



OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

PASSENGER FERRY SERVICE AT CAPE ROMAIN NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MET FEDERAL SAFETY REQUIREMENTS



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Memorandum

To: James W. Kurth
Deputy Director, Exercising the Authority of the Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

From: Mary L. Kendall *Mary L. Kendall*
Deputy Inspector General

Subject: Final Inspection Report – Passenger Ferry Service at Cape Romain National
Wildlife Refuge Met Federal Safety Requirements
Report No. 2018-FIN-058

This report presents the results of our unannounced inspection August 16, 2018, of passenger ferry safety aboard ferry service to Bulls Island in the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, SC. The objective of our inspection was to determine whether Coastal Expeditions, Inc., a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concessionaire, operated its ferry service to Bulls Island in compliance with Federal safety requirements.

Coastal Expeditions met all the safety requirements that we tested. Specifically, each of its two vessels had a U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection on board, carried enough life vests for all passengers, had fire extinguishers available that had been inspected regularly, and carried first aid kits. In addition, crew members possessed current operating licenses and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certifications, and passed random drug tests. While we inspected both ferries, the concessionaire's largest ferry was the only one in use during the period of our inspection and we found that it did not carry more passengers than allowed.

Background

Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1932 to conserve habitat for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, seabirds, and resident species. Stretching for 22 miles along the coast of South Carolina, the 66,306-acre refuge includes barrier islands, the largest of which is 5,000-acre Bulls Island, 3 miles off the mainland. Bulls Island is accessible to visitors only by boat.

Coastal Expeditions, a small, family-owned company established in 1992, has transported visitors to Bulls Island for more than 20 years, according to the concessionaire's website. In June 2010, the FWS awarded Coastal Expeditions its most recent 5-year contract (Contract No. 40181AF001) and exercised its option to extend the contract in July 2015 for an additional 5 years. The contract requires Coastal Expeditions to provide passenger ferry service to Bulls Island and provide information about the wildlife refuge to passengers while traveling to and from the island.

The concessionaire operates two ferries to Bulls Island from Garris Landing in rural Awendaw. The larger of the vessels, the *Caretta*, was in use at the time of our inspection. A second unnamed ferry, docked at Garris Landing, did not sail during the period covered by our inspection.

Inspection Results

Coastal Expeditions met safety requirements established by the Coast Guard and detailed in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations. As of August 16, 2018, the date of our inspection:

- Both vessels had a valid Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection on board, in compliance with 46 C.F.R. § 176.100(a).
- The *Caretta* did not carry more passengers than the Coast Guard's Certificate of Inspection allowed.
- The boats each carried more life vests than required on the Certificates of Inspection, and the *Caretta* had enough adult- and child-sized life vests for each adult and child on board.
- Each vessel carried the number of fire extinguishers stated on the Certificates of Inspection, and all fire extinguishers received regular inspections, as required by 46 C.F.R. § 176.810(b)(1).
- Each of the ferries carried at least one first aid kit containing such items as bandages, aspirin, and ammonia inhalants, in accordance with 46 C.F.R. § 160.041-4(b).
- Boat captains possessed current operating licenses to comply with 46 C.F.R. § 26.20-1.
- All crew members passed random drug tests, as required by 46 C.F.R. § 16.230(a), and possessed CPR certifications, in accordance with the Coast Guard's Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular No. 1-91, Enclosure 1, Paragraph II.E.

We also found that the FWS and Coastal Expeditions collaboratively determine whether service to Bulls Island should be suspended due to weather conditions. The refuge manager stated that she never felt pressured by Coastal Expeditions to allow ferry service to continue under unfavorable conditions, and she expressed no overall concerns regarding the concessionaire.

The legislation creating the Office of Inspector General requires that we report to Congress semiannually on all audit, inspection, and evaluation reports issued. Since there are no recommendations, a response to this report is not required.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance received during the inspection. If you have any questions regarding this report, please call me at 202-208-5745.

Attachment

cc: Jeffrey Fleming, Regional Director, Southeast Region, FWS
Sarah Dawsey, Refuge Manager, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, FWS

Scope and Methodology

Our inspection focused on whether Coastal Expeditions, Inc., complied with Federal safety requirements for passenger vessels as of August 16, 2018, the date of our unannounced inspection. We also reviewed the number of passengers who traveled to Bulls Island on the *Caretta* from August 7 to 14, 2018, to determine if the concessionaire kept an adequate number of life vests on board. In addition, we inspected a smaller, unnamed boat used by the concessionaire in the refuge, but that vessel did not carry passengers to Bulls Island during our inspection.

We conducted our inspection in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. We believe that the work performed provides a reasonable basis for our conclusions.

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed background information on Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge and Coastal Expeditions' ferry service
- Reviewed Federal safety criteria for passenger vessels
- Rode the *Caretta* to Bulls Island on August 16, 2018, prior to notifying the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and concessionaire of our inspection
- Listened to the safety instructions provided on board the *Caretta* and determined whether life vests were stored in the locations noted in the safety briefing
- Counted life vests, fire extinguishers, and first aid kits stored on both of Coastal Expeditions' ferries and compared the results to the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations' requirements and the list of required items from the U.S. Coast Guard's Certificate of Inspection for each vessel
- Compared the number of ticketed passengers from August 7 to 14, 2018, with (1) the number of life vests counted during our inspection and (2) the number of authorized passengers from the *Caretta's* Certificate of Inspection
- Interviewed Fish and Wildlife Service staff at Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge headquarters and concessionaire staff at Garris Landing in Awendaw, SC

