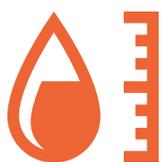


Results from **Community Member Interviews**

Cape Lookout National Seashore Stakeholder Studies Series



Project Need



Climate change impacts cultural resources by exacerbating the typical deterioration of physical resources, such as historic buildings, and altering cultural landscapes. Climate change impacts to coastal cultural resources include inundation, erosion, destruction, or submersion from sea level rise and storm-related flooding.



As indicated by a report of National Park Service (NPS) coastal assets*, most historic buildings at Cape Lookout National Seashore are listed as being highly vulnerable to sea level rise (and subsequent impacts). This high vulnerability rating is due to the low elevation of the seashore and the previous flooding impacts from storms.



The NPS is proactively thinking about strategies to adapt vulnerable cultural resources & landscapes to ensure their preservation for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Besides considering the opportunities and limitations of materials and technology, the NPS recognizes the need to consider the values and preferences of stakeholders.



In 2016, **previous community members** (former owners or lessees of Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village, their descendants, and others known to have strong ties) were invited to be interviewed on topics such as their connections to the seashore and its historic buildings, as well as their perceptions of resources, climate-related threats, and adaptation strategies.

*Peek, K. M., R. S. Young, R. L. Beavers, C. H. Hoffman, B. T. Diethorn, and S. Norton. 2015. Adapting to climate change in coastal national parks: Estimating the exposure of park assets to 1 m of sea-level rise. Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/GRD/NRR—2015/961. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Participant Profile



Eighteen individuals were interviewed for this study. An initial list of former owners or leasees of properties in Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village (and descendants of these owners/leasees) was provided by the Cape Lookout National Seashore Park Superintendent and the Director of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center (a partner organization). This initial list generated additional contacts through "chain referral sampling."



15 of the 18 participants were over the age of 50, demonstrating that the Cape Lookout community is aging. 13 participants were male, 5 were female.

Place Meanings & Cultural Resource Values

We asked community members which cultural resources were most important to them.

- The Lighthouse was the most salient building in the minds of most participants and was frequently described as a symbol of home.
- Federal maritime buildings and community buildings also held cultural significance for the participants.
- Residential homes held personal significance to individual participants and were also recognized as essential in telling the broader story of how people once lived on the islands.
- In Portsmouth Village, the village context was viewed as important for retaining cultural integrity.



Community members valued Cape Lookout National Seashore because this place was "**home**" to them even though they no longer (or never had) resided there.



Cape Lookout was also described as an inextricable aspect of community members' life and **identity**. As one community member said:

"It runs so deep within most of us that when we come off the island we're depressed for a month... And you're so happy the next time [you visit]. It's hard to put into words what the place does for you."



Cape Lookout National Seashore was also valued for the **family** memories and heritage it provided community members. Such as one participant who reflected:

"It was really a large portion of my upbringing... Just the pure beauty, and history, and nature. Everything out there. It was like a huge playground for a kid"



Participants also valued Cape Lookout National Seashore as a "sacred retreat" where they could recreate, recharge, and find **spiritual** meaning in their lives. One community member said:

"It's just almost like sacred ground. It really is. And not just from a fishing standpoint. So many of us go out there, we literally treat the place like it's sacred."

Participants' perceptions of the conditions of the historic buildings were widely varied.



- Community members have seen both deterioration and site improvements at Cape Lookout National Seashore.



- Overall, Portsmouth Village buildings were viewed as being in better condition, with the exception of the Lighthouse Complex in Cape Lookout Village.

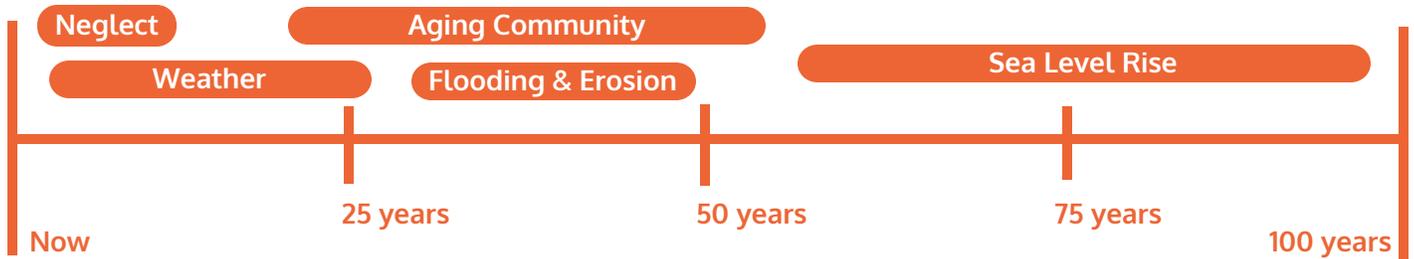


- Participants noted that while Portsmouth Village is more difficult to reach, once you get there many buildings can be accessed.

Perceptions of Adaptation & Prioritization

There was unanimous acceptance that climate change and sea level rise are occurring and will continue to impact Cape Lookout National Seashore.

Participants identified threats that exist in different temporal contexts.



Community perceived the most immediate threats to historic buildings to be neglect and weather-related (storm) events. In the 25-50 year time horizon they saw flooding and erosion as the greatest threat, as well as the aging community (advocates for maintenance). In the 50-100 year context, community members perceived that sea level rise would be the greatest threat to historic buildings on Cape Lookout National Seashore.



- **Beach nourishment:** The manual deposition of sand to replace sand lost from erosion and storm surge was seen as an acceptable adaptation strategy because community members saw it as less invasive than "hard fixes" such as seawalls.



- **Elevating & moving buildings:** Few community members supported these adaptation measures, as they were perceived to diminish the integrity of individual structures and the historic villages, although some found these preferable to complete loss of the buildings.

"Well I can't imagine the Portsmouth Church up on stilts. I just can't imagine it! Nor can I imagine it in downtown Harker's Island, or downtown Ocracoke... it would lose its soul"



- **Maintenance and restoration:** These were the most preferred adaptation strategies. Improving resilience and increasing interpretation of the historic buildings was preferred by community members over more costly landscape or "hard fix" adaptations.

Participants suggested several strategies the National Park Service (NPS) could use for decision-making when prioritizing buildings for adaptation:

- **Building-based:** Prioritizing building based on age, current condition, or how much money had previously been invested in buildings.
- **Value based:** Prioritizing buildings based on the historic or cultural significance and their representation of traditional uses and ways of island life.
- **Collaborative:** Prioritizing buildings based on conversation with local communities, cultural resource experts, and invested stakeholders.

Many community members expressed that their place connections had been most affected when the lease on their Cape Lookout property expired and that further impacts from climate change would not substantially reduce their remaining connection. They did, however, voice concern about the loss of these buildings influencing future generations' connection to the site:



"I just really hope and pray that we can somehow maintain those buildings so our, your children, and my grandchildren can actually see those places and walk up and touch these things and touch history... 'Cause you're touching history."

Key Insights

This study revealed that community members' strong place meanings—intangible cultural resource values—influence their adaptation preferences for historic Cape Lookout National Seashore buildings.



- Participants accept the inevitability of climate impacts to cultural resources and are more concerned with addressing immediate threats through restoration and maintenance, as well as increased interpretation and documentation.



- The participants perceive that the local communities are ready and willing to help with planning and maintenance efforts.



- They also suggest that involving the local communities in park planning will improve the NPS relationship and provide opportunities for the NPS to better incorporate community values into their interpretive materials.
- Leveraging community member input and resources of partner organizations has the potential to enhance preservation of both the physical cultural resources (shorter-term) and the cultural heritage (longer-term) within the historic districts.

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Photo credit (cover image): Malorey Henderson

For full report of survey results, please see:

Henderson, M., and Seekamp, E. 2017. Informing Plans for Managing Resources of Cape Lookout National Seashore under Projected Climate Change, Sea Level Rise, and Associated Impacts: Community Member Interviews Report. Tourism Extension Report Series 2018-CALO-001. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, College of Natural Resources, NC State University, Raleigh, NC. <https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/handle/1840.20/34902>



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