Coast Guard transfers management of Long Island Head Light to National Park Service

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BOSTON — U.S. Coast Guard officials handed over the management of Long Island Head Light to the National Park Service in a ceremony on Saturday, June 25, 2011.

Lighthouses have become vestiges of maritime culture. GPS devices and other navigational equipment have become stand-ins for the towering beacons and the position of lighthouses has ultimately transitioned to being historical landmarks.

Transferring lighthouses from the Coast Guard to others is part of the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000. This act allows for lighthouse ownership transfer to other federal agencies or local government agencies as well as non-profit corporations or educational institutions, all of which must be committed to cultural or historic preservation.

Long Island Head Light became one of the first cast iron lighthouses in the US in 1844 and has been in and out of service since the early 19th century. It is currently operational after a renovation in 1985.

“The National Park Service was glad to receive the historic, centuries-old lighthouse,” said Abbey Steffens, a Boston based National Park Service spokesperson. “It seemed only natural that the light’s ownership should be passed to the park service since Long Island is already one of the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area’s thirty-four islands.”

The National Park Service was offered the lighthouse in 2010 and preparations for the transfer culminated in the ceremony when Rear Adm. Daniel Neptun, the 1st Coast Guard District Commander, handed the Long Island Head Light key to Bruce Jacobson, the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area’s park superintendent.

“The park service is excited to receive the lighthouse in hopes to get the public out to the light on an occasional basis,” said Steffens.

Long Island is city-owned and a restricted area. Now, with the park’s new addition, Long Island Head Light will be open to the public for special trips and programs organized by the park. The park service is currently making moves to assess the lighthouse’s overall safety before organizing excursions for the public.

“Our (The National Park Service’s) primary function is preservation, making sure that natural and cultural resources are protected so that the next generation and the next generation can also come and enjoy these resources,” explained Jacobson who feels that ownership of the lighthouse fits perfectly under the park service’s goals and mission.

“This is a way for America to preserve its maritime history and when it ends up in the National Park Service we can be guaranteed it’s going to be not only a preservation of the history, but an asset the public can come see, enjoy, and learn about,” said, Bob Zarnetske, the U.S. General Services Administration’s Regional Administrator of New England.

The ceremony itself took place on city soil thanks to the help of Antonia Pollak, Commissioner of Boston Parks and Recreation, who also attended. The land transfer was a mere 0.06 acres of land between the two government agencies and is the only piece of land currently owned by the National Park Service within the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area.

The Coast Guard has been maintaining Long Island Head Light with the assistance of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. The Auxiliary currently assists with maintenance on Boston Light located on Little Brewster Island, another island part of the Boston Harbor Islands. The Long Island Head Light's grounds are being maintained with great efforts by the Auxiliary Flotilla 53-Constitution and hopefully Flotilla volunteers will continue their work after this transfer. The beacon itself will still continue to be run by the Coast Guard.

"I think it builds confidence when people get a chance to see that light out at sea," said Neptun. "It lets them know exactly where they are."

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