Critical Area Commission

STAFF REPORT

September 17, 2025

APPLICANT:	Maryland Department of Natural Resources
PROPOSAL:	Assateague State Park - Replacement of Ranger Station
JURISDICTION:	Maryland Department of Natural Resources
COMMISSION ACTION:	Vote
STAFF RECOMMENDATION:	Approval with Conditions
STAFF:	Katie Hayden
APPLICABLE LAW/ REGULATIONS:	COMAR 27.02.05 Development in the Critical Area Resulting from State and Local Agency Programs;

DISCUSSION

Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is seeking approval for the replacement of its ranger station and parking lot at Assateague State Park. DNR is requesting to replace the existing ranger station building in order to consolidate maintenance equipment and amenities that are currently housed in sheds that are scattered throughout the existing parking lot. DNR is also requesting to reconfigure the existing parking lot to improve traffic flow and provide stormwater management where none currently exist. Per COMAR 27.02.05, this project requires approval by the Critical Area Commission as it is a State agency action located on State-owned land. Commission staff recommends approval of this project with conditions. A copy of the site plan is attached (Attachment 1).

Existing Conditions:

Assateague State Park opened in 1965 and is located in Worcester County, just south of Ocean City. The park comprises 850 acres, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Sinepuxent Bay to the west, and is located entirely within the Critical Area on lands designated Resource Conservation Area (RCA). The park is a mixture of forest, non-tidal and tidal wetland complexes, and beaches. The park offers its patrons water access for fishing, boating, swimming, canoeing/kayaking, as well as recreational activities on land like camping, grilling, outdoor sports, and gatherings. Assateague State Park receives two million visitors annually.

The Assateague State Park Ranger Station was originally built in the 1980s. Since the construction of the building, multiple sheds have been erected around this building to accommodate additional maintenance equipment, campground supplies, and a first aid station. The current ranger station has failing structural components and is not adequately sized to handle

a first aid station or necessary equipment for running the park and campground. Improvements to the ranger station are needed to improve the structural integrity of the building and to better serve park and patron needs.

The parking lot outside the ranger station contains parking spaces for not only the ranger station, but also for general park users. Campground Road separates the station's parking spaces from the general park user spaces, but the road and parking spaces are all within the same concrete pad and separated by painted lines. Currently, there are 19 spaces and 1 ADA space dedicated to the ranger station and 63 spaces dedicated to general park users.

Proposed Improvements:
DNR proposes demolishing the existing ranger station along with the sheds and constructing a new, larger ranger station building that includes offices, a first aid room, a meeting room, maintenance bays to store firewood and ice for the campground, a deck, stairs, and an ADA accessible ramp. The parking lot will be reconfigured to improve traffic flow and incorporate a submerged gravel wetland. The improvements also include reconfiguring the parking spaces to provide the ranger station with 25 spaces, including 2 ADA spaces. The general use parking will be reduced to 55 spaces. While the reconfiguration results in less parking spaces for general park users, there is additional parking available in the adjacent parking lot. The parking lot improvements also include extending an existing combined use bicycle path from its current position outside the parking area to a location outside of the parking area to provide access to the park amenities and the building to the northeast of the parking lot.

Project Impacts and Mitigation

Limits of Disturbance
The total limits of disturbance (LOD) for this project are approximately 2.81 acres.

Buffer
The western portion of the site is located partially within the 100-foot Critical Area Buffer. No Buffer impacts are proposed for the proposed project.

Tidal and Nontidal Wetlands
No impacts to tidal or non-tidal wetlands are proposed.

Lot Coverage
The project will result in an overall decrease in lot coverage from 2.91 acres to 1.80 acres (0.39 acres).

Clearing
One tree (approximately 300 square feet) will be removed as a result of the project. Mitigation is required at a 1:1 ratio for the area of canopy coverage removed. DNR proposes to meet and

exceed this mitigation requirement by planting 56 trees and 196 shrubs on-site, some of which will be planted in the Buffer.

Critical Area 10% Phosphorus Compliance
The project proposes an overall reduction of impervious surface on the site by 0.39 acres. This reduction meets the 10% stormwater pollutant reduction requirement for this project. In addition, DNR is proposing a submerged gravel wetland that will remove 1.88 pounds of phosphorus per year (lbs P/year) on this site.

PERMITS AND REVIEW BY OTHER AGENCIES

Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
Stormwater Management Compliance and Sediment & Erosion Control
MDE issued concept approval on March 11, 2025. Final authorization is pending.

Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Wildlife and Heritage Service
The project area is within a sensitive species review area. Some of the notable rare, threatened and endangered species within this area include piping plovers and tricolored bats. However, given the project proposes redevelopment on existing imperious surface, WHS only has concerns about the tricolored bat. In an email dated April 25, 2025, WHS noted that if bats have been entering into the ranger station, then exclusion should be conducted prior to replacement. WHS further noted that a bat box could also be installed. DNR has confirmed that this problem has not been occurring.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
In a letter dated May 1, 2025, USFWS determined that the project area may affect the piping plover. However, given the project proposes redevelopment on existing impervious surface and the project area is far enough away from any potential nesting areas, no further consultation with USFWS is required for this project.

Maryland Historic Trust (MHT)
In an email from MHT dated June 13, 2025, it was determined that no historic properties will be impacted by this project.

Coastal Resiliency

DNR has completed the coastal resiliency review for the Assateague State Park Ranger Station. This review is required to address future coastal changes and determine how development will be impacted by climate change. DNR used guidance from Maryland's 2023 Sea Level Rise Predictions and the Ocean City tide gauge to determine the relative sea level rise (RSLR) for the site (3.9 ft. by the year 2090). The design life for this project is 65 years or 2090. By 2050, a portion of the parking lot improvements are projected to be impacted by 2 – 5 feet of inundation from sea level rise. By 2100, the entire project area, including the ranger station is projected to be impacted by 5 – 10 feet of inundation from sea level rise. The site is also within the 100-year

FEMA floodplain and the CoastSmart Climate Ready Action Boundary (CS-CRAB). This designation requires applicants to incorporate wider inundation planning into their proposed designs for flooding beyond base flood elevation.

As a result of the elevation, DNR has determined the risk tolerance for this project and site is medium. The first floor of the ranger station is proposed to be elevated on piers to an elevation of 10 feet, one foot above the CS-CRAB elevation of 9 feet. The proposed maintenance bay/garage attached to the ranger station is proposed to be at an elevation of 6 feet, which coincides with the 6 foot FEMA flood elevation. This maintenance bay will also have flood openings to allow water to rise and fall. Additionally, mechanical and electrical systems will be raised above the first floor elevation of 10 feet including exterior mounted equipment. The proposed parking lot includes a submerged gravel wetland to also help address some of the anticipated flooding. DNR has identified major maintenance activities during the 65 year timeframe including replenishment of the beach sand to keep the coastline and sand dunes in place.

Public Notification Requirements and Comments
In accordance with the provisions of COMAR 27.03.01.03, signage was posted at the project site and notice of the project was posted in Ocean City Digest on August 28, 2025. As of the writing of this staff report, no public comments related to this project have been received. Any comments received will be noted at the Project Committee and Commission meetings.

RECOMMENDATION

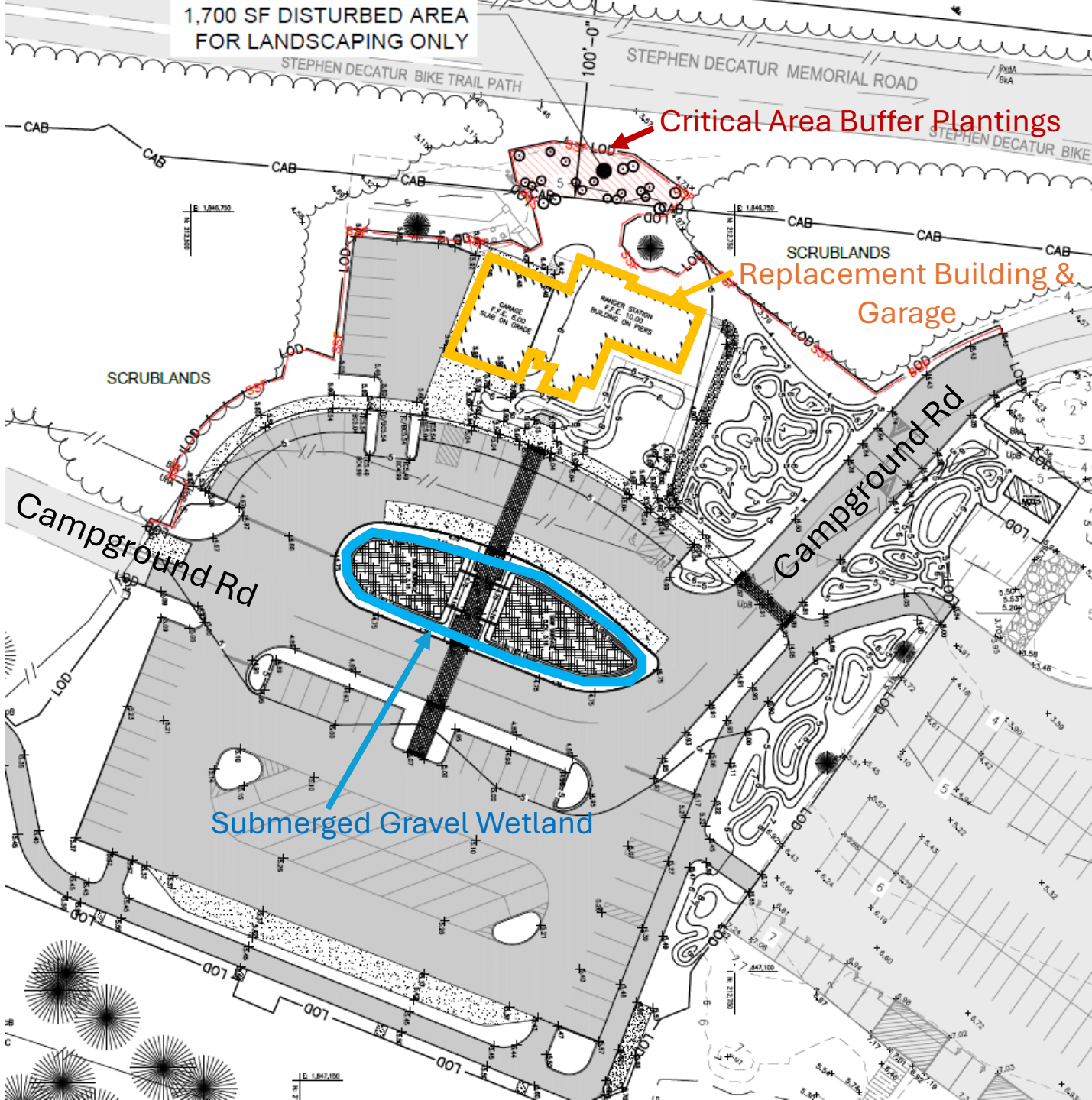
Commission staff recommends that the Critical Area Commission approve the new Assateague State Park Ranger Station and reconfigured parking lot with the following condition:

1. Prior to the start of construction, DNR shall submit to Commission staff:
    a. Final erosion and sediment control plan approvals from MDE; and
    b. A signed Planting Agreement.

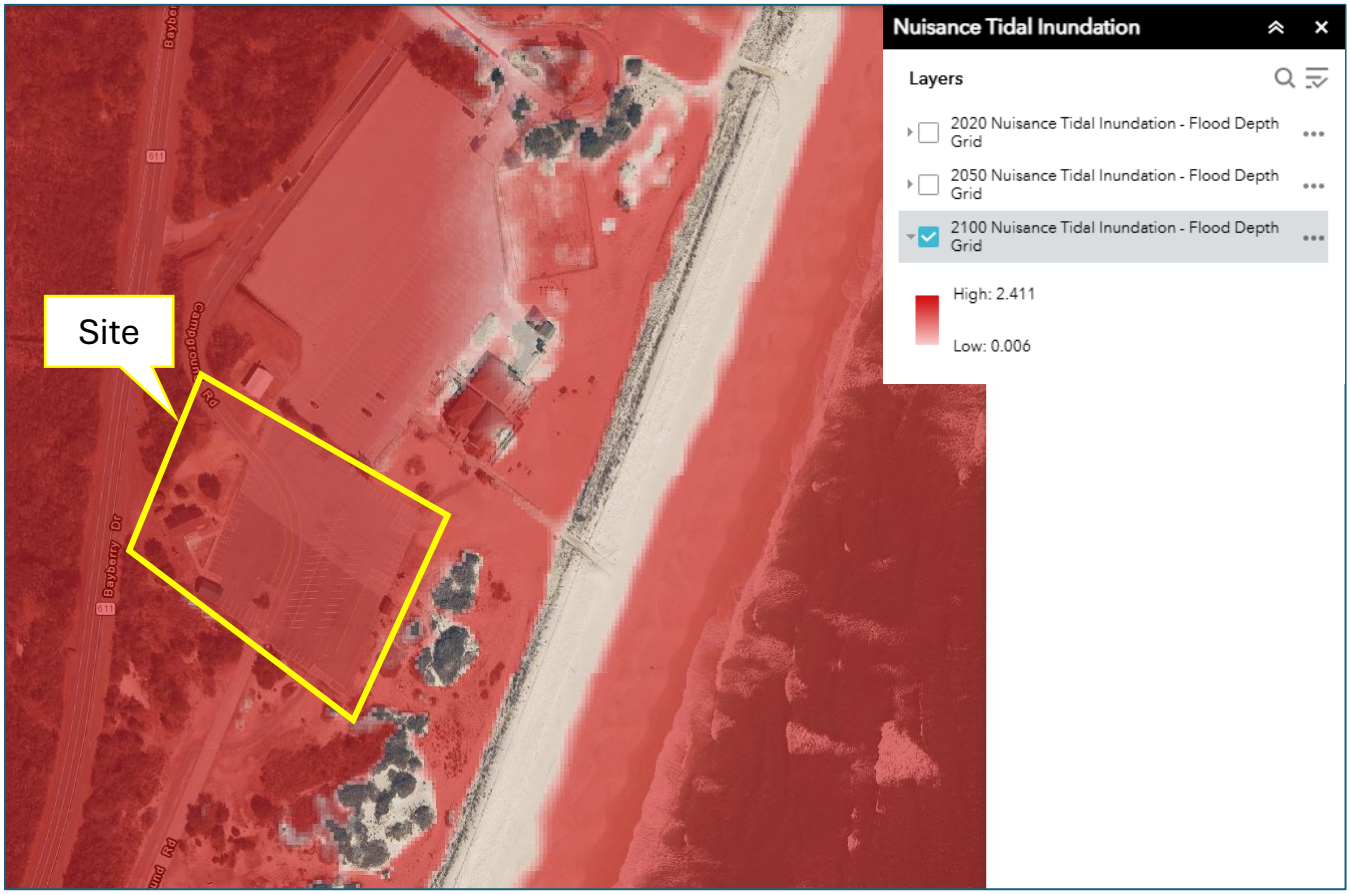
ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Site Plan
2. Coastal Resiliency Analysis


Stephen Decatur Memorial Road
Campground Rd
Site
Campground Rd


1,700 SF DISTURBED AREA
FOR LANDSCAPING ONLY
STEPHEN DECATUR BIKE TRAIL PATH
STEPHEN DECATUR MEMORIAL ROAD
Critical Area Buffer Plantings
SCRUBLANDS
Replacement Building &
Garage
SCRUBLANDS
Campground Rd
Campground Rd
Submerged Gravel Wetland

2100 Sea Level Rise Predictions



Sea-Level Rise Predictions for year 2100

CS-CRAB Analysis

CS-CRAB (Coast Smart – Climate Ready Action Boundary)