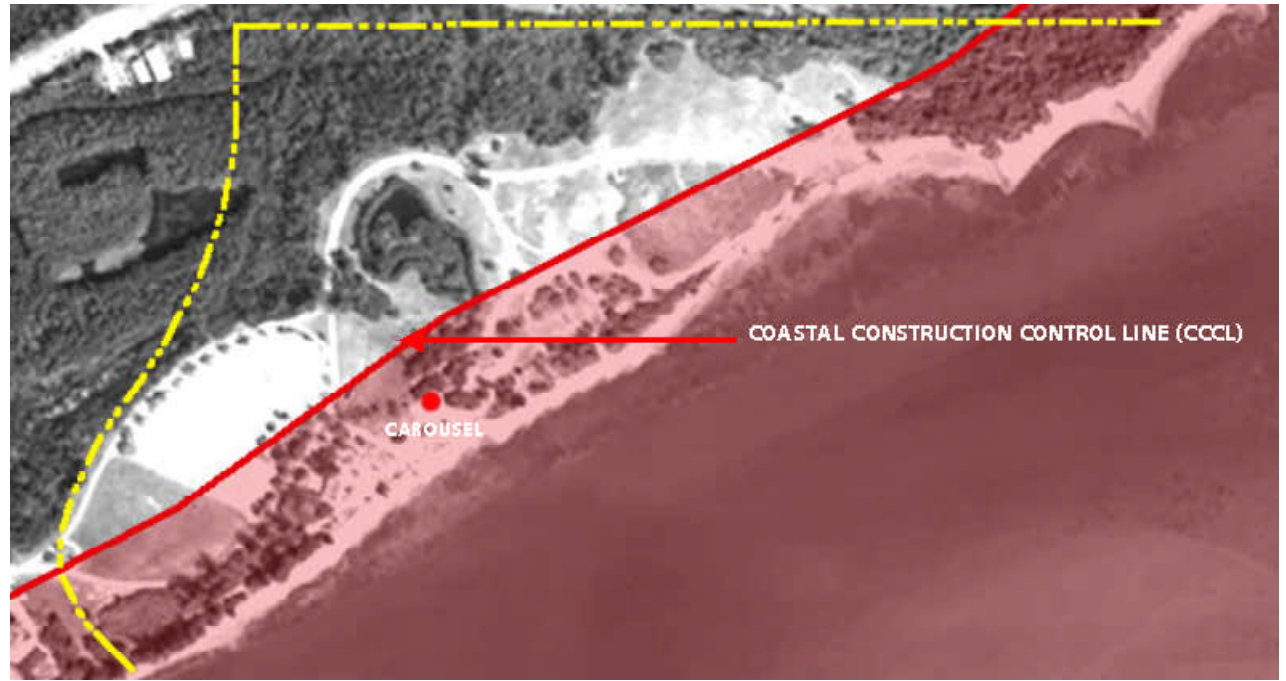
**Event Day Capacity**

Total audience - typical event	4,800 people
Parking Requirement	1,371 cars
Total audience - peak event	12,800 people
Parking Requirement	3,560 cars
Parking Capacity	1,695 cars
Daily Lot -paved	225 cars
Daily Lot - grass overflow	230 cars
Event Parking Lawn	960 cars
STP Road ROW	280 cars

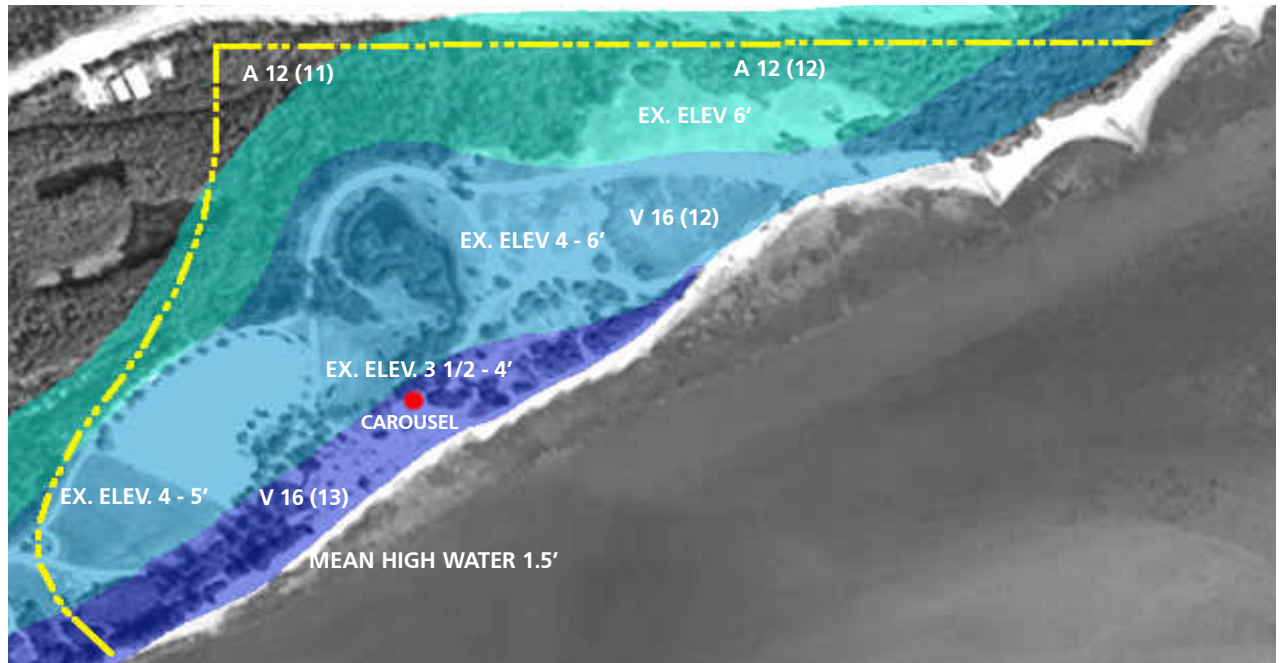
parking requirement is based on 3-4 people/car



Sign blown down in the 1950 hurricane that destroyed all of the park's original structures.



FEMA Flood Hazard Zone Construction Requirements



**Building code requirements:** All construction at Virginia Key Beach Park must meet standards imposed by the site's significant flood hazard. Engineering and building requirements to meet Federal Emergency Management Administration requirements are regulated and permitted through both the city of Miami Building Department and, for construction seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line, through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The majority of the Virginia Key Beach Park site falls within "V" flood hazard zones. V zones require all construction to be on pilings, with the lowest structural member of the structure to be a minimum of 12 feet above the mean high water elevation of the site (1.5') and to include "breakaway" construction at ground level to permit flood waters to flow through the pilings. A limited area along the northern boundary is within an "A" zone, which requires all habitable spaces to be elevated 12 feet above mean high water, but which permits construction to be on fill rather than on pilings.

**Planning and Zoning:** Design of all improvements at Virginia Key Beach Park is subject to review by the City of Miami Planning Board (City Commission) and as a waterfront site requires a Class II Special Permit. In addition, improvements are subject to review by the Miami Dade County Waterfront Development Committee, the City of Miami Parks Advisory Board, and the Waterfront Advisory Board. Current zoning of the site is "Parks & Recreation" either by designation or by interpretation for the area annexed to the city but left unzoned, which is subject to the most restrictive adjacent zoning designation. Permitted uses within this designation include: Public Parks, Clinics and Day Care, Police Facilities, Marine and Marina Facilities, Educational Facilities, Cultural Facilities, museums /art galleries /exhibit spaces, Social & Entertainment Services, restaurants /cafes /retail, Entertainment Facilities.

**Historic Preservation Requirements:** In order to protect the status of Virginia Key Beach Park as a National Register of Historic Places site, all improvements to the park must adhere to the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. Improvements, additions and adaptive reuse of park facilities must not adversely impact the listed historic resources or impair the integrity of the Character Defining Features of the landscape inventoried in this report. Other preservation requirements are documented in the Preservation Plan.

**Limited building sites for new construction:** Because virtually the entire site is protected as either a natural resource or historic resource, potential locations for new construction and site improvements are severely limited. Any site improvements must take into account impacts to resources and avoid, minimize and mitigate these impacts.

## SITE SUITABILITIES

The Virginia Key Beach Park Civil Rights Task Force public design charette findings identified four key goals for appropriate use of the historic beach park site. These goals were articulated in the Mission Statement of the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust that was established to implement the recommendations of the task force: “To restore Virginia Key Beach Park to its original state and to create Miami’s historical, environmental, cultural, recreational African-American Museum.” Opportunities consistent with the Trust mission and the priorities established through the public planning process address four goals:

1. Preserving and interpreting the park’s historic cultural and natural features
2. Documenting and commemorating Miami-Dade County’s Black Heritage
3. Providing recreational and educational opportunities
4. Providing programs and services that overcome barriers to recreational and educational opportunity for all Miami-Dade County residents

### **Goal 1: Preserving and interpreting the park’s historic cultural and natural features**

The historic features of the park include structures and a landscape setting that are interconnected. Preservation, restoration and interpretation of the park can be undertaken according to best practices in historic preservation and environmentally sensitive design and operation to reestablish a park that offers an educational and enjoyable glimpse into the natural and cultural history of Miami. While the historic park structures are not distinguished, the character of the historic setting incorporating these structures can be restored to create an evocative setting with a “period” ambiance suitable to understanding the historic and natural context of the events for which the park is recognized as a significant setting. The park can be restored according to the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Structures and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* and according to best practices in environmentally sensitive design and operation. The restored landscape setting and its features can incorporate interpretive features that permit the entire park to serve as an outdoor museum.

### **Goal 2: Documenting and commemorating Miami-Dade County’s Black Heritage**

Miami’s position as an important American city and international tourist destination, its role as a focal point of the western hemisphere with connections to the United States, Central and South America, and the Caribbean makes it potentially an appropriate location for a significant museum experience that has meaning for people beyond Miami-Dade County. The site is the only place within the city of Miami with an Atlantic Ocean shore, which gives it a unique link with places beyond the city. This fact, together with its proximity to other important visitor destinations on Virginia Key give it special prominence and potential. Because of this potential, the opportunity can be explored to provide a museum experience unique in the United States focusing on the African experience in America. Public input has identified a desire to recognize those who have contributed to the struggle for civil rights, to acknowledge the effect of segregation on African Americans and to memorialize those who lost their lives at Virginia Key. The park is well suited to exploring these themes since the beauty, serenity and dignity of the site can allow for a healing experience to be provided. This site also offers an opportunity to establish a gateway and anchor for other Black Heritage destinations in Miami Dade as well as historical sites around Biscayne Bay. Black Heritage tourism is a growing niche in the United States tourism market with significant potential. The state of Maryland, for example, recently committed \$30 million and half of all operating expenses for a Black Heritage museum in Baltimore in recognition of the potential for such a facility to benefit the economy

### Goal 3: Providing recreational and educational opportunities

Evaluation of the potential for existing and proposed uses at Virginia Key Beach Park to meet or not meet present and anticipated future recreational demand is based on information gathered from a variety of sources, including Miami Dade County Parks and Recreation staff and research as well as other sources cited in the assessment.

#### Influences on use levels

Beach utilization is influenced by six main factors: 1) custom, 2) service area or location, 3) season, 4) type of facilities and activities available, 5) design and operation of facilities and 6) access. Miami Dade County beaches provide relevant comparisons for Virginia Key Beach Park. Of particular relevance is Crandon Beach Park, which has the same service area as Virginia Key and offers similar activities and features.

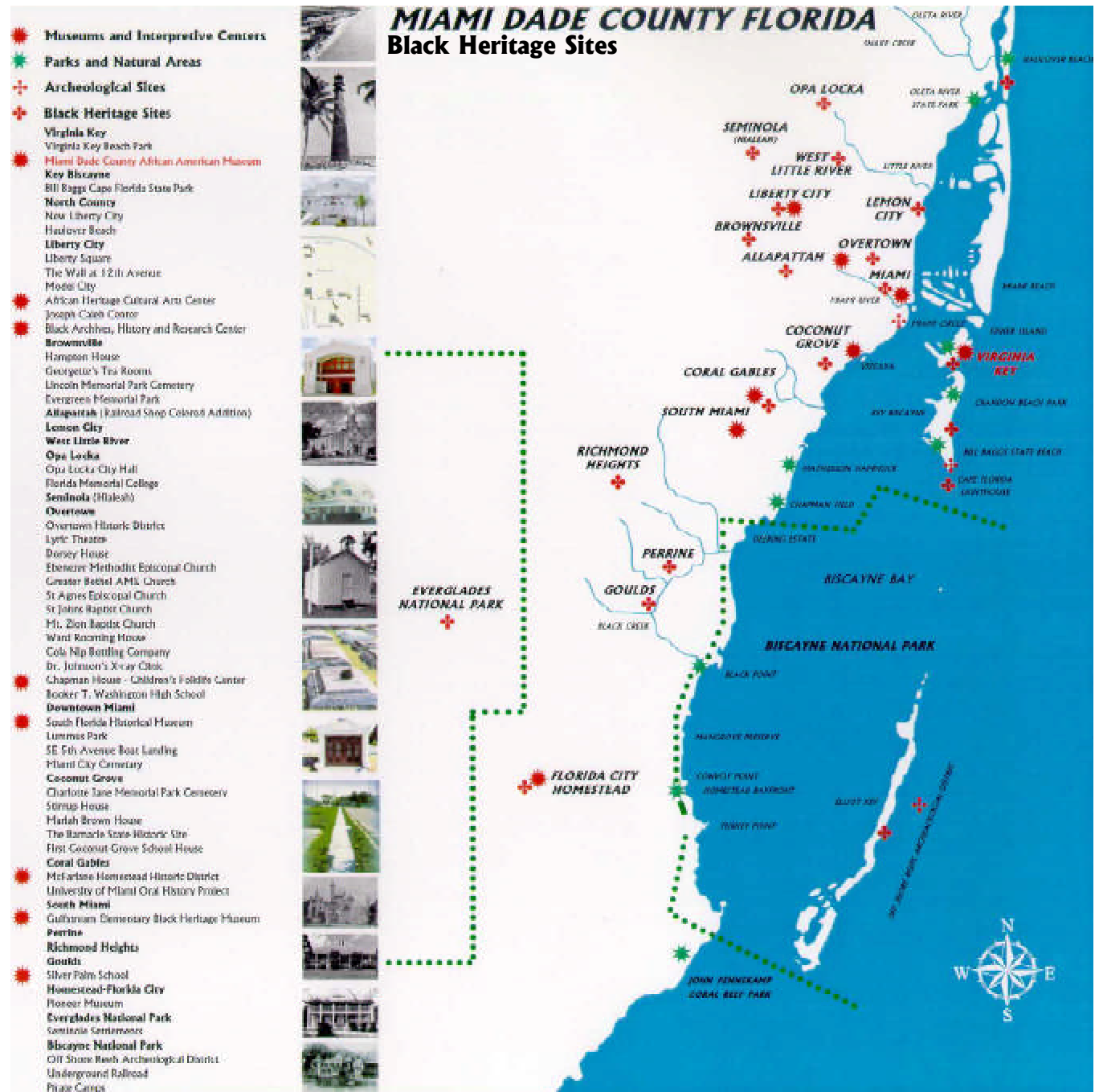
**Custom:** Beach users in Miami Dade County tend to show a preference for a particular beach park or area of a beach based on custom. A typical user profile for the five most popular county beaches prepared by the County Parks Department showed a tendency for beach users of similar ethnic background and age to frequent the same beach. While this utilization pattern is influenced by the ethnic make up of the service area closest to the beach, as discussed further under "Proximity," this pattern is also influenced by the custom of using a beach where a level of cultural comfort exists. Haulover and Crandon attract a high proportion of teens and young singles. Other county beaches, including Miami Beach, Bill Baggs, Matheson Hammock and Homestead Bayfront Park attract a higher proportion of young families and older users. Teens and young singles use beach facilities differently than families, showing a higher preference than families for some activities such as large gatherings and loud music. Similarly, beach users of different ethnicity show preferences for different activities. Hispanics show a preference for family group gatherings lasting a half day. African Americans show a preference for all-day, large group gatherings.

**Proximity:** A Miami Dade County study of beach preferences conducted in 1986 indicated that utilization of the five most popular county beaches reflects their location in the county, both in terms of total number of users and in the typical profile of the users. Census data indicates that the population of the county has remained relatively stable in terms of density and ethnic make up, which suggests that utilization patterns have remained the same in the intervening years.

Haulover Beach, located in the northeastern part of the county, attracts users from the county's northeast and northcentral neighborhoods. Neighborhoods in this part of the county have a large proportion of African American residents and this is reflected in the user profile of Haulover Beach, which has the largest utilization among African Americans. Crandon Beach is located in the central-eastern part of the county and attracts users from the central and western neighborhoods, where the relatively large proportion of Hispanic residents are reflected in the user profile of the beach. Crandon, however, attracts a broad spectrum of users of all ethnicities.

**Season:** Miami Dade County Parks and Recreation Department records indicate that beach utilization in Miami Dade County follows a seasonal pattern that reflects tourist visitation. At Haulover Beach, attendance is highest during the summer season and on weekends. Crandon Beach shows a more seasonal pattern of utilization, with peak attendance during the Thanksgiving to January holiday period and the April-May Spring Break period. Both parks experience higher utilization on weekends and the lowest utilization during the October-Thanksgiving period. Crandon Beach attracts a larger number of seasonal tourists and one-time users as a result of its





proximity to other tourist destinations such as Seaquarium. The Crandon Beach service area is the same as that of Virginia Key and therefore attendance figures provide a good indicator for demand for activities at Virginia Key.

Cyclical attendance patterns can influence use levels in a variety of ways. A stable attendance level is needed to support any kind of concession. The quality of concession offerings is affected by the quality of the business opportunity. Uneven concession quality can in turn influence perceptions about the beach experience and reduce the overall appeal of the beach, lowering use levels. Heavy concentrations of users can also leave an impression that facilities in general are inadequate and reduce repeat visits. Seasonal or event related crowding can pose maintenance challenges that also influence beach use levels by turning off first time users.

**Type of Facilities and Activities:** Use of county beaches by residents and visitors is highly influenced by the quality and type of activities and facilities. According to Miami Dade County Parks and Recreation Department research, going to the beach is the most popular recreational activity in the county. A recent opinion survey by the Trust for Public Land related to access to the waters of Biscayne Bay indicates that swimming and picnicking are the two most popular activities at county beaches. Approximately 60% of users at the most popular beaches cite swimming as the activity they enjoy; approximately 30% cite picnicking as the activity they enjoy. All other activities are enjoyed by fewer than 10% of beach users. Use levels are higher for specialized activities available only at a specific beach park. For example, approximately 25% of Matheson Hammock users enjoy boating, fishing or paddling. A high proportion of users cite "other" as the activity they enjoy at county beaches. Activities popular at local beaches include:

- Swimming
- Picnicking
- Walking/Jogging
- Motor boating
- Sports
- Beach sunning
- Bike Riding
- Fishing
- Special Events
- Wildlife Observation
- Eating
- Paddling
- Nature Trails
- Skating
- Playgrounds
- Diving/Snorkeling

Swimming and picnicking are overwhelmingly the most popular activities and the demand for these activities is therefore very high among county residents. The Greater Miami Convention and Visitor Bureau indicates that going to the beach is also the most popular activity for visitors and the main reason for non-business visits to the Miami area. Similarly, swimming is the most popular activity among visitors, along with sunbathing and eating.

Swimming and eating are the two most in-demand beach activities among both visitors and residents and the availability of these activities, as well as the quality, has an overwhelming influence on the use of local beaches. The quality of the swimming experience is by far the most influential factor in attracting beach users. Miami Beach is the destination of choice for swimming in the county, for visitors and residents alike. Miami Beach is the most frequently visited beach, indicating satisfied users who are attracted by the high quality swimming experience offered. Among non-residents, Miami Beach is also the most popular beach destination.

The Trust for Public Land statistics indicate that the availability of special activities and facilities also influences beach use. Matheson Hammock is the second most frequently visited beach after Miami Beach. Motorboating, fishing and paddling are the most popular activities at Matheson Hammock after swimming and picnicking and are nearly as popular as these. The high frequency of use of Matheson Hammock and the popularity of these activities suggests that repeat visitors are interested specifically in these activities. Bill Baggs attracts frequent users as well, with swimming by far the most popular activity. Trail-related activities such as biking, walking, and jogging are also popular at Bill Baggs, suggesting that repeat visitors are attracted to the availability of these activities. Crandon has been visited by almost as many county residents as the overwhelmingly popular Miami Beach, but is not as frequently revisited. Special events, such as organized picnics and sports events attract large numbers of one-time users to Crandon.

While Virginia Key, including the Rickenbacker Causeway, the city beach and Virginia Key Beach Park is not among the most frequently visited beaches, it has attracted a high number of visitors as well as a small number of frequent users. Virginia Key has been visited by only slightly fewer county residents than Haulover or Matheson Hammock. Special activities available at Virginia Key include Seaquarium, which accounts for the overall high number of county residents who have visited the island. Other activities such as windsurfing, sailing, jetski rental and special events at Virginia Key Beach Park attract smaller numbers of repeat visitors. Rickenbacker Causeway is also a dog-friendly beach. These uses are in high demand among small special interest groups.

Some extremely specialized users create a strong, consistent demand for facilities that are not available widely. These include dog owners, boating and fishing enthusiasts, specialized sports participants such as windsurfers and kite sailors, and nudists. Boat launches and storage facilities, boat rental and waters appropriate for fishing account for the popularity of Matheson Hammock. Similarly, nudists account for a strong demand for the clothing optional beach at Haulover. Demand for this activity is so intense that revenue generated by the north parking lot at Haulover, which serves the clothing optional beach, supports the entire beach.

**Design and operation:** Beach users cite the condition of facilities as an influential factor in their selection of a beach and in the frequency of their use. Well maintained facilities, such as at Miami Beach, Bill Baggs State Park and Matheson Hammock, attract repeat visitors. Maintenance issues and a lack of variety in facilities were cited by Haulover Beach stakeholders as reasons for low repeat visitation.

The design of facilities is also influential. Users show a preference for parks where a theme carries through the design of all facilities in the park. In addition, design can influence the ability of users to identify recreation options and has a strong influence on their perceptions of the extent and quality of facilities. Wayfinding is an important limiting factors at all county beaches. Use patterns on Key Biscayne, for example, indicate that users show a preference for Bill Baggs State Park and that only after parking spaces at Bill Baggs are full, do use levels at Crandon rise. Unclear access points, confusing internal circulation patterns, large, centralized parking lots and the fact that the beach is not visible from the access roads or parking facilities deter visitors at Crandon. Visitors show a preference for the clear relationship between access, parking and the recreational options at Rickenbacker Causeway and Bill Baggs, where parking lots are

aligned with the beach and the visitor can see where beach space is available. Visitors also show a strong preference for minimizing the distance between their parking space and the beach. Large, centralized parking lots at Crandon are perceived as distant from the beach and tend to concentrate users within a short distance of the parking lot. As result, the central portion of Crandon Beach, near the north parking lots accessed from the first entrance to the park along Crandon Boulevard, is the most highly used while the majority of the beach, which must be accessed by foot or from the south parking lot, is largely underused, even on high use days. Similar problems exist at Haulover, where circulation and wayfinding problems concentrate users in areas of the beach that are the easiest to access while large areas are virtually unused. Large concentrations of parked cars also convey an impression of crowding on the beach, which deters some visitors.

Conditions of riptides, lightning, littoral pollution, etc. can limit the number of beach users. Fluctuating factors, such as weather and pollution levels influence daily use levels but long-term factors such as currents, persistent pollution, seaweed deposits and murkiness influence the swimming experience and have an impact on overall use levels. Beach utilization is highest on clear days with low pollution levels.

**Access:** Income level influences beach utilization. Transit-dependent, low-income county residents without cars do not use county beaches. TPL statistics indicate that a large percentage of inner city children have never visited a beach.

#### **Broader trends in the recreational marketplace**

**Missed Opportunities:** Facilities and activities that are scarce and which attract loyal followers are in high demand. Clothing Optional Beaches attract a highly loyal following. The scarcity of clothing optional beaches means that unmet demand for this beach activity is extremely high. This strong demand translates into revenue dollars. As noted, for example, the parking lots serving the clothing optional beach at Haulover generate sufficient revenue to support the entire beach park. The clothing optional section of Haulover Beach is close to its capacity.

**New Demands:** Low income county residents without access to automobile transportation have low participation rates in recreational opportunities of all kinds, including beach going. Programs and alternative transportation options that provide access to this population are a potential generator of demand for beach activities.

Beachside overnight accommodation is in high demand throughout south Florida, as real estate and hotel prices attest. Camping sites are available at only five parks in Miami Dade County. Ecotourist type accommodations are non-existent. The feasibility study for the ecotourist campground proposed for Virginia Key lists only five comparable facilities that include overnight camping and short term rental opportunities. Only two of these were within 100 miles. The feasibility report indicated a high demand for this type of facility.

Rental cabanas are in high demand at Crandon Park. In contrast to day-use cabanas, which are available as changing rooms, rental cabanas are leased annually and provide storage for recreation equipment such as beach umbrellas, chairs and bicycles.

**Competitive Trends:** Black Heritage Tourism is a small but growing niche within the tourism industry. Heritage tourism is currently a \$30 billion a year industry. The most recent Travel Industry Association report stated that as a small segment of the total tourism picture, the African-American market is a \$10 billion a year market. It also stated that African Americans are more likely to visit

heritage sites and ethnic museum exhibits than any other segment of the market. (da Silva, Angela, "African American Heritage Tourism," *Preservation Issues*, Volume 7, Number 3)

Synergy with other Black Heritage initiatives in Miami Dade County could enhance demand for this kind of experience. The Overtown Folklife Village, the Miami Dade County Black Heritage Trail, Coconut Grove's Junkanoo Festival are possible complimentary attractions that could draw Black Heritage tourists to the area, establish Miami Dade County as a Black Heritage destination and create a larger potential audience for a civil rights memorial and museum.

### **Conclusions**

The poor quality of the swimming experience possible at Virginia Key Beach Park limits the park's recreational potential. Dangerous currents make parts of the beach relatively unsuitable for swimming. Although methods of improving the safety of the beach can be explored, the potential of the beach to attract and retain typical beach users is severely limited, since swimming is the primary activity enjoyed at the most popular beaches. Virginia Key Beach Park is in a poor position to compete with Miami Beach and Crandon as a swimming destination. However, attendance at other county beaches indicates that demand for well-maintained, unique activities other than swimming is also high and can take the place of swimming in meeting the recreational demands of county residents and visitors. In addition, unique activities and features increase repeat visits and help to stabilize attendance. Stable attendance reinforces the appeal of facilities by ensuring the viability of concessions and by building familiarity with the recreation options available. Design and operation of facilities can strongly influence attendance and build loyal repeat visitors.

Virginia Key Beach Park is well-positioned to serve a broad spectrum of Miami Dade County residents and visitors of all ages and ethnicities, especially from the south and central areas of the county. Virginia Key Beach Park's proximity to other parks, recreation options and tourist destinations such as Seaquarium, Crandon Park, and a restored Miami Marine Stadium, enhances its potential as a recreation destination. Crandon Park alone attracts approximately one million visitors per year, with an additional quarter million attending the annual tennis and golf events held at the park. Virginia Key Beach Park will be well placed to attract a proportion of this visitation, as visitors explore the various recreation options available at Key Biscayne and Virginia Key. In addition to this "walk by" traffic, Virginia Key will also attract a loyal following of users interested in its unique features, including educational and interpretive facilities and its historical significance as a gathering place for African Americans. The park also holds high potential demand as a Black Heritage tourist destination. Because Virginia Key Beach Park is positioned to attract tourists visiting nearby destinations, it can potentially serve as a gateway to other Black Heritage Trail destinations in Miami Dade County including Overtown and Coconut Grove.

Design and maintenance of facilities, especially those related to access such as parking and alternative transportation options and programs, are essential to ensuring that Virginia Key Beach Park fulfills its potential to meet demand for recreation.

The reuse of historical facilities for both interpretation and for their historical recreational uses is a key means of realizing the park's vision. At the same time, the historical facilities can meet only a portion of the recreational demands called for by the park's mission. New uses are therefore required as well as new facilities to ensure adequate services, including sufficient restroom and concession facilities. The park can accommodate recreational facilities for most popular beach activities, including:

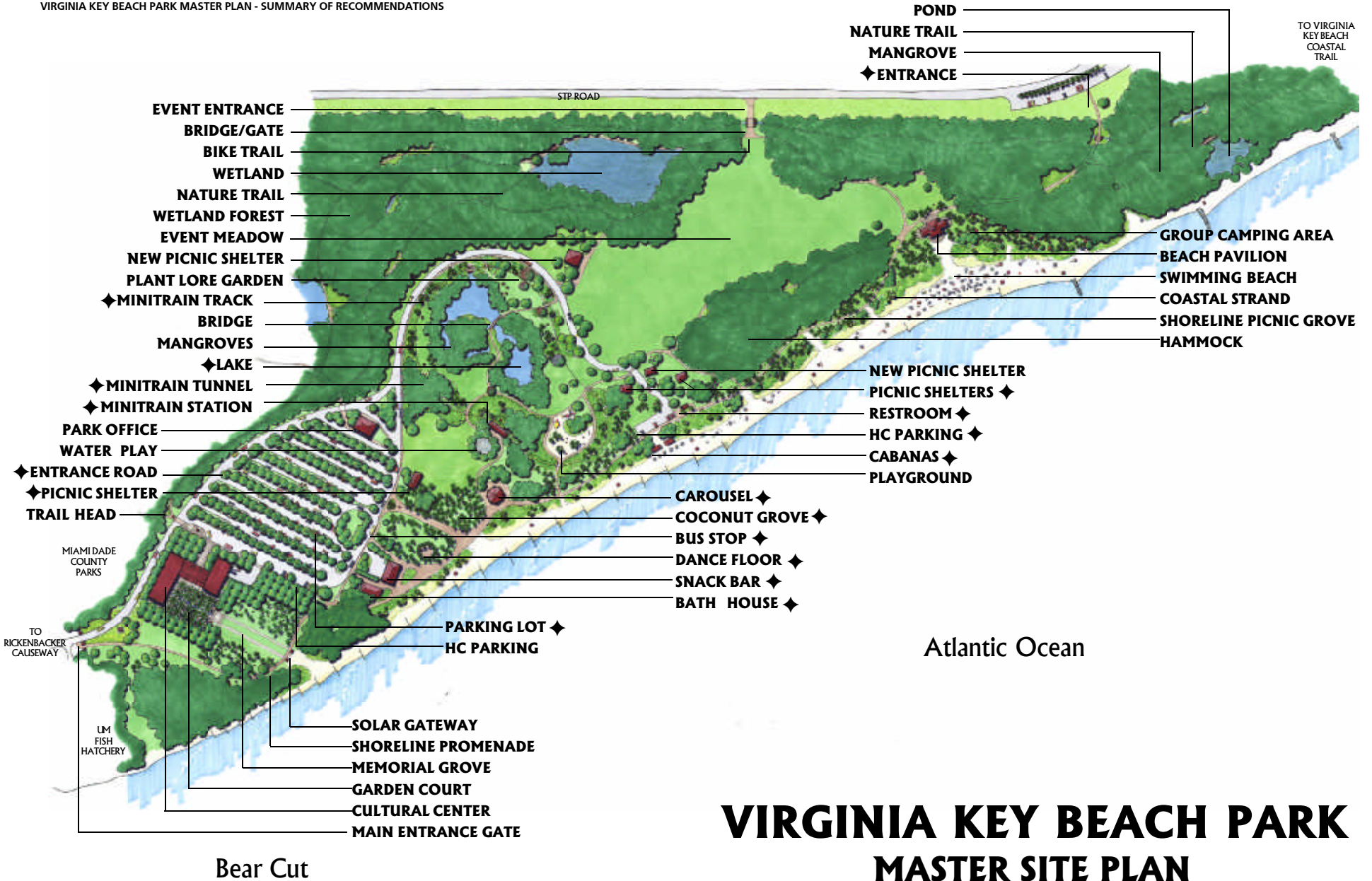
- Beach areas for swimming and snorkeling
- Beach areas for picnicking, sunbathing, kayak launch
- Lawn areas for picnicking
- Concession facilities for dining/food sales
- Concession facilities for equipment
- Storage facilities for equipment
- Day-use cabanas and bath houses
- Trails for Walking/Jogging/Bike Riding/Skating – including dog-friendly facilities
- Nature trails for wildlife observation and nature study
- Performance venue for special events
- Playground area – including the historic Carousel and Mini Train

#### **Goal 4: Overcoming barriers to access**

The park’s mission, like Crandon Beach Park, is to provide a place where all county residents can experience the healing powers of the natural world. Virginia Key Beach Park can place a special emphasis on overcoming barriers to access. The park program therefore can include features geared to enhancing access to the park for the county’s low-income residents. The park’s comparatively compact size makes it a “walkable” beach park with a variety of attractions that are easily explored on foot. In order to make beach going more convenient, affordable and enjoyable for people reliant on transit, facilities and programs can be developed that take into account all aspects of reaching and enjoying a visit to the beach. There are many reasons not to take public transit to the beach: the potential to be stuck there if the bus is unreliable, the walk from home to the bus stop to the beach with heavy and cumbersome equipment, especially after being tired by a day of activity and heat, lack of space or permission to carry equipment on the bus, the long bus ride itself, including waiting and transfers, the challenge of finding an outfit (or outfits) that will be wearable throughout the many phases of the outing, especially the return bus trip after spending a day outdoors, having wet or messy hair in public (ok for the beach, but not for the bus ride). All of these inconveniences – as well as the expense involved in overcoming them – deter those dependent on public transit or with low incomes or who want to reduce their reliance on the car for environmental reasons from visiting the beach. Making the beach transit-friendly means addressing these realities. Several approaches are possible to improve the experience of getting to the beach by making it shorter, more convenient, more reliable and more fun:

- Extend bus routes into the park with shelters, telephones and transit information as close to amenities as possible.
- Provide alternative transit modes such as jitney service, organized group transportation
- Provide carts, buggies or wagons to facilitate carrying beach equipment to the areas of the park remote from the parking lot
- Partner with organizations that can sponsor transportation and supply equipment. Facilitate church groups and clubs that sponsor recreation opportunities for youth such as Optimists Club, Big Brothers and Sisters, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Sierra Club and other groups focused on environmental education. Provide facilities for sponsoring organizations that provide for equipment storage and group activities including camping.
- Make a wide variety of beach necessities affordably available at the park: towels, chairs, umbrellas, coolers, ice, food, recreation equipment such as bikes, rafts, fishing gear and bait, kayaks, kites etc.
- Provide long-term lockers for storage of personal beach gear including clothes, bikes, chairs, umbrellas, coolers, bathing suits.
- Provide and meticulously maintain changing rooms that offer privacy, places to store street clothes, vanity areas and showers.

# **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**



# VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK MASTER SITE PLAN

0' 300'



WALLACE ROBERTS & TODD, LLC

◆ HISTORIC FEATURE



## DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM SUMMARY

Virginia Key Beach Park is not just another city park. Its future management and development have been the subject of an intense public involvement process that has involved every level of government from local to Federal and innumerable dedicated citizen activists, many of whom have devoted years to the protection and wise use of this unique parcel of public land. The park is one of a handful of places in Miami that people are willing to call sacred. The Virginia Key Beach Park Trust is thus charged with a unique mission: the stewardship of a park with extraordinary significance to our city and our nation as one of few sites dedicated to the commemoration of the Civil Rights movement. The Trust will face management issues related to commemoration of historic events, stewardship of natural and cultural resources, education, and recreation—and will share management duties with other public entities. Efficient and effective management of the park must be predicated on a clear understanding of how these duties are shared. As the word “trust” implies, the public will look to the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust to oversee and coordinate these activities.

The master plan outlines the actions required to preserve and reuse Virginia Key Beach Park as a recreational setting and a natural and historical resource with an educational and commemorative purpose. The park is recognized as a significant place within the context of the Civil Rights movement and the master plan provides a framework for establishing the park as a setting where the public can gain an appreciation of the goals and achievements of the Civil Rights movement. The park is also recognized as a significant vestige of the natural setting of the city of Miami and the master plan provides a framework for integrating into this setting a park program that reflects goals established by the public planning process. The park’s natural resources will sustain a rare vestige of the region’s unique animal and plant communities and contribute to the city’s long term sustainability. The park will serve as a setting for education about both history and the natural environment. The park will play a role in meeting the recreational needs of the city as a whole and as a setting for cultural events.

The development program depicted in the Master Site Plan is summarized below. Cost Estimates for the development of the park and detailed capital improvement budgets follow this summary. Detailed recommendations and descriptions are provided in separate sections for Historic Preservation, Commemoration and Education, Recreation, Natural Resources Protection and Operations and Support.

### **Cultural Center**

36,000sf exhibit building with apparatus required to present video, voice recording or holographic imagery

### **Commemorative Landscape**

Inscribed stone garden court terrace with Date Palms and interactive fountain

Solar Gateway

Memorial Walkway with inscriptions

Memorial Coconut grove with markers and monuments

Recreate or reinterpret the park office at its original location as an interpretive display

Install interpretive displays at Bath House

Replace the lost carousel horses

Install interpretive text panels and historic photographs at carousel

Install a Juke Box at the Dance Pavilion that plays music from 1920s-1960s

Restore the Minitrain feature including train, tracks, tunnel and station

Enhance the Minitrain course with interpretive, educational and play features at the station and in the landscape

Replace metal cabanas and install interpretive signage

- Install interpretive signage, historic photographs and text in parking lot
- Install classic car display
- Install shoreline interpretive features
- Install natural history interpretive features
- Install the State Historic Marker

### **Historic Landscape Restoration**

#### **Paving, Grading and Drainage**

- Remove/spread the spoils piles
- Regrade throughout the site to establish positive drainage
- Widen the northern spur of the entrance road to accommodate two-way traffic and bus access
- Renovate the parking lot
- Restore the parking lot adjacent to the cabanas
- Stripe and sign handicap accessible parking spaces in the main parking area and cabana area
- Install 8' shoreline path with friable geotextile base, a stabilized sand wearing surface with maximum slope 1:20
- Adapt the southern spur of the entrance road as a pedestrian-only path

#### **Planting**

- Restore shade trees in planting islands around the parking lot's perimeter
- Plant shade trees to provide complete canopy coverage of the
- Restore the historic coconut grove using primarily certified-seed *Cocos nucifera*, var. Maypan
- Engage a certified arborist to evaluate and prune shade trees
- Plant new shade trees according to a "Tree Succession Plan"
- Replace lawn grasses with *Paspalum*
- Renovate the meadow with turf-block, grass-rings or similar geotextile system
- Restore plantings around historic buildings
- Enhance plantings around the Minitrain tracks
- Enhance the plantings along the historic mini train with barrier plantings with concealed fencing

### **Recreation Features**

- Trail system
- Shoreline promenade
- Paved recreation trails
- Nature trails
- Dune crossings
- Boardwalk at pond / mangrove area
- Canoe or kayak launch with access to the water bodies in the adjacent County park
- Informational and wayfinding signage

Beach Improvements

- Recreate the lifeguard stands
- Replace the metal cabanas
- Install "No Swimming" signs
- Install marker buoys for safe swimming area

**Picnic and Camping Facilities**

- Replace and restore picnic tables and grills inside and around the historic picnic structures
- Install Picnic tables, benches and grills for picnic/camping areas
- Small shelter near the two small existing shelters
- Large corporate rental shelter with grill
- Beach Pavilion
- Post and rope barriers to protect natural vegetation

**Children's Amusement Area**

- A water play feature with interactive water jets.
- Playground climbing structures
- Hedge theatre
- Climbing sculptures and interactive play features

**Event Meadow**

- Electrical service vaults at temporary stage locations

**Operations and Support Facilities**

- 5,000-7000 Park Office SF on pilings
- Water and Sewer Service:
- Electrical Service:
- Overhead electrical line burial
- Conversion of service risers at existing structures
- Telephone and high-speed internet access
- Access drive from STP Road with removable bollards
- Security gate
- Bridge over wetland

**COST ESTIMATE**

The cost estimate represents multiple phases of improvements that will be carried out over the next five years. The major elements are listed below in order of priority, beginning with in-progress projects (underlined). The cost estimate does not include soft costs. For a breakdown of costs, see the detailed capital improvement budgets for each project. Budgets for museum improvements and park improvements are detailed on the following pages.

Element		Estimated Cost	Authorized Funding	Source	Deficit
<u>Historic Building Restoration</u>		\$1,234,000	\$1,000,000	(HDB)	\$234,000
<u>Sanitary Sewer</u>		\$1,200,000	\$750,000	(SSB/HDB)	\$450,000
<u>Shoreline Restoration 111</u>		\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	(ACOE-111)	
<u>Ecosystem Restoration 1135</u>		\$2,792,000	\$2,000,000	(ACOE-1135)	\$692,000 (required City match)
Exotics removal & replanting	\$2,692,000				
Recreation Features	\$100,000				
Museum Improvements		\$15,747,500	\$5,441,000		\$10,306,500
Cultural Center	\$12,580,000			\$5,000,000 (CDT)	
Commemorative Landscape	\$1,735,000			\$441,000 (SNPB)	
Contingency (10%)	\$1,431,500				
Park Improvements		\$4,388,500	\$3,250,000	(HDB+)	\$1,138,505
Historic landscape restoration	\$1,119,500				
Operation and Support	\$1,117,800				
Recreation Features	\$1,752,250				
<i>(excluding ACOE-1135 funded elements)</i>					
Contingency (10%)	\$398,950				
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$26,362,000</b>	<b>\$15,441,000</b>		<b>\$10,921,000</b>

Key to Funding Sources

- HDB Allocated Homeland Defense Bond - \$1M allocated from \$5M authorized
- HDB+ Authorized but not allocated Homeland Defense Bond - \$4 unallocated less \$750,000 earmarked to repay SSB
- SSB/HDB Special Sewer Bond to be repaid from \$5M authorized HDB
- ACOE-111 Army Corps of Engineers
- ACOE-1135 Army Corps of Engineers - Requires 25% match from city; includes 5% for recreation features
- SNPB Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond
- CDT Convention & Development Tax

**CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGETS**

	QTY	UNIT	UNIT COST	TOTAL	
<b>CULTURAL CENTER</b>					
Cultural Center Architecture	36,000	SF	\$250	\$9,000,000	
Cultural Center Landscape hardscape	60,000	SF	\$10	\$600,000	
Cultural Center Landscape softscape	4	AC	\$20,000	\$80,000	
Cultural Center furnishings and exhibits	1	ALLOW	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000	
Interactive fountain	1	ALLOW	\$800,000	\$800,000	
<b>CULTURAL CENTER SUBTOTAL</b>					<b>\$12,580,000</b>
<b>COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE</b>					
Entrance gateway	1	ALLOW	\$100,000	\$100,000	
Solar Gateway	1	ALLOW	\$100,000	\$100,000	
Memorial Walkway with inscriptions (400lf x10')	4,000	SF	\$10	\$40,000	
Bronze figures	10	EA	\$60,000	\$600,000	
Plaques, markers and monuments	12	EA	\$10,000	\$120,000	
Interpretive signage/displays (30 points of interest)	30	EA	\$3,000	\$90,000	
Recreate park office	1	ALLOW	\$15,000	\$15,000	
Carousel horses	1	ALLOW	\$100,000	\$100,000	
Juke Box	1	ALLOW	\$50,000	\$50,000	
Minitrain ride (train and track)	1	ALLOW	\$250,000	\$250,000	
Recreate the Minitrain station	1,000	SF	\$100	\$100,000	
Restore the Minitrain tunnel	1,200	SF	\$100	\$120,000	
Replace the Metal cabanas	10	EA	\$5,000	\$50,000	
<b>COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE SUBTOTAL</b>					<b>\$1,735,000</b>
<b>HISTORIC LANDSCAPE RESTORATION</b>					
Grading and soil amendments	18	AC	\$5,000	\$90,000	
Roadway renovation	7,500	SY	\$10	\$75,000	
Parking lot fill, drainage	25,800	SY	\$10	\$258,000	
Parking lot asphalt	18,000	SY	\$2	\$36,000	
Parking lot reinforced turf (includes irrigation)	7,800	SY	\$3	\$23,400	
Parking lot tree pits	65	EA	\$500	\$32,500	
Parking lot trees	130	EA	\$600	\$78,000	
Parking lot wheel blocks - (220 turf spaces + 1/2 (246) asphalt	353	EA	\$200	\$70,600	
Restore the parking lot adjacent to the cabanas (10 HC spaces)	3,000	SF	\$1	\$3,000	
Remove southern spur of the entrance road (approx. 1000lf)	1	ALLOW	\$20,000	\$20,000	
Picnic grove (approx. 5 acres)	5	AC	\$20,000	\$100,000	
New shade trees	200	EA	\$1,000	\$200,000	
Replace lawn grasses with Paspalum (sprigged )	18	EA	\$6,000	\$108,000	
Miscellaneous plantings	1	ALLOW	\$25,000	\$25,000	
<b>HISTORIC LANDSCAPE RESTORATION TOTAL</b>					<b>\$1,119,500</b>

**RECREATION FEATURES**

**Trail System**

Shoreline promenade (4000lf x 8')	4,000	LF	\$32	\$128,000	
Paved recreation trails (8000lf@6')	8,000	LF	\$12	\$96,000	
Nature trails (8000lf@6')	8,000	LF	\$4	\$32,000	
Bridges (pedestrian @35/sf)	250	SF	\$35	\$8,750	
Bridges (vehicular 1@30x24)	1	ALLOW	\$25,000	\$25,000	
Dune crossings (5accessible@30x60)	9,000	SF	\$4	\$36,000	
Boardwalk at pond / mangrove area (@35/sf)	600	SF	\$35	\$21,000	
Post and Rope barriers (8000lf)	8,000	LF	\$2	\$16,000	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	\$362,750

**Beach Improvements**

Lifeguard stands (15)	15	EA	\$3,000	\$45,000	
Install "No swimming" signs (15 @ 500)	15	EA	\$500	\$7,500	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	\$52,500

**Picnic and Camping Facilities**

Picnic tables	100	EA	\$1,000	\$100,000	
Benches	50	EA	\$1,000	\$50,000	
Grills	100	EA	\$800	\$80,000	
Small shelter near the two small existing shelters	1	ALLOW	\$37,000	\$37,000	
Large corporate rental shelter with grill	1	ALLOW	\$300,000	\$300,000	
Beach Pavilion (5000sf)	5,000	SF	\$100	\$500,000	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	\$1,067,000

**Event Meadow**

Electrical service vaults at temporary stage locations	6	EA	\$5,000	\$30,000	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	\$30,000

**Children's Amusements (New)**

Water play feature with interactive water jets	1	ALLOW	\$200,000	\$200,000	
Playground climbing structures	2	EA	\$50,000	\$100,000	
Climbing sculptures and interactive play features	10	EA	\$4,000	\$40,000	
				<i>Subtotal</i>	\$340,000

**RECREATION FEATURE TOTAL**

less \$100,000 to be included in ACOE-1135

**\$1,752,250\***

**OPERATION & SUPPORT FACILITIES**

Park Office	7,000		\$150	\$1,050,000	
Access drive from STP Road (200lf x 24')	4,800		\$2	\$9,600	
Security gate at event entrance	1		\$10,000	\$10,000	
Bridge (50 lf x 24' @35/sf)	1		\$45,000	\$45,000	
Removable bollards at event entrance (4@6'oc)	4		\$800	\$3,200	
					<b>\$1,117,800</b>

**OPERATION AND SUPPORT TOTAL**

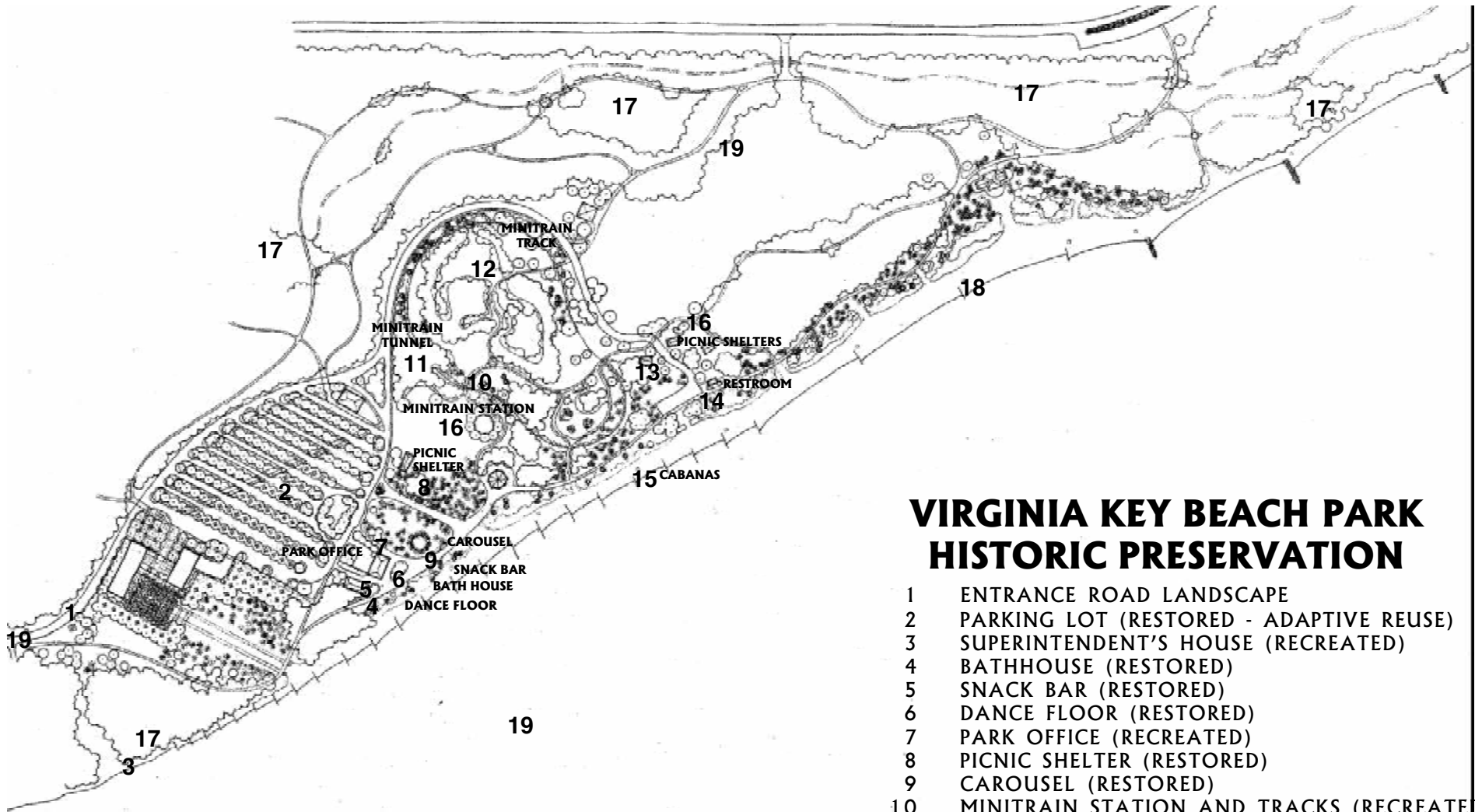
*Site Subtotal* \$18,305,050

*Contingency* \$1,830,450

**TOTAL**

**\$20,135,500**

# **HISTORIC PRESERVATION**



## VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- 1 ENTRANCE ROAD LANDSCAPE
- 2 PARKING LOT (RESTORED - ADAPTIVE REUSE)
- 3 SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE (RECREATED)
- 4 BATHHOUSE (RESTORED)
- 5 SNACK BAR (RESTORED)
- 6 DANCE FLOOR (RESTORED)
- 7 PARK OFFICE (RECREATED)
- 8 PICNIC SHELTER (RESTORED)
- 9 CAROUSEL (RESTORED)
- 10 MINITRAIN STATION AND TRACKS (RECREATED)
- 11 MINITRAIN TUNNEL (RESTORED)
- 12 LAKE (HISTORIC DESIGN INTENT REALIZED)
- 13 PICNIC SHELTERS (RESTORED)
- 14 RESTROOMS (RESTORED)
- 15 CABANAS (RECREATED)
- 16 LAWN AND SHADE TREES (RESTORED)
- 17 NATIVE VEGETATION (RESTORED)
- 18 SHORELINE (RESTORED)
- 19 VIEWS (RESTORED AND PROTECTED)





## INTRODUCTION

The goal of preservation of the historic site features – including both buildings and landscape setting – is to permit the public to place the events for which the site is recognized as significant into historical context. The character of the park during its period of significance was a joyful place of refuge and ease. Restoration of that setting will illustrate the achievement of one of the fundamental goals of the struggle for Civil Rights: the enjoyment of the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness. The historic site features will provide an evocative setting for active recreational use and for the presentation of interpretive information that can illuminate the establishment of the park as a significant event in the Civil Rights movement. Proposed historic preservation measures are as follows:

- Preserve and restore the landscape setting of the park and integrate new facilities and uses sensitively to protect the integrity of the setting
- Preserve and restore the existing historic structures and adaptively reuse each for its original function and to present interpretive information
- Recreate or reinterpret lost historic features within contemporary building code restrictions and use each for recreation and interpretation
- Incorporate interpretive text, period photographs and period artifacts into the park setting to provide visitors with information about the park’s historic features, their use and popularity, their significance to the black community and the context of the park within American society during the period of significance

Recommendations for the preservation of the site reflect the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* and are intended to safeguard the integrity of the Character Defining Features of the Landscape. Recommendations for preservation of the Character Defining Features of the Landscape are as follows:

### SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND PATTERNS

Orientation of all park facilities to the Atlantic Ocean shoreline is a character defining site feature with both significance and integrity that should be preserved. In addition, the division of the park into distinct “outdoor rooms” by vegetation masses has significance and integrity and can also be preserved and restored. The “outdoor room” that was formed by the coconut grove along the park’s shore was a significant element of its spatial organization, providing shaded seating and circulation areas along the shoreline with uninterrupted views of the water. This spatial configuration was critical to the recreational function of the park. The integrity of the grove has diminished with time. Shoreline seating areas created by clumps of Sea grape trees remain from the park’s period of significance but have reduced integrity due to intrusion by exotic species. Erosion has caused the loss of shoreline vegetation in the eastern part of the site. The following treatment is recommended to preserve and restore the historic character of the site’s spatial organization:

- Preserve orientation of all site facilities to the Atlantic Ocean by reestablishing the shoreline as a major circulation element
- Remove exotic species and reestablish shoreline vegetation in massing reflecting historic patterns
- Restore the coconut grove along the entire shoreline with a combination of native palm species and Coconut palms. Integrate the palm grove with native plant communities. (See Natural Resource Protection) Site picnic tables and grills similar to the standard park furnishings used during the park’s period of significance throughout the grove to reestablish it as an “outdoor room”



## VIEWS/BACKDROPS

Views of the Atlantic Ocean horizon, the absence of views of significant development and views of the natural character of the shoreline are among the site's most significant character defining features and should be preserved and restored. Uninterrupted views of the beach from the interior of the park and the vegetated backdrops that define the park's northern boundary are significant character defining features that should be preserved and restored. Views of the beach park site within its undeveloped context from other vantage points are also important character defining site features that should be protected. The following treatment is recommended to preserve and restore the historic character of the site's views and backdrops:

- Stabilize vegetated backdrops by removal of invasive exotic species and replanting with appropriate native species
- Screen adjacent development with vegetation massing consistent with historic patterns
- Work with adjacent property owners to reduce and limit the visual impact of adjacent development
- Investigate the feasibility of scenic or conservation easements for critical visual backdrops



## LANDMARKS/STRUCTURES

Significant landmarks with integrity include all of the structures identified as contributing resources in the National Register of Historic Places nomination. In addition, significant landmarks have been lost. The following treatment is recommended to preserve and restore the historic character of the site's existing landmarks and to recreate its lost features. (See Preservation Plan for details):

### Carousel

- Restore the carousel building
- Replace the lost carousel horses
- Reuse the carousel as an entertainment feature as demand dictates (See Recreation)
- Use the carousel building to house significant interpretive exhibits that take advantage of the building's available wall space and secure interior protected from the elements
- Present longer, more complex interpretive text panels that can be perused at leisure in a shady indoor setting
- Display high quality photographs from the park's period of significance that can be enjoyed either in the context of the interpretive text or within the context of an entertainment feature such as images of the carousel itself, images of the landscape setting visible from the vantage point of the carousel such as the historic coconut grove and the Atlantic Ocean.

### Concession Building

- Restore the concession building to house the operations of a concessionaire responsible for providing refreshments (See Operation and Support for detailed recommendations related to the operation of the concession.)
- Include menu items from the park's period of significance (corn dogs, pop corn)
- Provide rental of beach chairs and umbrellas of the type available during the park's period of significance

### Bathhouse

- Restore the bathhouse to provide changing facilities and restrooms
- Meticulously maintain facilities to protect the structure itself and to support park operations (See Operation and Support for detailed recommendations)
- Use the bathhouse building to house significant interpretive exhibits that take advantage of the building's available wall space and secure interior protected from the elements



*The park's historic structures offer an opportunity to present the public with an accumulation of evocative glimpses of black life during the period of significance that can put the goals and accomplishments of the American Civil Rights movement into historical perspective. Period photographs can be displayed in the restored structures together with text panels and artifacts.*



*The corn dogs served at the snack bar are still remembered with relish fifty years later. Can the taste be recreated? A Juke Box like the one used at the dance floor can play period music once again, such as the songs of 1953 chart-toppers Nat King Cole and Ella Fitzgerald. The Minitrain ride can be a place to learn about the plant lore brought to America by the African Americans and Caribbean Islanders who settled in Miami Dade County.*

- Integrate interpretive features in the interior that illustrate the importance of the bathhouse as a means of facilitating access to the beach for the park’s visitor’s during the period of significance when many people walked or took the bus to the park and relied on the changing facilities to make their visit feasible and dignified. Display the bathing suits and personal beach gear and grooming products that were used during the period of significance. Display period photographs of “bathing beauties” that were taken at the beach during its period of significance and which were a period mainstay of mainstream Miami from which black citizens were largely excluded until the opening of the beach.

**Picnic Shelters**

- Restore the picnic shelters for their original purpose
- Restore the historic lawn and shade tree plantings around the picnic shelters (See Vegetation)
- Replace and restore picnic tables and grills inside and around the structures (See Site Furnishings)

**Restroom Building**

- Restore the restroom building to serve its original function
- Meticulously maintain facilities to protect the structure itself and to support park operations (See Operation and Support for detailed recommendations)

**Superintendent’s House**

- Recreate, within building code restrictions, the superintendent’s house at its original location. Work with Miami Dade County Park and Recreation Department to incorporate the site into the park boundary
- Use the recreated structure to display significant interpretive exhibits related to Virginia Key’s only official residential structure, the history of settlement and development of the barrier islands, water linkages to the park

**Dance Pavilion**

- Replace the palm trees, benches and Juke Box that were historically associated with the existing concrete dance floor
- Reuse the feature as an active entertainment feature
- Supply the Juke Box with music from the park’s period of significance (1945-1953) as well as from the park’s period of informal use by black Miamians (1920s-1930s) and from the period of the park’s greatest popularity (1950s-1960s)

**MiniTrain**

- Restore the mini-train tunnel
- Recreate the mini train station in its original location on the existing slab and according to the original plans with appropriate modifications for coastal construction
- Recreate the mini train track
- Provide controlled train-track crossing points and planted barrier plantings with concealed fencing around the entire train track
- Replace the train with a train identical to or similar in appearance to the original train. Investigate energy-saving alternative power sources for the locomotive
- Enhance the plantings along the historic mini train route to provide educational and interpretive interest consistent with the original design intent of the feature as an entertaining experience of the natural landscape of the park (See Recreation for detailed recommendations)
- Incorporate interpretive, educational and play features within the enhanced landscape setting

**Bus Stop**

- Restore service to the bus stop (See Site Suitabilities)
- Site the State Historic Marker at this arrival point



Lost historic structures and site furnishings can be recreated as interpretive features that tell the story of the park. Interpretive signage can be located throughout the site.

**Park Office**

- Recreate or reinterpret the park office at its original location
- Adapt or reinterpret historic plans or site an appropriate surplus military building of the type originally used at the park and replaced after the hurricane of 1950, with appropriate modifications to address hurricane hazards.
- Use the recreated structure to display interpretive exhibits related to the park’s operation during its period of significance
- Present information on visitor demographics and attendance figures highlighting the diversity of black immigrants and the role of the park in bringing large numbers of people from isolated neighborhoods together. Present information on the facilities and services provided, the wide service area of the park, operating costs and management in comparison to other beach parks. Focus interpretation on the context of the park’s establishment and preservation: the segregation laws that prohibited access to county beaches for black residents, the “Wade-in” at Haulover Beach, negotiations between the Negro Service Council and county officials, the planning and design of the park including the reason for the selection of the Bear Cut beach, its use during the 1920s and 1930s and as a segregated training area for black servicemen during World War II.





*Stabilized sand and wide dune crossings should evoke the historic sense of being near the water on natural soil without straining the natural resources of the park*

## CIRCULATION

The entrance road, parking lot, sand esplanade and water linkages have considerable significance but limited integrity and should be restored in a manner that is consistent with protection of the natural environment and adaptive reuse of the site as an active beach park and educational setting.

The sand esplanade was the primary pedestrian circulation element during the parks period of significance and should be restored as the primary circulation element of the restored park. Since the park's period of significance, the flat sand esplanade along the shoreline has evolved as a dune in some areas. Restoration to its historic condition would have negative impact on the site's natural resources and would require permitting and mitigation. Because of the importance and sensitivity of the natural shoreline resources, historic restoration of the sand esplanade should be integrated with natural resource protection.

- Reestablish a shoreline promenade evocative of the historic sand esplanade
- Extend the promenade along the entire shoreline of the park and provide access to palm-shaded picnic groves and dune crossings as well as other site facilities
- Use a friable base to comply with coastal construction requirements and to permit service vehicle and emergency access and a stabilized sand wearing surface to provide a handicap accessible, maintainable path that looks like the historic sand esplanade. (See Recreation for further recommendations)
- Maximum slope 1:20 for handicap accessibility
- Minimum width 8' for service vehicle access
- Locate benches along the shoreline promenade at shady vantage points with views of the ocean
- Locate interpretive features along the shoreline promenade that provide information on the plants and animals native to the shore, the Atlantic Ocean, tides, sunrise and sunset and facets of the site's history having to do with its accessible shoreline such as its possible link with the Underground Railroad, pirates, refugee landings and the Virginia Key Beach Park Civil Rights Task Force.





### Water Linkages

Access by boat to Virginia Key Beach was a significant character defining feature of the historic landscape. Restoration of water access can be an important method of restoring the park's historic character and interpreting its historic significance. No structures associated with this access have integrity. Compliance with conservation goals for both the sea grasses and the West Indian Manatee which feeds in the near off-shore waters of the park preclude construction of a pier or introduction of motorboat traffic into this zone. Recommendations for the treatment of the site's historic water linkages are as follows:

- A motor boat exclusion zone established for the shoreline should be marked to ensure enforcement.
- Water links to the shore should be limited to kayak and canoe access
- Provide interpretation of the history and significance of the water linkages along the Shoreline Promenade

### Entrance Road

Florida Accessibility Code requires 2% of total parking spaces to be located at the shortest safely accessible route from the facilities they serve. The location of the entrance road between the parking lot and the public facilities it serves does not permit a code compliant safely accessible route.

- Adapt the southern spur of the entrance road as a pedestrian-only path to accommodate handicap access and to link the shoreline promenade to the access road from Rickenbacker Causeway
- Widen the northern spur of the entrance road to accommodate two-way traffic and bus access
- Use curbless asphalt roadway consistent with the historic character of the entrance road
- Extend the roadway to the historic parking area adjacent to the cabanas and picnic area

### Parking Lot

The parking lot is a listed contributing resource in the National Register. As such, the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards* require that no action be taken that will have an adverse impact on the parking lot or the integrity of its setting. The parking lot has deteriorated during the fifty years since the park's period of significance and has limited integrity. By contemporary environmental, aesthetic and functional standards, the parking lot is of poor design quality and thus conveys an impression directly opposite the one conveyed during the park's period of significance when it represented a significant investment of public resources for the creation of top-quality facilities for African Americans. Restoration to its historic condition will have detrimental impact on other park resources. Drainage problems create flooding of the northeastern portion of the parking lot, which limits access and threatens further deterioration. Lack of shade and the unbroken expanse of asphalt make the lot uncomfortably hot and contribute to heat island effects and poor air quality. A lack of pervious areas to reduce storm water run-off contributes to flooding, impairs replenishment of the water table and increases non-point source water pollution. During the park's period of significance, the parking lot accommodated 660 cars which reflected exaggerated demand for the park's segregated recreational facilities among African Americans. Current demand levels at the park will be significantly lower, except during cultural events, but effective interpretation of this feature requires preservation of a sizable lot. The parking lot requires replacement with appropriate materials and methods. Because the significance and integrity of the park's natural areas limit appropriate building sites for historically compatible, functional interpretive facilities, and because the parking lot has a detrimental impact on other park resources, it is recommended that the parking lot be replaced or adaptively reused to accommodate protection of the site's natural features and to permit an interpretive center and park management office that will facilitate meaningful interpretation of the park's significance. Specific recommendations for the replacement or adaptive reuse of the parking lot are as follows:

- Stabilize and upgrade the parking lot to meet environmentally sensitive design standards and reduce the impact of the parking lot on the natural resources that are the basis of the park's historic significance.
- Regrade to establish positive drainage
- Replace crumbling asphalt driving lanes



- Replace 50% of asphalt-paved parking spaces with pervious areas to decrease storm water run-off and flooding and to reduce non-point source pollution. Pervious areas can be a combination of stabilized lawn over-flow parking spaces and planting areas
- Maintain the orientation of the parking lanes and the overall size and shape of the lot
- Restore shade trees in planting islands around the parking lot's perimeter
- Preserve and restore the hand-cast curbing used around existing tree planting islands
- Plant shade trees to provide complete canopy coverage of the parking lot
- Use the native canopy tree species used in the parking lot's existing tree islands (*Ficus aurea*)
- Use hand-cast curbing for new planting islands
- Provide handicap accessible parking spaces in the main parking area
- Restore the parking lot adjacent to the cabanas for handicap accessible parking
- Coordinate storm water management requirements with South Florida Water Management District
- Convey the historic significance of the lot with in-depth interpretation of the role the parking lot played within the context of its period. Interpretation can include at a minimum interpretive signage, historic photographs and text explaining the parking lot's symbolism during the period of significance and can also include classic cars as permanent exhibits or classic car shows as temporary exhibitions as part of the park's event programming.

#### **TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE**

Character defining elements of the topography and drainage of the site with significance include the extent of fill, the water bodies in the wetland forest, the artificial lake and the shoreline. These should be preserved and restored. The integrity of these features is compromised by the large spoils piles located on the western and eastern ends of the shoreline and the eroded segment of the shoreline between the two existing groin systems. Since the park's period of significance, settling of the filled areas of the park has caused serious drainage problems throughout the park. Flooding and ponding are evident throughout and deterioration of pavement and "lumpy" lawn surfaces are the result. The meadow in the eastern end of the park currently does not have positive drainage and has many divets and hillocks that make walking uncomfortable and contribute to drainage problems. The irregular grading and drainage of the site has implications for the water quality and storm water management. Recommendations for the treatment of the site's topographic and drainage features are as follows:

- Stabilize the shoreline and wetland water regime (Army Corps of Engineer projects are planned to accomplish this stabilization.)
- Remove/spread the spoils piles
- Regrade throughout the site to establish positive drainage
- Adapt the parking lot, as discussed under Circulation, above, to reduce water and air quality impacts
- Renovate the meadow to serve as an event lawn, picnic meadow and overflow parking area for events.



The historic coconut grove can be integrated with native vegetation to provide habitat and recreation areas.

## VEGETATION

The natural setting of Virginia Key is its most significant character defining feature. Protection and stabilization of the park’s natural setting, especially its native vegetation, is therefore a critical aspect of its preservation and restoration as an historic site. The coconut palm grove that existed along the entire sand esplanade was a significant character defining feature of the vegetation, spatial organization and circulation of the site during its period of significance. The grove provided shady walking and seating areas along the shore that significantly extended the usable area of the beach and contributed significantly to the perception of the beach as a high quality recreational setting. The circle of palms surrounding the dance pavilion was also a significant feature and a visual icon of the park. Other significant elements of the historic landscape plantings were lawn areas and shade trees located throughout the park but especially in picnic areas offering shaded vantage points with views of the Atlantic Ocean. Since its period of significance, the park landscape has undergone many changes: invasion by exotic species, natural succession of native species, natural mortality of shade trees and other ornamental plantings and, most significantly, the loss of the historic coconut grove. The natural vegetation of the site will be stabilized by removal of exotic species and replanting with native species by the US Army Corps of Engineers Ecosystem Restoration Project. The ecosystem restoration project will restore the natural areas of the site to ecological integrity but will not address the restoration of historic landscape plantings, including parking lot shade trees, ornamental plantings, picnic lawn areas and the extensive shade tree plantings that were historically an important element of the park’s appeal. Parking lot shade trees are addressed above under Circulation. Restoration of the other elements of the historic landscape should be carried out within parameters established by the ecosystem restoration, including the exclusive use of native plants, with the exception noted below. The following recommendations are made regarding historic planting restoration:



- Restore the historic coconut grove using primarily certified-seed *Cocos nucifera*, var. Maypan
- Following ecosystem restoration, engage a certified arborist to evaluate the quality and potential longevity of remaining native shade trees and make recommendations for proper pruning and reshaping of the trees to enhance their value as picnic sites and to extend their life expectancy
- Augment existing shade trees with new shade tree plantings in lawn areas and develop a “Tree Succession Plan” that plans for the replacement of mature shade trees as they age
- Replace lawn grasses with Paspalum, a species identified in the US Army Corps of Engineers/DERM ecosystem restoration project as native. (See Natural Resource Protection recommendation regarding use of native plants adapted to the climate and site conditions that do not require irrigation.) Paspalum is the low-water use lawn grass of choice in environmentally sensitive developments, including golf courses, and provides an attractive, easy to maintain lawn surface
- Restore plantings around historic buildings based on period plans, where these are available, with historically appropriate modifications to the plant selections to ensure that only native species are used
- Enhance plantings around the Minitrain tracks to serve as an interpretive and ornamental feature, with an emphasis on native plants. Include plants of African and Caribbean origin that are compatible with ecosystem protection (i.e. non-invasive species) to permit interpretation of African and Caribbean plant lore as part of the Minitrain experience.





### SITE FURNISHINGS

There are no existing furnishings of significance or integrity on the site. New furnishings in the vicinity of the historic structures should be consistent with the design of features documented from the park's period of significance. (See Recreation for more specific recommendations)

- Use the standard park furnishings and wayfinding signage documented from the park's period of significance which are still widely available and routinely used in contemporary park settings (See Recreation for more specific recommendations)
- Recreate the lifeguard stands based on historic documentation
- Replace the metal cabanas with temporary structures consistent with the character of the historic features and compliant with building code requirements.
- Provide furnishings and site accessories such as chairs, umbrellas and awnings that are compatible with the natural character of the setting and the park's period of significance.



*Furnishings from the period of significance were typical park furnishings that are still in common use and will provide versatile, easy to maintain seating and cooking facilities for picnic areas*



PICNIC SHELTER



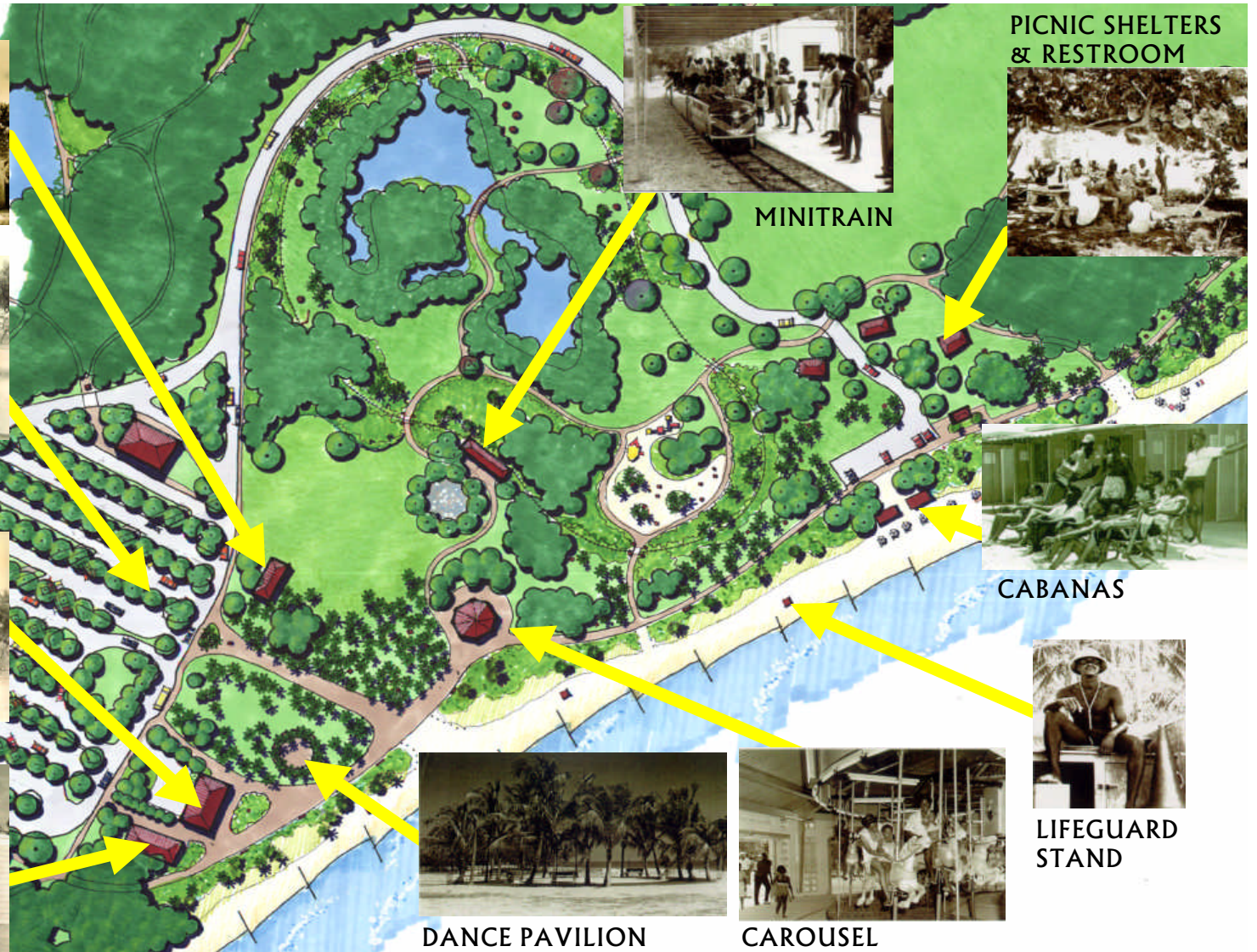
PARKING LOT



SNACK BAR



BATH HOUSE



PICNIC SHELTERS & RESTROOM



MINITRAIN



CABANAS



LIFEGUARD STAND

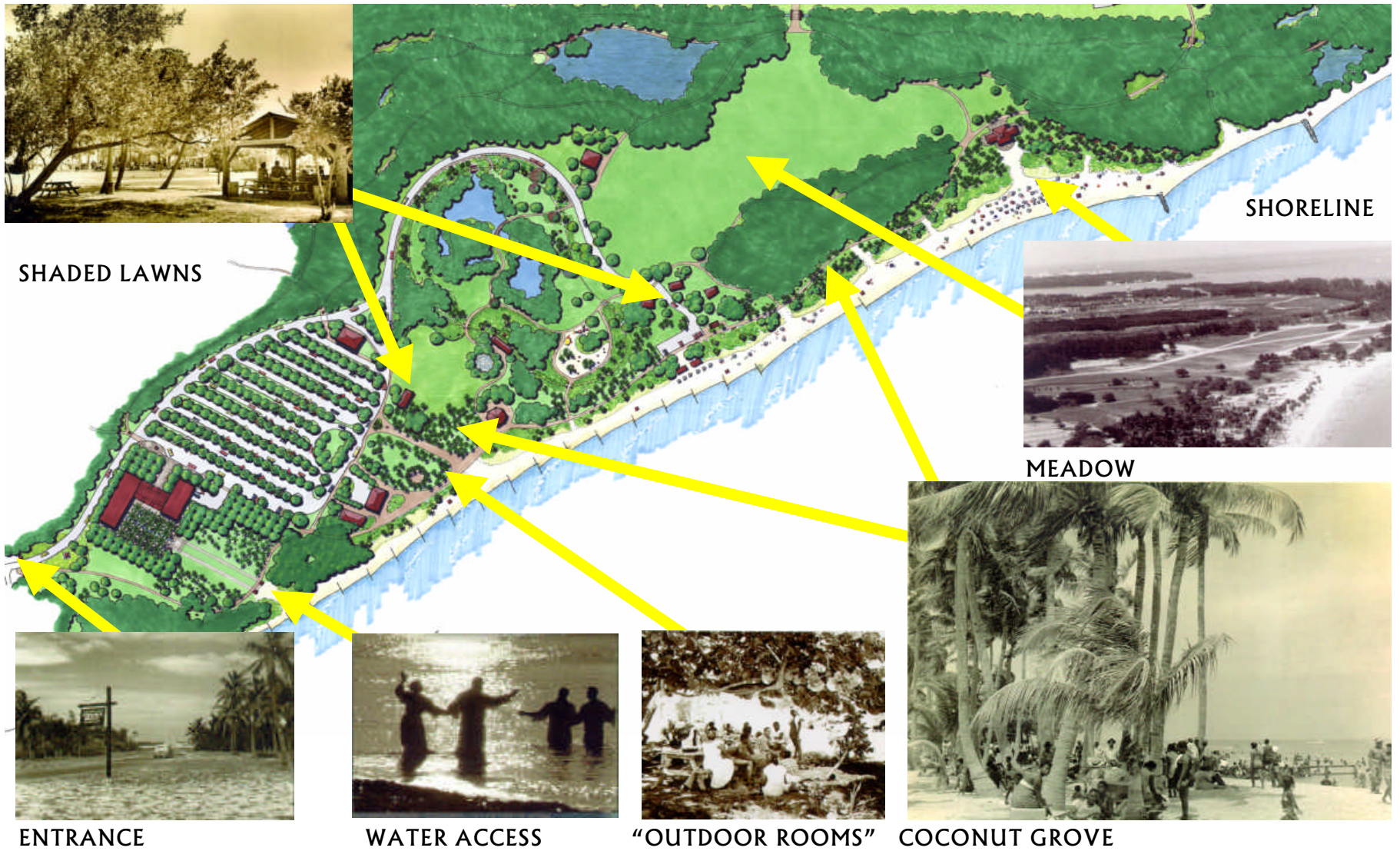


DANCE PAVILION



CAROUSEL

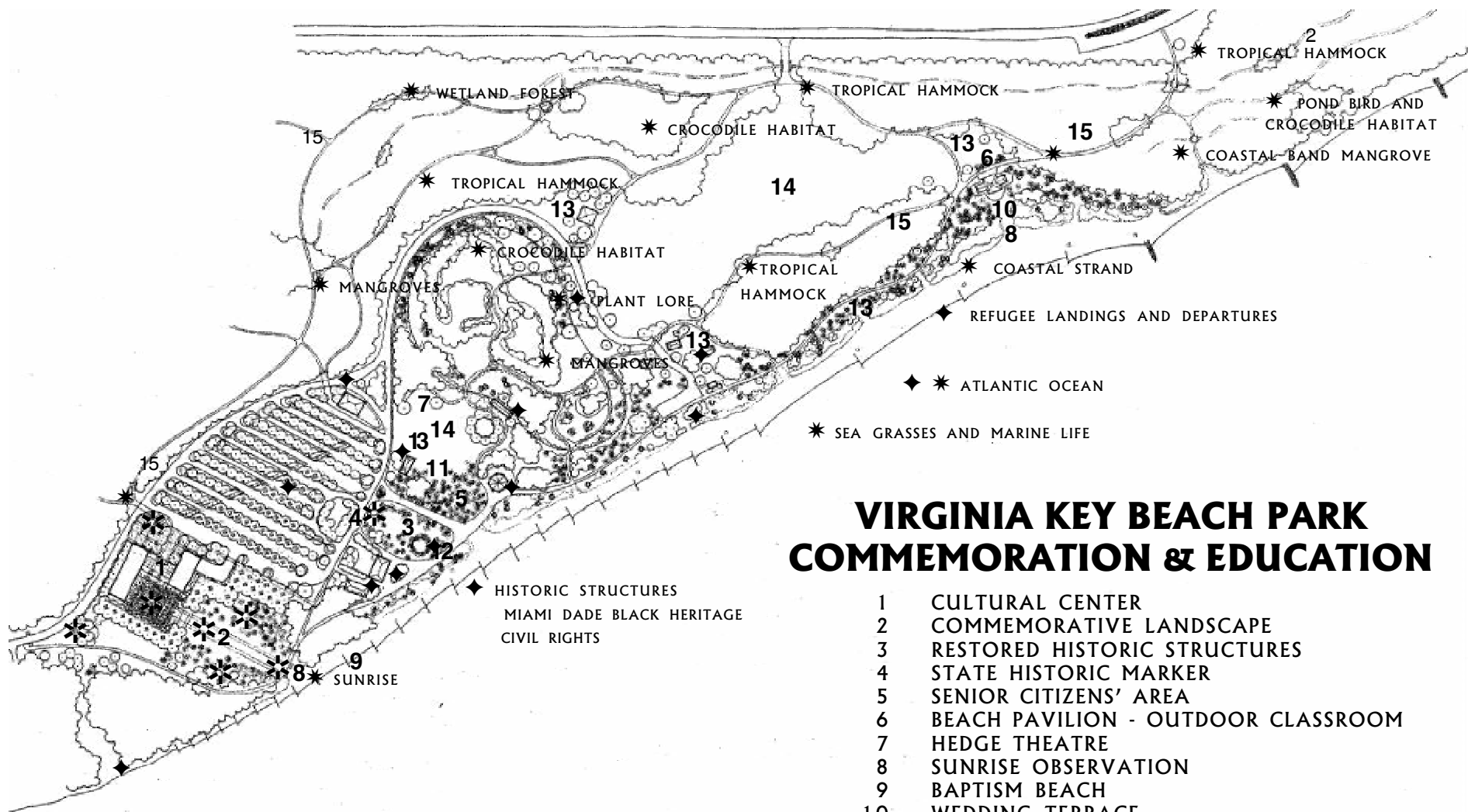
# RESTORED HISTORIC STRUCTURES



# RESTORED HISTORIC LANDSCAPE FEATURES

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# COMMEMORATION & EDUCATION



# VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK COMMEMORATION & EDUCATION

- 1 CULTURAL CENTER
  - 2 COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE
  - 3 RESTORED HISTORIC STRUCTURES
  - 4 STATE HISTORIC MARKER
  - 5 SENIOR CITIZENS' AREA
  - 6 BEACH PAVILION - OUTDOOR CLASSROOM
  - 7 HEDGE THEATRE
  - 8 SUNRISE OBSERVATION
  - 9 BAPTISM BEACH
  - 10 WEDDING TERRACE
  - 11 CHILDREN'S PARTY AREA
  - 12 DANCE FLOOR
  - 13 PICNIC AREAS
  - 14 EVENT LAWN
  - 15 NATURE TRAILS
  - 16 GROUP CAMPING AREA
- 
- ✱ MONUMENTS AND MARKERS
  - ✱ NATURAL POINTS OF INTEREST
  - ◆ HISTORIC POINTS OF INTEREST



## INTERPRETATION

The main purpose of the public planning process has been to create a site plan that accommodates the establishment of a museum to commemorate and explain the site's historic significance. The American Association of Museums recommends that a museum effectively involve its audiences in developing public programs and exhibitions and the site planning process has provided the public the opportunity to identify themes, listed below, that are of interest and relevance to the community.

- The natural history of the barrier island (including its evolution/development)
- Early inhabitants and uses (Native Americans; African Americans fleeing to the Bahamas; pirates; rum runners)
- African American History at Virginia Key (The 20s and 30s; World War II; The Wade-in and establishment of the park)
- Miami's last natural jewel (Virginia Key's role in the urban context; The Virginia Key Beach Park Trust)
- African American experience in Miami Dade County – the struggle for Civil Rights
- The daily world of Miami-Dade County's African American community during the park's period of significance, including family life, entertainment and cultural expression, civic life and segregation.
- Miami's African-Caribbean culture (Church life; the place of nature in African cultures, the uses and significance of plants; links to the Caribbean; festivals and celebrations)
- Black contributions to Miami-Dade County History (Founders of Coconut Grove, Lemon City, Overtown; civil rights figures, etc.)

The public has also identified the key features of a museum in which to discuss these themes. These are discussed below.

### OUTDOOR MUSEUM ENCOMPASSING THE ENTIRE SITE

Virginia Key Beach Park has a unique and fascinating story to tell its visitors. An inter-illuminating set of outdoor and indoor exhibits and programs, refined through a focused process that effectively engages the public, the Trust board, and museum experts, should together create the experience of an outdoor museum that effectively conveys the park's story to the public. The master plan identifies points of interest throughout the site that correspond with historic structures, natural features, opportunities for educational and interpretive information and opportunities for commemorative features. The park's original structures and its site features can be restored and used to house artifacts, hold performances or present exhibits, text and graphics, including the evocative photographs of the park's hey day. Inscriptions, sculpture, interactive features and artifacts such as the classic cars of the era, the juke box and music that were part of the dance pavilion experience, the foods that were served in the snack bar, the beach chairs, fashions and toys of the era can be incorporated into the park setting. The presence of people actively enjoying these site features can become an important facet of the park's character and serve as a living memorial to its historic significance. (See Historic Preservation for detailed recommendations for individual historic structures.) The centerpiece of this interpretive landscape or outdoor museum can be a facility where aspects of the site's story can be told in depth and where cultural activities can occur. A preliminary program for a cultural center building has been developed to establish the size, location, program and cost of a facility that meets the site's requirements for natural and historic sensitivity and which can serve as the focal point of the museum. (See Appendix III: Preliminary Cultural Center Programming Report.)

Historic preservation requirements, natural resource sensitivity and flood hazard each establish important constraints on the design of interpretive features and facilities. Protection of the integrity of the historic setting requires that interpretive features adhere to the *Secretary's Standards*. Interpretive features may not dominate the setting or have an adverse impact on any character defining site feature or contributing historic resource. (See Site Assessment and Historic Preservation.) Adaptive reuse of existing structures for interpretive functions would meet these standards as would a new facility that is appropriately sited and which adheres to architectural standards for historically compatible new construction. Interpretive structures that can be transformed into damaging missiles during



hurricanes are not appropriate within the Coastal Construction Control zone and any features located seaward of the CCCL will require permitting by the state. In addition, interpretive features must meet building code requirements for construction within Flood Hazard zones. Interpretive features can take a variety of forms that comply with these requirements and can be sited sensitively throughout the park to illustrate and evoke the history of the site.

#### **ORAL HISTORY, STORY TELLING AND COMMUNITY**

Oral history plays a special role in the history of Virginia Key Beach Park, which has been transmitted orally, and interpretive features and programs should make the most of this tradition by emphasizing oral story telling and performance. Live story telling and performance can be accommodated in several places throughout the park including the cultural center, beach pavilion, event lawns, picnic areas and the hedge theatre in the children’s amusement area. Seating areas that address the comfort and tastes of senior citizens can facilitate events such as the Seniors to Seniors event held at the park where senior citizens transmitted their stories to high school seniors.

The importance of oral history, the richness of the photographic record of the park and its historic context and the special design constraints on the site each point to the use of the ephemeral elements of sound and light as appropriate media in which to convey the park’s story. Photographs of the park are extremely evocative of the park’s joyful heyday while photographs and video images from the period of the park’s establishment reveal both an inspiring oratorical tradition and a harsh reality that are critical to understanding the park’s historical context and significance. Voice recording, video and even holographic imagery can provide complex, in-depth story-telling that minimizes the use of irreplaceable artifacts vulnerable to hurricane damage. The apparatus required to present video, voice recording or holographic imagery has the capacity to present a wide variety of images and sounds from a single apparatus that can be appropriately engineered for site conditions or replaced in case of damage without loss of unique and irreplaceable artifacts. At the same time, these ephemeral images make a powerful statement about the nature of things which are part of our collective memory but which are not written in stone. These in turn can make a poignant contrast with the things that we do chose to etch in stone.

#### **COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE**

The Wade-in at Haulover Beach staged by Negro Service Council member Judge Lawson Thomas and the anonymous service men and longshoremen who joined him was one of the first direct action protests in the Civil Rights movement, mounted a full ten years before the Bus Boycott recognized as the initial impetus for the movement. The historic importance of the event that lead to the establishment of the beach park as well as other events in the life of Miami-Dade’s African American community should be commemorated in a garden setting that celebrates the beauty of the accomplishments and of the setting. The commemorative landscape proposed is a garden linked with the cultural center.

The form of the garden proposed refers to Exodus 15:22-27, Marah and Elim, in which the Israelites are led by Moses to an oasis in the desert where the water is bitter and they cannot drink it. Moses throws a piece of wood into the spring and the water becomes sweet. *Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.* The garden includes a court associated with the cultural center where a grove of Date Palms is set in a terrace inscribed with appropriate texts. The court features an interactive fountain that alludes to the Wade-in by permitting visitors to wade into its waters. At the same time the fountain is intended to lighten the atmosphere of the cultural center where the frank and thorough presentation of the historical context of the movement will have a bittersweet effect. The garden court will serve the traditional function of a garden, which is to provide a transition between the interior of a building and its landscape setting. The fountain, with children actively enjoying it, will serve as a reminder that the purpose and result of the Civil Rights Movement is a joyful one and will provide an emotional “decompression





chamber” that permits visitors to prepare to experience the more joyful and lighthearted elements of the outdoor museum. At the same time, the formality of the setting will prepare visitors approaching from the outdoor museum exhibits and recreation features for the more serious exhibits in the cultural center.

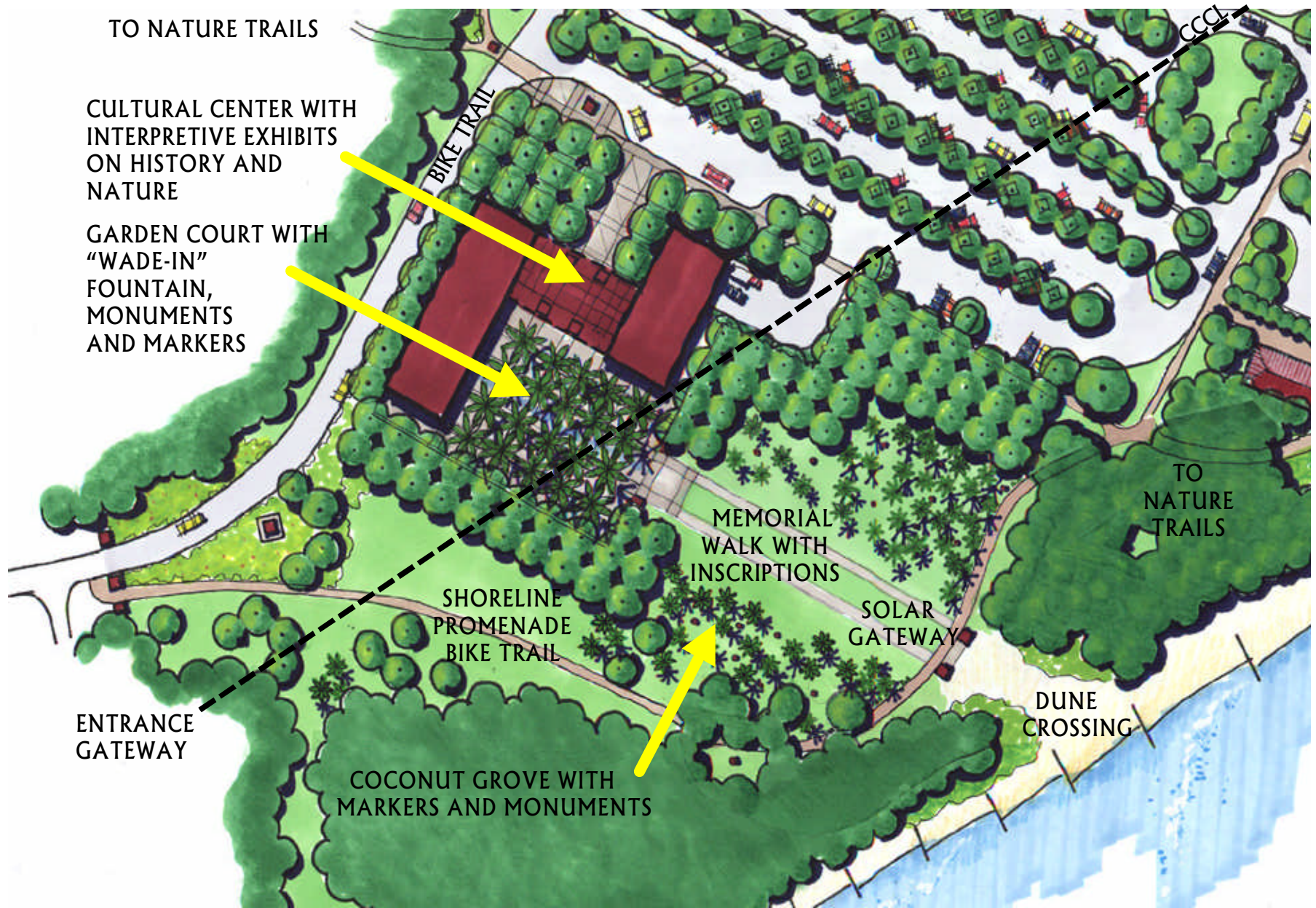


The garden’s main element is a Solar Gateway focused on the Atlantic Ocean horizon and aligned with the rising sun. The solar gateway should be a commissioned artwork from an artist and an engineer experienced with significant permitting and engineering requirements. This feature and the walkway leading to it from the Cultural Center’s garden court should be engraved with inscriptions that convey the purpose and meaning of the beach park as a living place and a symbol. The plantings and dune crossing associated with this feature should reinforce the alignment. The gateway is symbolically aligned with the World Heritage Site at Goree Island, where the millions of Africans sent to America in slavery are memorialized at The Door of No Return, focused on the Atlantic Ocean horizon with America beyond. Markers and monuments bearing inscriptions that commemorate the achievements of Africans on the other side of that horizon should be located throughout the garden flanking the gateway. A coconut grove is proposed for this area of the garden. The message chosen by the Trust Chairwoman M. Athalie Range to convey the intent of the garden is the final testament of Florida Educator Mary McLeod Bethune: I leave you love. Key texts from the Civil Rights movement should find a place within the garden as well. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” seems especially appropriate to illuminate why the simple pleasures offered by Virginia Key Beach Park were so well appreciated in their day and represent a significant achievement in the Civil Rights movement

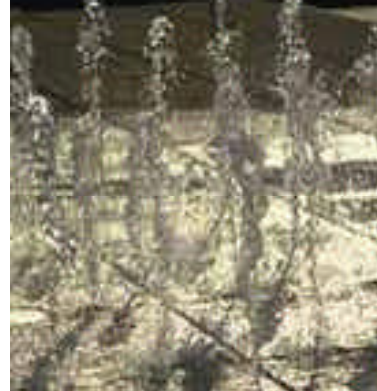


“...We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we stiff creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dart of segregation to say, “Wait.” But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can’t go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?”; when you take a cross-county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” and “colored”; when your first name becomes “nigger,” your middle name becomes “boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John,” and your wife and mother are never given the respected title “Mrs.”; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness” then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience...” *Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.*

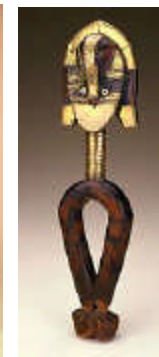
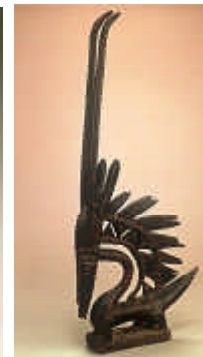
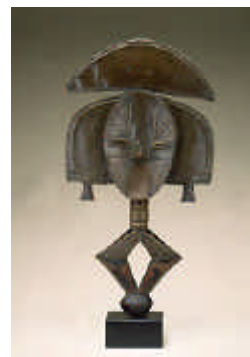
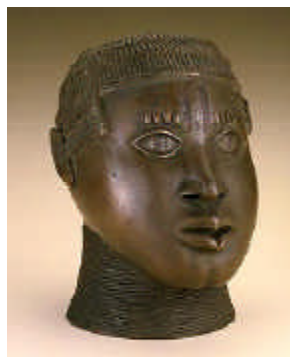
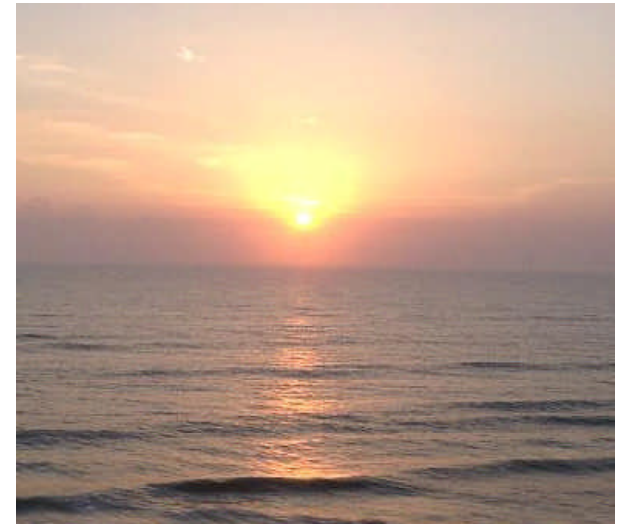




# CULTURAL CENTER & COMMEMORATIVE LANDSCAPE



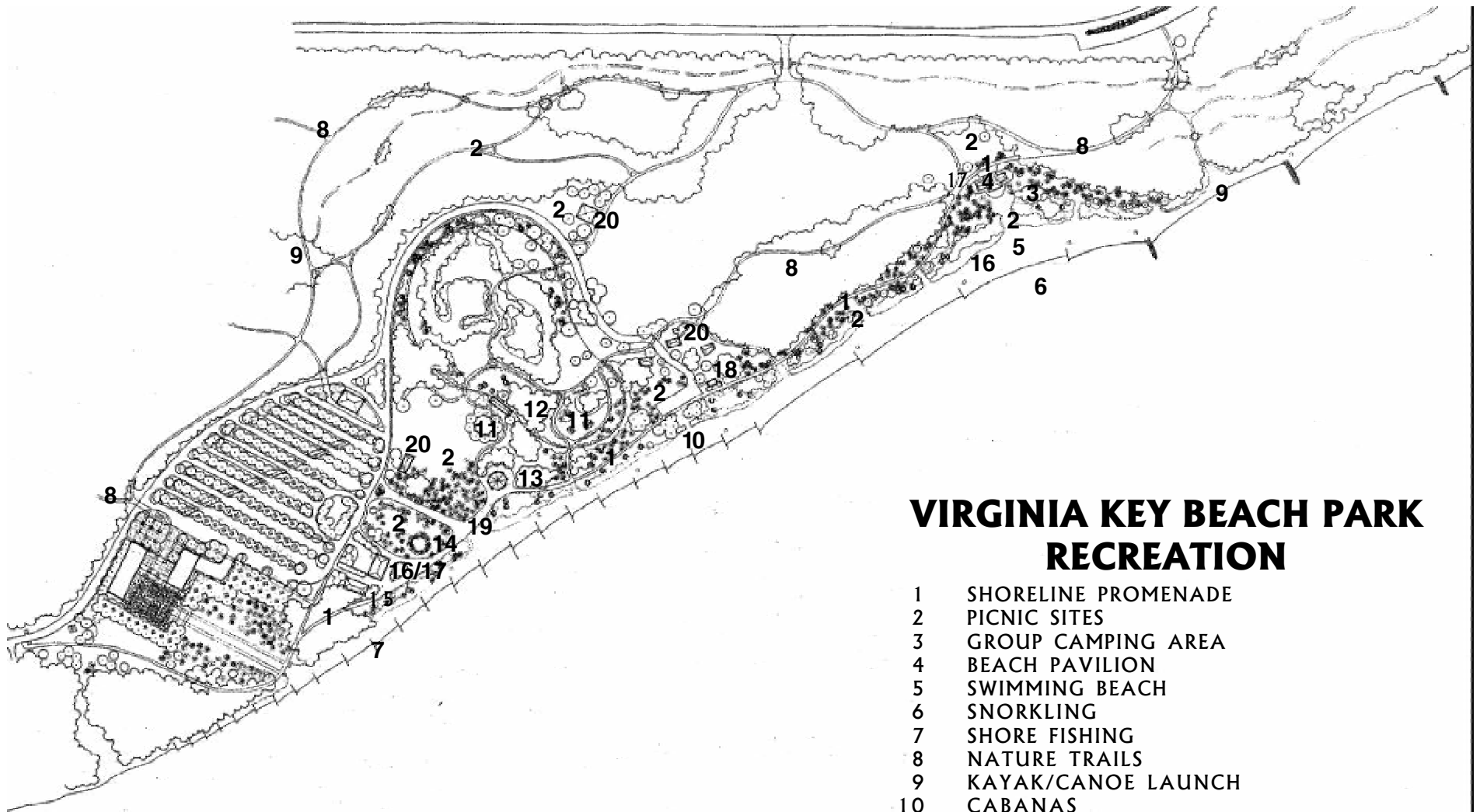
*The Atlantic Ocean horizon from The Door of No Return at Goree Island, Dakar, Senegal, through which millions of Africans were sent to America. The struggles and achievements of Africans on the other side of that horizon can be commemorated at Virginia Key Beach Park in a garden that focuses on the Atlantic Ocean horizon visible through a gateway that frames the sunrise.*





# SOLAR GATEWAY





## VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK RECREATION

- 1 SHORELINE PROMENADE
- 2 PICNIC SITES
- 3 GROUP CAMPING AREA
- 4 BEACH PAVILION
- 5 SWIMMING BEACH
- 6 SNORKLING
- 7 SHORE FISHING
- 8 NATURE TRAILS
- 9 KAYAK/CANOE LAUNCH
- 10 CABANAS
- 11 PLAY GROUND
- 12 MINITRAIN
- 13 CAROUSEL
- 14 DANCE PAVILION
- 15 BATHHOUSE
- 16 BEACH EQUIPMENT RENTAL
- 17 REFRESHMENTS
- 18 RESTROOM
- 19 SHADED SENIOR SEATING
- 20 PICNIC SHELTER





## RECREATION

### TRAIL SYSTEM

The shoreline promenade is the primary recreational feature of the park as in the park's period of historic significance. The restored park will feature an environmentally sensitive adaptation of the historic sand esplanade planted with native coastal vegetation and a restored palm grove of both native palms and coconut trees. A paved recreational path for pedestrians and bicyclists will extend along the entire shoreline of the park and link all of the park's features. The trail will connect to Rickenbacker Causeway via the entrance road and to the beach park to the north via nature trails and the STP Road. Nature trails will be incorporated in the US Army Corps of Engineers restoration project. The trail system identified in the master plan is coordinated with the location of historic pathways, roads and cleared areas assumed to have predominantly exotic vegetation cover. Following exotics removal appropriate routes through the restored ecosystems will be determined with precision. The location of the trails will be determined in the field by the landscape architect in charge of the restoration project in coordination with DERM. Points of interest and trailhead locations will also be refined following the restoration. Recommendations for trails development and improvement are as follows:

- See Natural Resource Protection for recommendations related to trails layout
- Coordinate points of interest and interpretive signage and features as part of an integrated, holistic interpretive program for the entire outdoor museum
- Work with the Biscayne Nature Center, MAST Academy, Rosenstiel School, NOAA, and Marine Fisheries as well as city schools and the city Park and Recreation Department to develop nature interpretation that reflects the on-going programs of these institutions
- Follow historic preservation recommendations for trail paving, benches, signage, fencing, boardwalks, shelters and outdoor classroom features
- Extend hours of operation by reservation to take advantage of the shoreline promenade's unique vantage point for observing sunrise over the Atlantic Ocean from a setting without any trace of urban development intruding on the view. Sunrise baptism ceremonies, sunrise yoga and meditation groups should be accommodated as well as special celebrations focused on the Solar Gateway that is the focal point of the Commemorative Garden.
- Coordinate with Miami Dade County Park and Recreation Department to introduce a canoe or kayak launch with access to the water bodies in the adjacent park land if these are restored for recreational access.



### SWIMMING AND SHORELINE ACTIVITIES

Following completion of the shoreline restoration, the requirements for establishing safe swimming conditions along as much of the shoreline as possible should be explored. Preliminary studies related to the US Army Corps of Engineers Shoreline Stabilization study indicate that the shore drops off less abruptly in the area identified in the master plan as the Swimming Beach. Access to the shore for turtles and other sea life dependent of the near shore sea grass beds precludes the use of nets or cribs to physically prevent swimmers from straying into dangerous currents. Lifeguards stationed appropriately for effective monitoring should be deployed along the entire shoreline together with posted "No Swimming" signs. Only the area identified as safe for swimming should be groomed, since seaweed deposits serve as a passive deterrent to swimmers. The non-swimming areas of the beach can be used for shore fishing and baptism ceremonies, in which immersion is restricted to safe distances from the shore. As with other maintenance and operational issues, duplication of personnel and equipment needed to guard and groom the beach would not be a wise use of scarce city resources. The city of Miami Park and Recreation Department has an existing management and equipment capacity established for the city beach to the north. The Trust should work with the city of Miami Park and Recreation Department to extend these services to the Trust beach, with the Trust contributing funding to support additional personnel required.





### PICNIC SITES, SEATING, CABANAS

Picnicking and eating are close seconds (behind swimming) as popular beach activities and shaded picnic sites are an important feature of the historic landscape setting. Picnic tables, benches and grills compatible with the historic furnishings should be deployed throughout the park in the restored coconut grove and beneath the restored and new shade trees. The historically compatible picnic tables and benches are available with environmentally-friendly, easy-maintenance recycled plastic table tops and seats which could be used in place of wood and could incorporate a signature color combination. The same color theme can be applied to beach chairs and umbrellas as well as to cabana awnings and temporary tent-style beach cabanas and shade awnings. (See Food and Equipment Vending).

Benches and tables should be located to permit easy access by senior citizens in the vicinity of the historic structures, including the cabanas. Shade, cushions, appropriate height, easy access and arrangements that encourage gathering should be considerations in the design of senior seating. Senior seating should not be the standard park equipment of the historic type since this is not easy for seniors to use but it should be compatible with the historic setting. The best shade trees should be reserved for senior seating and temporary shade canopies or awnings should be supplied where shade trees are lacking. Wheel-chair accessible seating areas should also be provided with shade and where feasible, shade trees should be made accessible to wheel chairs. Supply and maintenance of these special features should be included in the concessionaire’s contract to simplify management.

### PICNIC SHELTERS

Three historic picnic shelters will be restored. In addition, two new picnic shelters are proposed:

- A small shelter near the two small existing shelters. This shelter should be compatible with the historic structures since it will be sited in close proximity.
- A large corporate rental shelter with grill on the western end of the event lawn. This shelter is not near historic features and therefore does not need to comply with the historic preservation standards that apply to the small shelter but should not be visually intrusive. The design should be distinctive, however, and reflect the theme of the Beach Pavilion.



### BEACH PAVILION

This shelter is also not constrained by the historic preservation requirements and should be a distinctive structure with the potential to become a visual icon for the park. As the “home base” for nature study programs and group camping, the pavilion should have an environmentally sensitive and regionally appropriate design theme. The beach pavilion will serve a multitude of functions and should accommodate the following program:

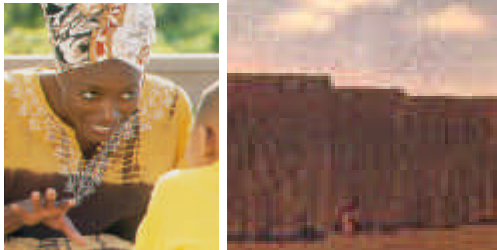
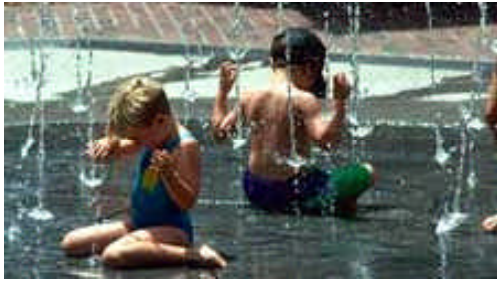
- Outdoor classroom or story-telling venue
- Trail head interpretive facility
- Nature-study program group camping “home base” with storage space
- Outdoor kitchen with a large outdoor fireplace or hearth suitable for both cooking and gathering around for stories or classes
- Sheltered eating area
- Refreshment vending area (refreshment cart or vending machines)
- Bath house (See restrooms for recommendations)



### GROUP CAMPING

The master plan proposes a group camping area near the beach pavilion to facilitate nature study and recreation access and outreach programs. The group camping area should be, like the Sand Spar Beach Camping Area at Bahia Honda State Park, carefully integrated





with the adjacent natural vegetation with sites oriented both to the ocean and nestled beside the marine hammock vegetation. The group camping area should include:

- post and rope barriers to protect natural vegetation
- dune crossings at both ends and in the center of the area
- a central “allee” of palm trees with a lawn to serve as a circulation spine
- a staggered arrangement of individual 50’ square picnic/camping sites with planting buffers separating neighboring sites

Each camping site should be equipped to serve either as a picnic site for day use or an overnight site for tent camping:

- a pair of palm trees spaced appropriately for hanging a hammock
- a picnic table and a grill
- a level, flat, rock free 16’x16’ lawn or bare sand area to accommodate a four-man tent

### CHILDREN’S AMUSEMENT AREA

The historic restoration will include two children’s amusements: the Minitrain and the Carousel. The master plan proposes to group the historic features with new play features that have a strong appeal and which provide a more well-balanced play experience incorporating more types of play. In addition to the passive fantasy elements of the historic amusements, the children’s amusement area should include active experiences involving the imagination, social skills, exploration and learning, fantasy, drama, music, as well as climbing and running around. These enhancements are designed to boost the appeal of the historic amusements to make the children’s area competitive with other parks as a venue for birthday parties. All play features must be compatible with preservation of the historic landscape and must not dominate the landscape setting. All play areas should be shaded to the greatest extent. New features proposed include

- A water play feature incorporating interactive water jets set in a concrete slab and surrounded by shade trees and benches reminiscent of the Dance Pavilion
- A sand playground that is visually compatible with the historic landscape incorporating simple climbing structures with water themes such as boats, marine mammals, birds and reptiles native to the park and its offshore waters. The playground should be visually continuous with the nearby picnic grove and incorporate coconut trees for shade. Only structures compatible with a sand play surface should be used and these should be sited to provide handicap transfer points accessible from pathways.
- A hedge theatre oriented toward the picnic lawn that can be programmed with story-telling events and dramas for children and rented as a performance venue for small events.
- African and Caribbean plants should be planted along the mini-train track (as recommended for Historic Restoration of the park’s vegetation) to provide the opportunity for interpretation of plant lore as part of the Minitrain adventure.
- Climbing sculptures and interactive play features sited within the Minitrain’s enhanced landscape. Features should have nature themes with both educational purposes and aesthetic qualities compatible with the historic landscape setting.

### EVENT MEADOW

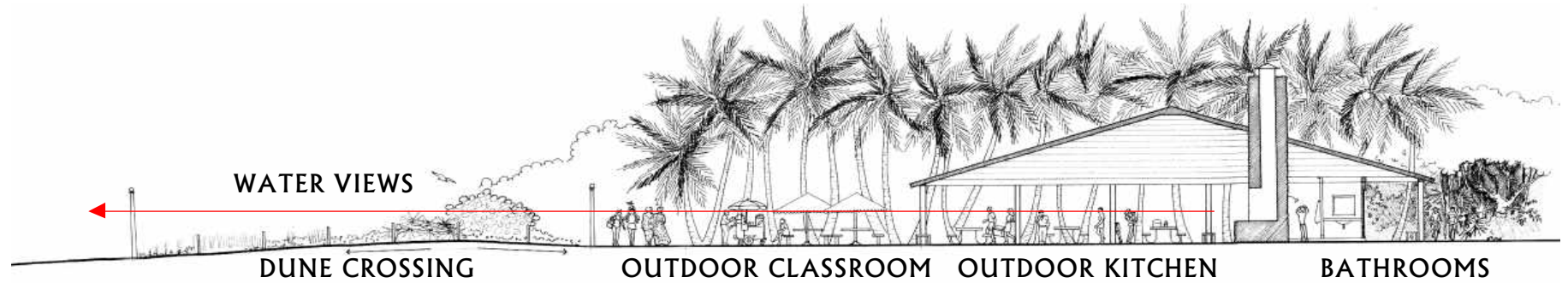
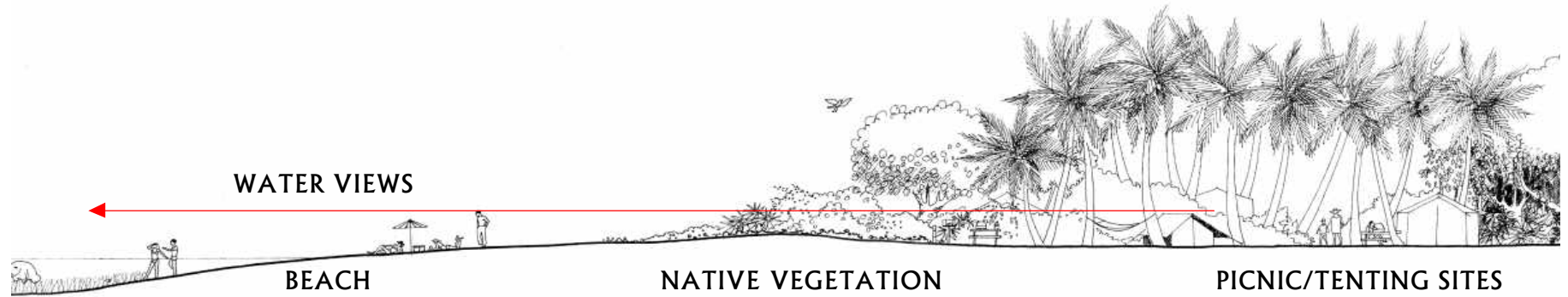
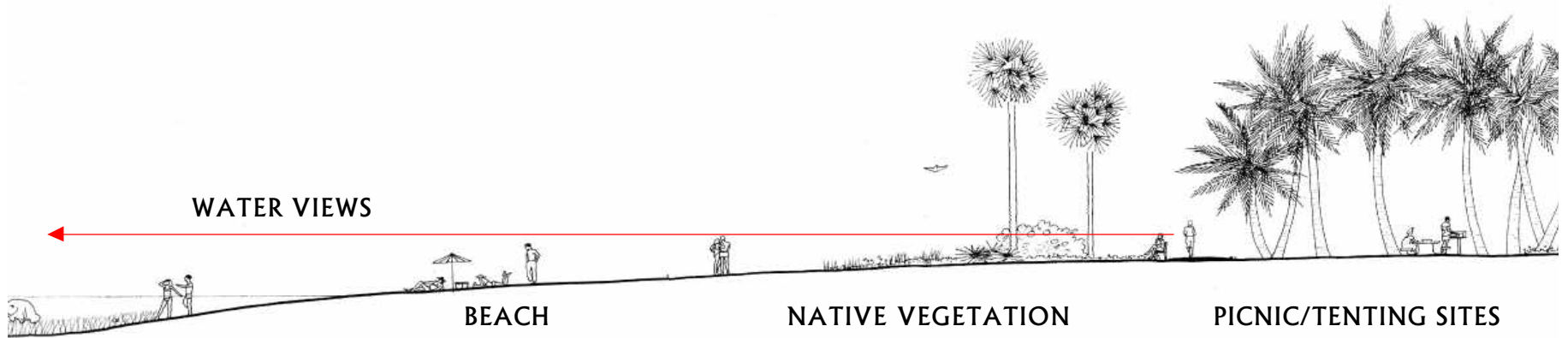
The meadow offers a variety of locations for temporary stage set ups that should be supplied with power vaults to accommodate a variety of stage sound and lighting systems. The meadow can also accommodate festivals, craft fairs, and other types of cultural events as well as freestyle field sports, kite flying, model airplane flying, classic cars shows, large scale tented parties, picnics, large tent camping groups, temporary carnivals, outdoor movie screenings and any other kind of activity that requires no more than a lawn and simple, removable equipment. (See Historic Restoration: Vegetation and Site Constraints: Park Carrying Capacity for details regarding restoration, event capacity and traffic and parking issues.)



# TRAIL SYSTEM



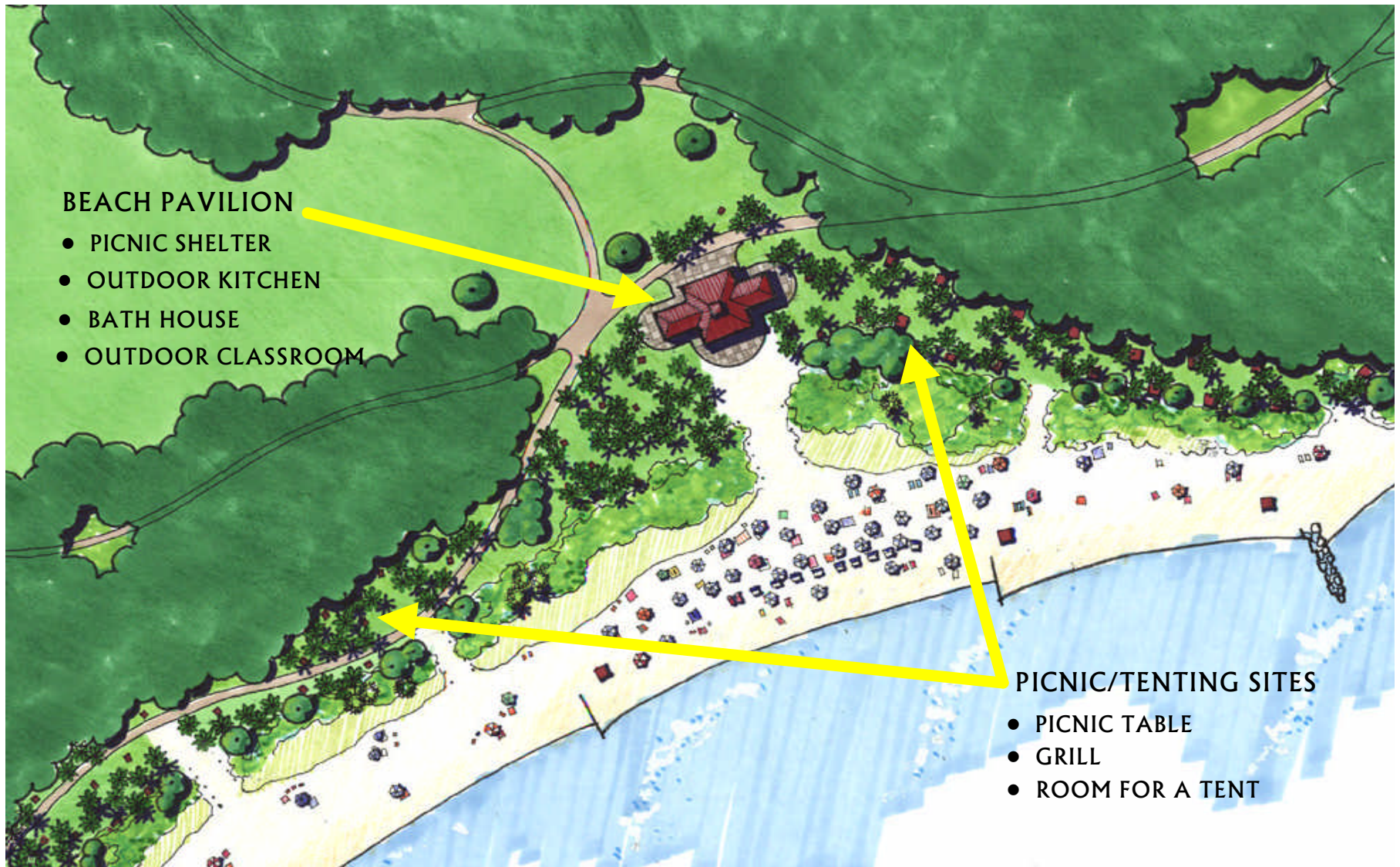
# SHORELINE PROMENADE



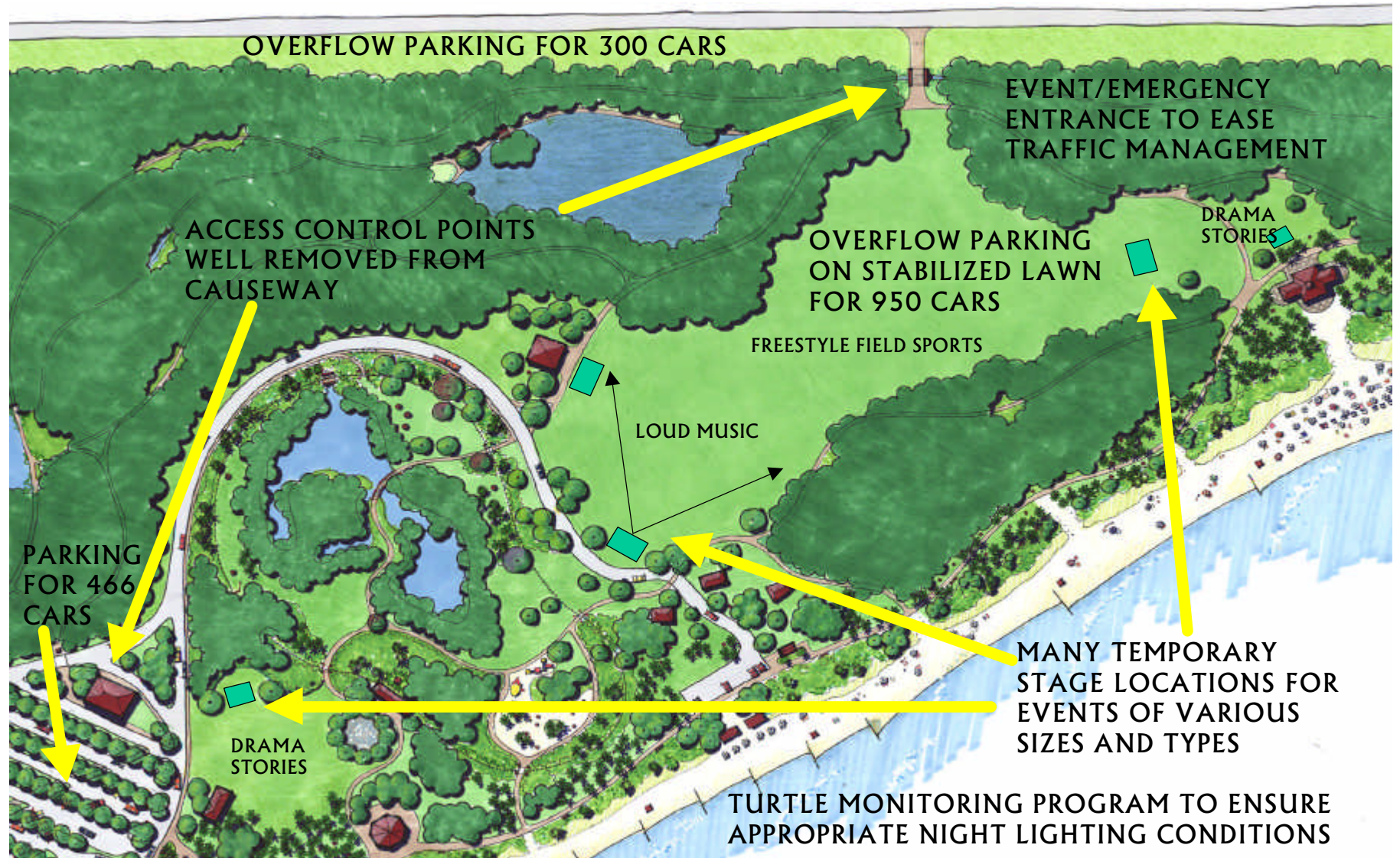
# PICNIC & CAMPING FACILITIES



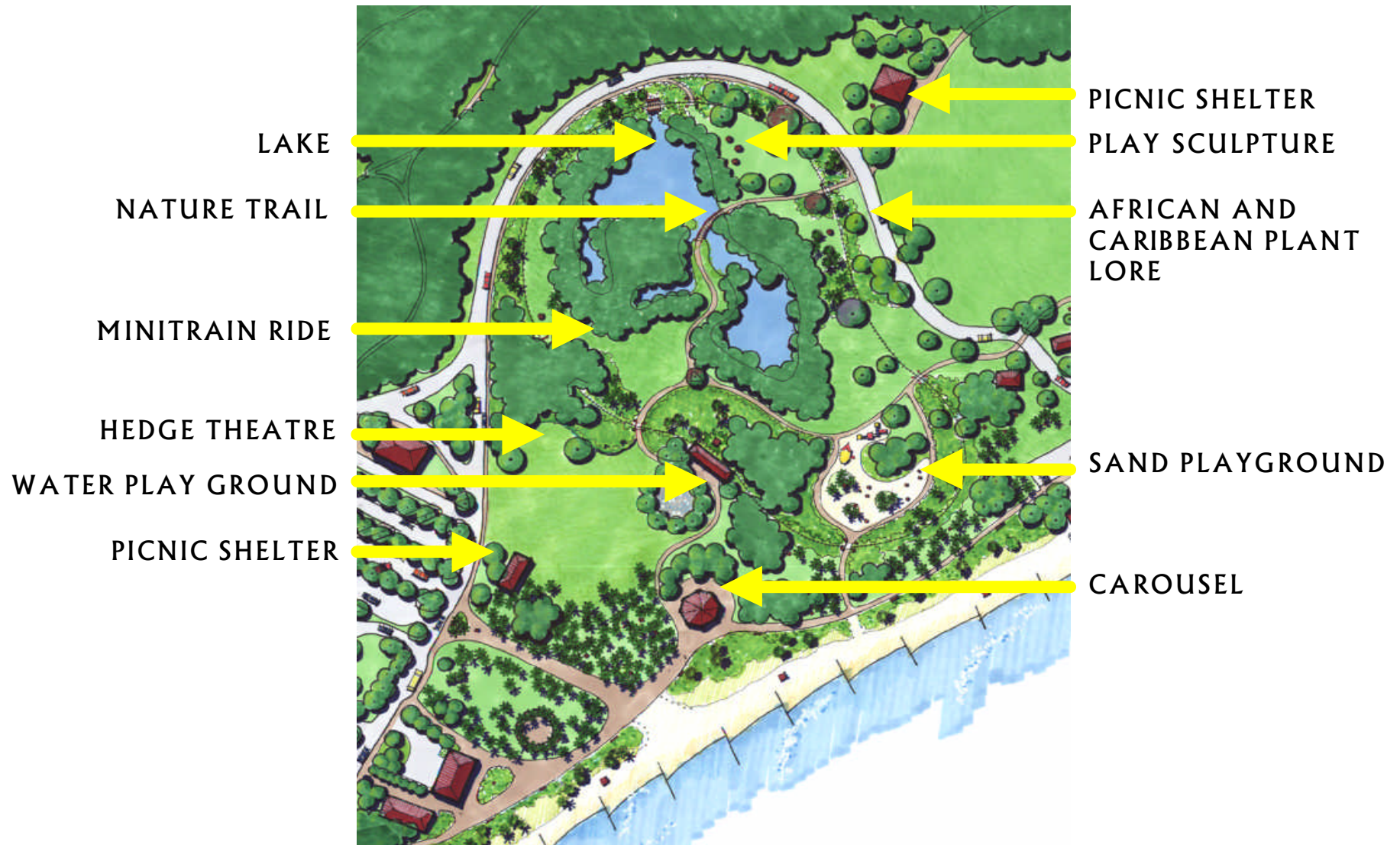
# BEACH PAVILION



# GROUP CAMPING



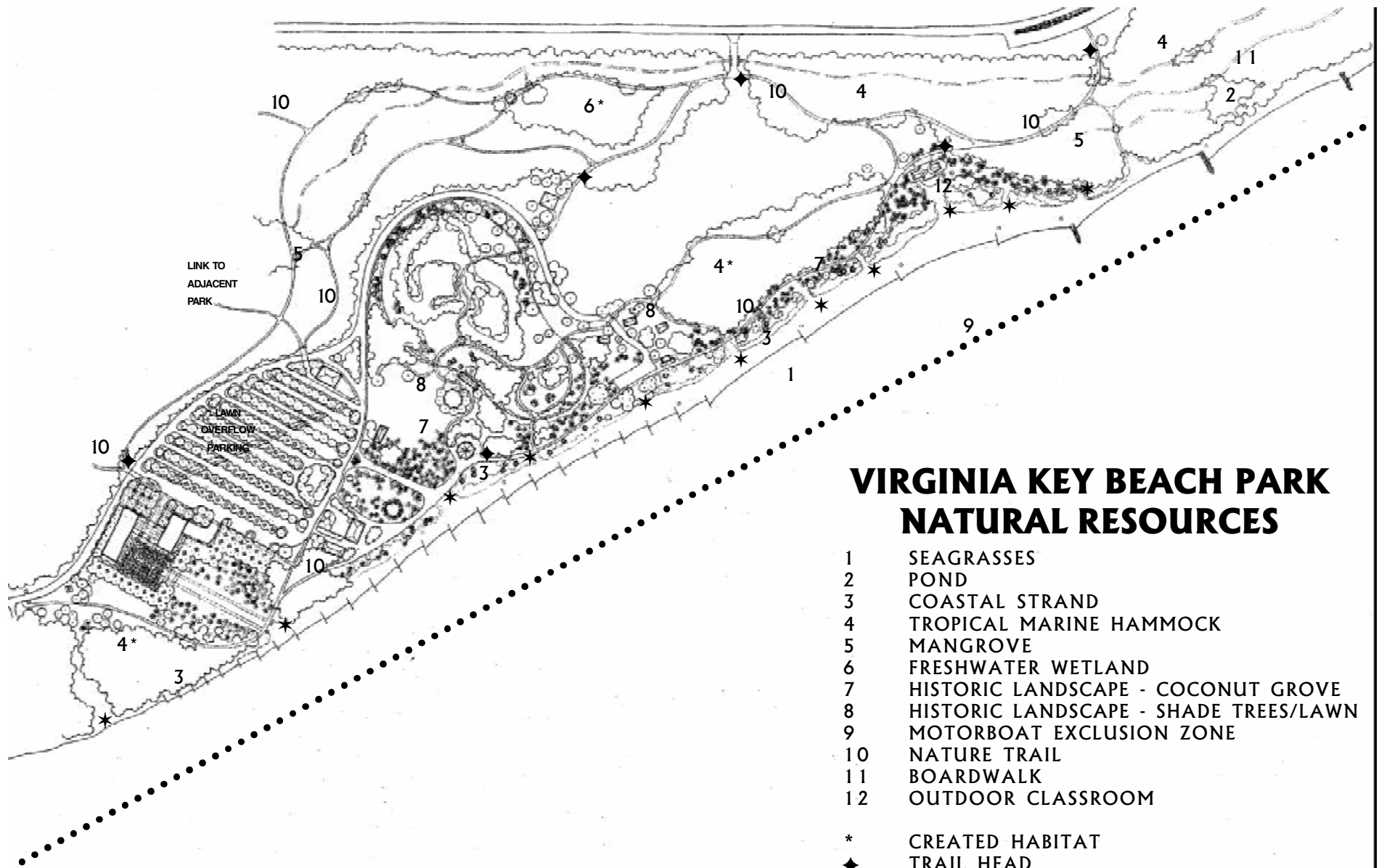
# SPECIAL EVENT LAWN



## CHILDREN'S AMUSEMENT AREA



# **NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION**



## VIRGINIA KEY BEACH PARK NATURAL RESOURCES

- 1 SEAGRASSES
  - 2 POND
  - 3 COASTAL STRAND
  - 4 TROPICAL MARINE HAMMOCK
  - 5 MANGROVE
  - 6 FRESHWATER WETLAND
  - 7 HISTORIC LANDSCAPE - COCONUT GROVE
  - 8 HISTORIC LANDSCAPE - SHADE TREES/LAWN
  - 9 MOTORBOAT EXCLUSION ZONE
  - 10 NATURE TRAIL
  - 11 BOARDWALK
  - 12 OUTDOOR CLASSROOM
- 
- \* CREATED HABITAT
  - ◆ TRAIL HEAD
  - \* DUNE CROSSING

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The United States Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) has planned two projects designed to restore the ecological integrity of the site. These projects are funded and underway, with preliminary planning complete. Design and implementation of these projects will be coordinated with the master plan. Recommendations for integrating the project parameters established by the Corps with the master plan are discussed below.

### PROJECT 111 SHORELINE STABILIZATION

The first project, scheduled to begin in October 2003, will restore the wooden groins stabilizing the beach and add three new wooden groins of similar design in the area of the severely eroded segment of the shore. This project will include the creation of a dune berm of approximately two feet which will parallel the shoreline in the area of the new wooden groins. The dune berm will include five breaks to permit dune crossings. Recommendations for integrating the shoreline stabilization project with the master plan are as follows:

- Locate dune crossings as shown in the master plan along the shoreline promenade to correspond with other planned site features
- Provide handicap accessible 1:20 maximum slope at-grade stabilized sand dune crossings similar to Sand Esplanade
- Make crossings as wide as feasible to maximize views to the water
- Make crossings perpendicular to the shoreline to maximize views to the water and to permit ceremonial processions for weddings and sunrise ceremonies

### PROJECT 1135 ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

Following stabilization of the shoreline, the Corps will undertake an ecosystem restoration project involving removal of all exotic vegetation throughout the park followed by replanting with native species typical of the habitat types located in the park. Design of the ecosystem restoration project will include a detailed inventory of the plant communities on site. Ten percent of the project budget is earmarked for recreational features such as nature trails and interpretive signage. Recommendations for integrating the ecosystem restoration project with the master plan are as follows:

- Protect and restore historic vegetation backdrops
- Protect views of the Atlantic Ocean. Only low coastal species and Key Thatch Palm and Silver palms should be planted in the area between the historic bath house and carousel.
- Follow recommendations under Historic Preservation for the Sand Esplanade. To the extent possible, given the requirement that existing vegetation be retained, alignment of the promenade should be as shown in the master plan, using long, smooth curves to provide a varied experience that passes through dense and open vegetation and moves between coastal strand and marine hammock.
- Vegetation on the seaward side of the promenade should incorporate large and frequent passages of low coastal vegetation to maximize views to the water from points along the promenade. Passages of low vegetation should be coordinated with picnic sites and shoreline seating oriented to the water.
- The location of vegetation masses and trails should correspond with the master plan, which identifies the general location of restoration areas by habitat type and integrates these with recreational use areas and preservation of historic features, including views.
- Points of interest and trailhead locations have been identified in the master plan. Precise locations and the content of interpretive features at points of interests should be determined based on the detailed inventory of site vegetation. See Commemora-

tion and Education for detailed recommendations

- Amenities such as benches, boardwalks or fencing should reflect the design guidelines established for these elements in Historic Preservation.
- The key feature of the commemorative garden is a special shoreline feature that will frame the rising sun. The dune crossing and shoreline promenade at this location should be aligned with the proposed feature. No dense planting should be planned in the immediate vicinity of the walkway to permit a grove of coconut trees to be integrated with retained existing vegetation in this area.
- Link to the coastal nature trail established to the north of the park by the City of Miami Parks and Recreation Department and provide opportunities to interpret the area between the two parks, which includes several notably large Mangrove specimens that are of special interest since they may represent some of the oldest mangrove trees in Miami Dade County. The trail alignment here should take advantage of the interpretive possibilities of this historically important mangrove community.
- The lake at the center of the park has been colonized by both exotic species and mangroves since the park's heyday, altering its character significantly. Formerly a visual focus for the historic Minitrain, the lake's dense surrounding vegetation and associated wildlife has become a feature of interest in itself. Clearing of exotics should create views into the lake from its edges and expose the peninsulas extending into the lake and create opportunities for nature trails. The restored historic Minitrain will encircle the lake. Because of safety concerns related to crossing of the Minitrain tracks, access to the lake shore will be restricted to crossings at designated points. Trails accessing the lake should correspond with these controlled crossings of the Minitrain track. A boardwalk across the lake should be located to permit nature study within the context of this controlled access system and to make the most of the lake's potential as a "destination" within the park, which is reduced by the dense surrounding vegetation.
- While planting of non-native Coconut palms is outside the parameters of the ecosystem restoration, native palms should be planted within the area designated in the master plan as the Shoreline Picnic Grove to enhance the ecosystem value of this area and to provide variety. Key Thatch Palm, *Coccothrinax morrisii*, Silver Palm, *Coccothrinax argentata* should be used more extensively in this area than the Cabbage Palm, *Sabal palmetto*.

#### NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Miami Dade County Department of Natural Resources Management has been instrumental in developing the restoration plan that will be implemented by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Once exotic vegetation has been removed and native plant communities reestablished, DERM will continue to be involved in resource protection but the on-going maintenance of the park's natural resources will be the responsibility of the Trust. The Trust's stewardship obligations will include:

- Protection of restored habitats from recreation-related impacts
- Control of Exotic Vegetation
- Adherence to best practices in resource-sensitive design and operations
- Conformance with State wildlife and water quality protection requirements (which will be determined during the permitting process that will be required for virtually all site development activities)
- Promoting awareness of the value and requirements of natural resources protection

The city of Miami Park and Recreation Department and Miami Dade County Park and Recreation Department control adjacent park properties. Each has either implemented or planned restoration of the natural resources on these adjacent properties. Because the natural resources of all three parks on Virginia Key are intimately related, the natural system encompassing all three would benefit from

a single management program that leverages the capabilities of all of the organizations and institutions with an interest and expertise in the island’s natural resources. As with other maintenance issues, duplication of personnel and equipment required to monitor and maintain the park’s sensitive habitat areas as a separate entity is not a wise use of scarce city resources or an effective strategy for long-term habitat protection. However, the capacity of existing management systems to absorb the additional responsibility of managing the re-opened Virginia Key Beach Park must also be considered. Management of its natural resources is a pressing challenge for the city of Miami. With only one naturalist and a small pool of laborers responsible for exotics control for all parks within its system, the city of Miami lacks the resources to effectively manage these resources and would be strained by the addition of another park. The City of Miami Park and Recreation Department has recently initiated a master plan process for the park system that will address maintenance, operation and staffing issues related to the city’s parks, including its four natural resource-based parks (Sewell Park, Alice Wainwright Park, Simpson Park and Virginia Key Beach, the beach park area north of the Historic Virginia Key Beach Park.) The City of Miami Park Master Plan should address the issue of providing adequate staffing and funding for the management of Virginia Key Beach Park as an integral component of the Virginia Key ecosystem. The Trust should actively participate in the master planning process and take the lead in exploring partnership arrangements to ensure that an effective management program is developed that incorporates all three natural areas into a single unit. Partnership responsibilities can be shared by the variety of institutions and organizations with an interest and expertise in Virginia Key’s ecosystem. The Trust can bring a number of unique resources to such a partnership:

- Raise funds from both governmental and private sources
- Formalize and administer partnerships with a wide variety of institutions both public and private
- Create education and resource-based recreation programs
- Organize volunteer programs.

**EXOTIC VEGETATION**

Reestablishment of exotic vegetation should be actively guarded against. To effect this the Trust should:

- Develop the expertise—whether through partnership with other institutions and organizations or by employing a park naturalist—to monitor the park’s plant communities and detect invasive plants
- Routinely remove invasive pioneers before they have the chance to establish and spread to adjacent lands.
- Limit park plantings to native species or *proven* non-invasive species

**WILDLIFE ISSUES**

Virginia Key Beach Park includes important wildlife habitat. With restoration of the plant communities, wildlife presence can be expected to increase and to bring with it the need for policies and programs to safeguard the wildlife and its habitat. The State Department of Environmental Protection and the US Fish and Wildlife Department have jurisdiction over the wildlife and will define the requirements for these measures during the permitting process. The Trust can also implement educational programs to support these measures.

**Crocodiles**

The return of this species from the brink of extinction is indicated by the increased population within the county. American Crocodiles, unlike their Australian and African cousins are docile. Popular misconceptions about the danger posed by crocodiles has a detrimental effect on the species. Public education about the gentle nature of the crocodiles can play a role in the Trust’s education programs.

**Sea Turtles**

A turtle nest monitoring program is required by the State. Monitoring will identify when turtle nests are present. In addition, protection

of the quality of the turtle nesting habitat should be a primary consideration in planning activities and events:

- Peak attendance should be avoided during nesting season to limit beach activity
- Night time events should not be held when turtle nests are present
- All events and activities that will take place on the beach should be compatible with protection of the quality of nesting habitat and reviewed with a sea turtle biologist
- Site lighting should be designed to protect the integrity of turtle nesting habitat. Turtle hatchlings orient themselves to moonlight on water to guide them from the nest to the water and artificial shoreline light causes the hatchlings to head in the wrong direction. The design of site lighting should be reviewed with a turtle biologist to ensure that it conforms to turtle protection requirements.

### **Manatees**

The decision to forego the restoration of the historic water link to the park is based on the more compelling public interest of compliance with the goals of the Manatee Protection Plan. The plan discourages activities that increase boat traffic in sensitive manatee habitat. While the beach park is not within the designated Manatee Protection Zone, the park's shoreline seagrass is habitat for the Manatee, among other species. In addition, the points of origin for water taxis to the park would be within the Manatee Protection Zone and thus restoration of the historic water link would increase boat traffic in this zone. The Virginia Key off-shore waters have been designated a Motorboat Exclusion Zone but the zone has not been marked. The Trust should

- Work with state officials to ensure that the Motorboat Exclusion Zone is properly marked.
- Actively discourage motorboat access to the shoreline

### **SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND OPERATIONS**

Virginia Key Beach Park's place in the urban context is unique. The park is an important historical remnant of the natural environment that once typified the now heavily developed Miami area. Best practices in environmentally sensitive design are therefore essential to assure that the development of the park does not adversely affect the natural resources that are fundamental to the park's significance and integrity as a both a National Register of Historic Places site and a jewel in the crown of Miami's public places. Responsible use of non-renewable resources – or sustainable design – is therefore an important tenet of the beach park's development program that reflects the Trust's mandate to provide wise stewardship of one of the city of Miami's most valued natural and cultural resources

The principles of sustainable design have been followed in the planning of the park's development program and should be followed in the design, development and operation of the park. Sustainable design requires that design, construction and operation of facilities reflect wise use of precious resources and consideration of the impacts on land, water, air, soil or living systems of the actions necessary to build and operate the park. It is recommended that the Trust adopt a standard ranking system to ensure adherence to best practices in sustainable design. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) ranking system developed by the United States Green Building Council is recommended as a method of guiding future design and operational decisions.

Common sense and community values have guided the planning process toward a development program that fulfills many of the criteria established by this ranking system including minimization of development overall, preservation and enhancement of existing Florida habitats, creation of additional habitat areas, removal of exotic species and ongoing management to preclude re-establishment, encouraging and accommodating alternative transportation modes, limited use of impervious paving and reduction of paved surfaces to reduce storm water run off, shading from trees to reduce heat island effects and protect air quality. Adoption of LEED standards will provide the

Trust with a method of communicating expectations and accomplishments regarding sustainable design to consultants, city officials, the public and grant making organizations. The LEED ranking system will also provide an accepted recognition that has already helped other institutions around the country to obtain grants from environmentally conscious foundations and governmental agencies.

- Consider the life-cycle cost of all improvements required to both protect the site’s resources and to conserve the resources of the community at large.
- Incorporate water conservation and protection measures in improvements to the parking lot, event meadow and other areas of the site and development of new facilities. As discussed under Historic Preservation, drainage is a significant issue on the site. Improvements are necessary to correct flooding problems and improve functionality throughout the site. As with all improvements on the site, environmental permitting will be required. The site’s extensive jurisdictional wetlands and its critical habitat areas make storm water management and water quality issues of special importance.
- Increase permeability by reducing impervious or paved areas for parking
- Limit paving and roof areas throughout the site to maximize permeability
- Incorporate filtration features in parking lots and new structures to cleanse run-off to reduce pollution
- Incorporate “green building” techniques in all new structures according to the US Green Building Council “LEED” Standards
- Use only low-water-use, native plant species to reduce or eliminate the need for irrigation
- Irrigation during the establishment period for new plantings should be provided by water trucks and planting timed, as feasible, to coincide with the summer rainy season to reduce the supplemental water requirement.
- Incorporate water recycling systems into the design of all new facilities to reduce the demand for municipal water. Potable water from the municipal system is required for drinking water, showers and water play features but storm water run-off collected in cisterns can be used for supplemental irrigation and to supply toilets. The Lighthouse Keeper’s house at Bill Baggs State Park includes a vernacular cistern that supplied all water for South Florida’s first built structure. Such cistern systems are increasingly common and can be incorporated into the design of the cultural center and the beach pavilion to supply non-potable water.
- The use of an on-site treatment system for effluent can be explored to reduce the demand for potable water at the beach pavilion by providing an alternative water source for toilets. The Audubon Society’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary employs such an innovative system that uses wetland plants as part of a filtering system that supplies near potable water that is purer than the municipal water supply. Such a system could be an integral part of the Beach Pavilion’s educational function and integrated with the Ecosystem Restoration. Such a system would require below ground tanks for the initial and final treatment and a small artificial wetland planted with typical freshwater wetland species.
- Maintenance vehicles and mobile concession carts should be electric vehicles with a recharging station.
- Solar energy provided by photovoltaic cells should be used to power any or all of the park facilities requiring electrical power but at a minimum all site lighting, ticket vending machines, interpretive features and park maintenance vehicles and vending mobiles should be powered by solar charged batteries. Because the park will not be a large energy consumer, there is some flexibility in the use of alternative energy sources for larger energy-demand features as well. Solar panels have become substantially more efficient creating energy, more common and more economical as well. Further study will determine how much of the park’s energy needs can be met by solar power.

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# **OPERATIONS & SUPPORT**



## OPERATIONS & SUPPORT

While Trust administration functions can be housed in office space incorporated in the cultural center, many functions related to the day-to-day operation of the park will require separate facilities that will be required long before the funding, design, permitting and construction of the center is complete. The master plan therefore proposes a 5,000-7000sf management office. The Park Office should accommodate the following functions:

- Office space for the park manager including meeting space
- Break area/locker room for park staff
- Storage space for limited maintenance equipment. As noted, the city of Miami Park to the north has a maintenance yard and equipment capacity that should not be duplicated on the historic site's limited and highly constrained site.
- A visitor orientation/information and assistance space with a public telephone, an information kiosk, a lost and found and a first-aid station
- A battery-charging station for solar powered maintenance vehicles
- Designated Employee Parking spaces for park manager and maintenance staff
- Parking space for a park maintenance truck
- Overflow storage space and vending area for rental equipment including bicycles or other equipment that cannot be accommodated in the Concession Stand's service yard or elsewhere on site.
- Interpretive/trailhead information for nature and recreation trails



## FOOD AND EQUIPMENT VENDING

The historic concession stand will offer snacks, beach chairs and umbrellas that were historically available for sale or rent. The distance between the parking lot and the swimming beach and the distance between the swimming beach and the historic concession stand are inconveniences that can diminish repeat visitation. To counteract this and in order to make beach-going as convenient as possible for those without cars to transport all the beach necessities, the master plan proposes additional refreshment vending and equipment rental facilities. A wide variety of beach necessities should be made affordably available at the park including coolers, ice, a variety of picnic items or boxed lunches as well as recreational equipment. Snacks (including corn dogs), cold drinks and equipment rental should be made available at the swimming beach and along the shoreline promenade by means of mobile refreshment carts of the type used at Crandon Park, where a Cushman cart plies the beach vending cold drinks, or by means of a more historically-appropriate type of cart that can be transported to a remote location and returned to storage at the main concession stand. Beach chairs, towels, umbrellas, coolers, rafts, boogie boards and other non-motorized water sports equipment such as snorkels, canoes or kayaks can be rented directly from beach with the attendant sheltered in a structure similar to the historic lifeguard stand. Bicycles, tricycles, scooters or, if appropriate security techniques could be developed, Segues could be rented at the Park Office for use on the park's recreational loop trails. Since an historically and ecologically compatible shoreline promenade would not be wide enough to accommodate passing, Surreys of the type used at Crandon Park should be avoided since they are too big. The design of the recreational trails should take these wheeled uses into account to ensure appropriate wearing surfaces. Stabilized sand wears well under foot and bicycle traffic but a sand-surfaced concrete or asphalt path might be more durable under heavy recreational use of this type. Trail traffic congestion should also be controlled by limiting the numbers of vehicles in use at one time.

In addition to the standard beach items that visitors might expect, Virginia Key Beach Park will offer a signature snack – the corn dog – and should investigate other opportunities to offer simple yet distinctive treats that will drive business by attracting loyalists. Eating is the second most popular beach activity and providing a quality eating experience will attract and retain loyal users. Treats should be explored that are unusual – such as fully loaded boxed lunch or family picnic baskets for sale at the concession stand– and treats that naturally attract loyalists, such as Espresso or morning coffee for sunrise visitors or Key Biscayne commuters stopping by in the morning on their way to Miami.

All vendors should be managed by a single concessionaire to simplify management and to enhance the business opportunity provided to the concessionaire. Only a successful concessionaire will be capable of providing the quality of service and products required to attract and retain repeat visitors and ensure a stable attendance for the park.

### **RESTROOMS**

Two historic restroom bathhouse facilities will be restored and a new facility is proposed at the beach pavilion. The beach pavilion restrooms are proposed to serve the swimming beach and the group camping area as well as trail users. The remote location of the facility introduces the potential for misuse and to guard against this, the facility should be designed to discourage malingering by desegregating the facility, omitting semi-private space, and providing unisex facilities that open directly onto the shoreline promenade. Full facility private “cabanas” can serve day users as changing areas and restrooms and overnight group-campers as complete shower and restroom facilities. Each beach pavilion cabana should include:

- toilet
- sink and vanity counter with mirror
- shower
- utility shelf/bench
- clothes hook/towel rack
- electric hand drier to remove the need for paper towels
- floor drain
- easy-maintenance surfaces and design features such as a stainless steel counters and wall partitions that do not touch the floor to facilitate floor cleaning
- break-away wooden partitions to conform to coastal construction requirements
- Caribbean design characteristics (See Beach Pavilion for detailed design recommendations)

Impeccable restroom maintenance is vital to Virginia Key Beach Park’s long-term sustainability since it is required to encourage repeat visitation. Repeat visitation will allow the park to hold its own as a popular recreation option despite its relatively small swimming area and competition from nearby Crandon Park and Bill Baggs State Park. The park’s distinctive ambiance and historic significance will offer an experience with the potential to attract a small, loyal user group. Priority should be given to attracting and serving this audience since consistent visitation is crucial to many aspects of the park’s operations. Measures should be taken to ensure that first time users return and that repeat visitors develop a high level of confidence in the consistency of the park’s offerings. Dirty restrooms are frequently cited by visitors as the most influential deterrent of repeat visitation and therefore a commitment to superior levels of restroom maintenance should be a top priority. While this may seem an odd top priority, failure on this front has the potential to undermine all other aspects of the park’s operations. Because concession operations are dependent upon a consistently visitation and thus on high levels of bathroom maintenance, this maintenance function should be included in the concessionaire’s contract and diligently monitored by the Trust.

### ACCESS AND ACCESS CONTROL

Access to beach recreation, education and cultural activities is not easy for many Miami residents: it is expensive and inconvenient. Access to a car is a prime deterrent and many residents lack the financial resources to overcome this hurdle. Many lack the \$4 entrance fee typical for parks. (See Site Suitabilities: Goal 4: Overcoming Barriers to Access for detailed recommendations for programming.) The master plan proposes several features to increase accessibility:

- Make the beach “transit friendly” by extending the bus line into the park
- Provide well-maintained changing facilities
- Actively work with outreach organizations that provide access to non-traditional park users, including organizations such as Optimists Club, Boys and Girls Clubs, church groups and nature-related educational organizations
- Eliminate the entrance fee and collect revenue at “value added” points throughout the park such as the parking lot, the cultural center, the historic amusements, the food and equipment concessions, and the rental facilities including the dance pavilion, the event lawns, the Hedge Theatre, the picnic pavilions, the Beach Pavilion, the Group Camping area, and for special events on off-hours such as sunrise events.
- Enhance the business opportunity for the concessionaire (and simplify and reduce the cost of management and overhead) by permitting the concessionaire to collect all fees associated with non-rental facilities and assume all management costs associated with these activities.
- Automated fee collection methods should be explored to further simplify management.
- Actively pursue grant funding from environmentally conscious organizations to subsidize outreach programs with emphasis on education and natural resource protection
- Collect revenue from “members” for special privileges such as access during off-hours (“The Sunrise Club”) or long-term cabana rental.
- Pursue other revenue streams to subsidize park operations. The Beach at Crandon Park is in constant use as a film and photography venue, with fees contributing to the park’s operating budget. The park’s wide beach, scenic coconut tree plantings and Atlantic Ocean views are therefore a valuable commodity. Once restoration is complete, Virginia Key Beach Park should actively pursue this revenue stream by accommodating media companies and maintaining the scenic character of its setting, with due diligence to the impact of filming on sensitive areas. The entire beach park – and especially key landmarks, such as the restored Dance Pavilion, the Solar Gateway and the Beach Pavilion — can be made available as a scenic backdrop but access to sensitive natural areas should be limited to prevent damage.

### UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Improvements required are identified below for the park’s major infrastructure systems. Electrical and water and sewer service improvements are in progress and should incorporate the recommendations below.

#### Water and Sewer Service

Water and sewer service are required for the following:

- 36,000sf Cultural Center
- Water features (memorial fountain, water playground)
- 5,000-7,500sf Park office
- Beach Pavilion (6 unisex facilities including toilet, sink and shower; sink and hose bib, drinking fountain, outdoor beach shower)
- Large Picnic Shelter (sink and hose bib)

**Electrical Service**

The park is currently served by overhead electrical lines. It is recommended that these lines be buried to minimize potential storm damage and to reduce interference with trees. A cost analysis should be conducted to compare the life-cycle cost of converting electrical service connections at existing buildings to underground connections. The highest portion of the cost of utilities undergrounding is related to the modification of service risers at existing buildings. Maintaining the above ground service risers to existing buildings can reduce the cost of the underground conversion and minimize impact on the historic structures themselves. These cost savings should be compared to the long-term cost for storm damage repair to the historic structures. Underground service connections should be provided to new facilities. Electrical service is required for the following:

- 36,000sf Cultural Center
- 5,000-7,500sf Park office
- Beach Pavilion (lighting, restroom hand dryers)
- Large Picnic Shelter
- Water features pump systems (memorial fountain, water playground)
- Minitrain
- Parking lot lighting
- Pathway lighting system
- Temporary Stage sound and lighting systems
- Entrance Lighting
- Battery recharging station for electric park maintenance vehicles and mobile concession carts