

## Community Profile

### Captree State Park, Long Island, NY

By Johnelle Lamarque

More than two dozen for-hire boats dock at the Captree State Park, a barrier island in Long Island, New York that sits between the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Fire Island actually fronts the ocean and buffers the state park from direct ocean action. The for-hire boats and their auxiliary services within the park employ up to 200 people, including an office staff for the for-hire boats, a bait shop, concessions vendors and other park employees. Although this community of people, employed in recreational fishing ventures, may not be considered a “place” for the purposes of National Standard 8, additional research into the residency, occupational tenures and social and economic networks of employees may prove interesting to the national efforts for understanding fishing communities. Captree came up in conversation with other for-hire industry informants, as a key locale for “open” and charter boat fishing. The data for this section comes from one brief field visit in July 2002, including informal conversations with a few people employed at the park, the Captree Boatmen’s Association website and various New York-based publications.

The Captree Boatmen’s Association website ([www.captreefleet.com](http://www.captreefleet.com)) lists 27 boats, all but one of which is a for-hire fishing business. The for-hire boats are either “open boats” or charter boats. Most are larger boats, over 60 feet in length, but two are smaller, equipped for only six passengers. A third is a boat for dive charters. “Open boat” fares for the summer of 2002 ranged from \$34 for seven-hour “full-day” trips to \$27 for four-hour “half-day” trips with five- and six-hour trips between. Prices were lower for senior citizens and children. The fares included fishing rod, reel and bait. One boat listed an evening ocean trip for bluefish at \$45. The Captree Boatman’s Association website advertised photos, services and contact information for most of the boats. It provided descriptions of some boats and links to several boat websites. The website also included a list of association officers, their boats and their contact phone numbers. Charter boat clients could make reservations on-line through the website or with the association’s office.

In the summer of 2002, the for-hire boats at Captree were fishing for fluke, bluefish and weakfish. Most of the for-hire boats fish in the Great South Bay with only two boats regularly fishing beyond the three-mile limit and another occasionally fishing for shark. One informant estimates the Captree fleet employs about 70 full-time and 30 part-time captains and crewmembers, who live throughout Long Island. Open boats tend to carry a captain and five or six crew each. According to one of the people we spoke with informally, the for-hire business dropped by 18 to 20 percent the year of our research trip because of regulations and weather. The New York fluke limit was his primary management concern. He said clients don’t want to spend \$30 to \$40 to go out on an open boat if they can’t bring home something to eat.

The open and charter boats that dock at Captree seem well-situated geographically in terms of access to clients and infrastructure. Although, it costs a \$5 toll to drive into Captree State Park, linked to the suburbanized populations of Long Island via the nearly 5-mile Robert Moses Causeway, on which no commercial vehicles or pick-up trucks are allowed to travel. In addition to the cluster of services around marina (food, bait shop and offices), the park also contains picnic areas and a public fishing pier. The bait and tackle shop inside the park sits at one edge of the marina, while the cluster of offices and the Captree Cove restaurant are at the other. Several people were working in the bait shop on a sunny summer day in 2002, selling items, such as a frozen baitfish, and recording the weight of a fluke brought in by one of the party boat's mates. The bait shop keeps track of the weights in a competition among the for-hire boats. The boat with the heaviest fish that day wins. One of the shop employees also collects data for MFSS.

The Captree Cove restaurant sits on a second-floor level and shades about a dozen picnic tables clustered in the space beneath it. Adjacent are offices for the State Park and Boatmen's Association, separated by a breezeway from men's and women's public restrooms. A bulletin board in the breezeway provides additional information about the Captree fleet. The afternoon we visited, dozens of people were sitting around with coolers, waiting for or recuperating from an open boat voyage. We took photos of anglers streaming off of a recently docked party boat and a group of Asian anglers waiting to board. One informant said party boat fishing is a frequent recreational activity for Asians in the area.

Some social links exist between the Captree boatmen and the other for-hire fishers in Long Island and throughout the New York Bight. One Captree-based source provided the names and phone numbers of other Long Island-based for-hire fishing associations, as well as the contact information of one local commercial fisherman. Also, the Captree Boatman's Association is represented in the recently rejuvenated United Boatmen's Association, which draws membership from for-hire fishermen in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Party boat captains in Freeport and Point Lookout are sure to include Captree as a fishing port similarly affected by federal fisheries regulations, particularly regarding the size of fish within the fleets' range.

The Captree for-hire fleet competes for space and fish stocks in the bay with commercial boats, particularly draggers. The fleet has developed a notorious reputation among commercial fishermen in the area. One Freeport-based commercial fisherman complained that Captree captains and crew threw refrigerators and stoves in front of commercial draggers in order to destroy their nets. Because of their unique situation in a state park, the Captree boats do not deal with gentrification issues nor do they compete for dockside space with commercial boats. Although the state park is not associated with a residential community, what seems to be a well-organized association and the longevity of some boats at this dock suggests that it would be fruitful to examine cluster of boats in Captree and the networks within which employees and visitors move.

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