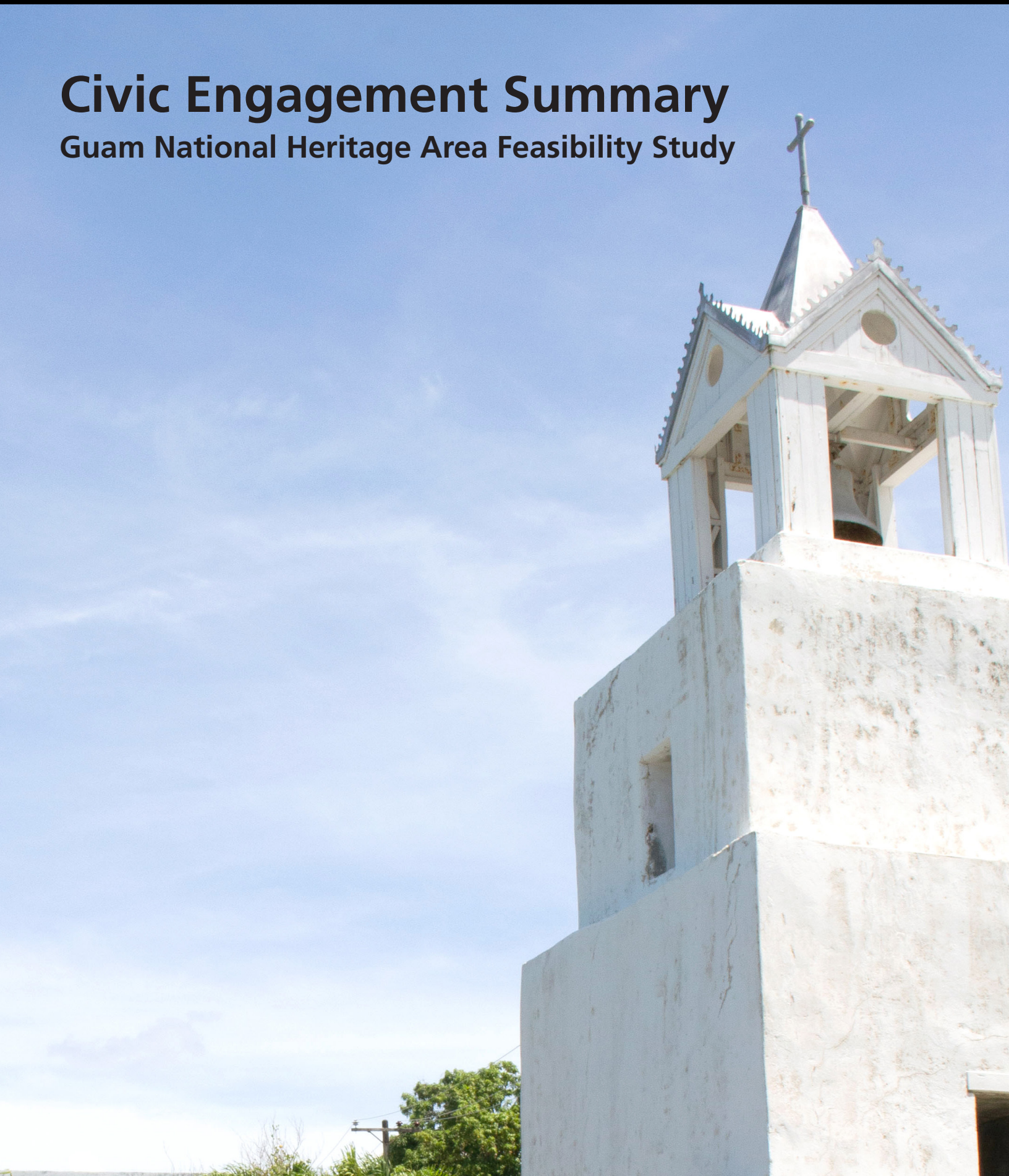
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Civic Engagement Summary

Guam National Heritage Area Feasibility Study



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY
GUAM NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA FEASIBILITY STUDY

The National Park Service, the University of Guam, the Guam Preservation Trust, and Guampedia conducted public outreach for the Guam National Heritage Area Feasibility Study from May through August 2026, during which community members and interested organizations were invited to provide feedback on the feasibility of designating Guam as a National Heritage Area. This period served as an opportunity for the public to share perspectives related to Guam's cultural, natural, and historic resources and the potential benefits and considerations for National Heritage Area (NHA) designation.

This civic engagement summary reflects feedback received through a range of public outreach activities, including written comments, virtual and in-person conversations, public presentations, community events, roundtable discussions, and meetings with community leaders.

Public comment is an essential element for a national heritage area feasibility study. The National Park Service will continue working with local partners and community members as the study progresses. Upon completion, a report describing findings and recommendations will be transmitted to Congress and made available on the study website (https://parkplanning.nps.gov/GuamNHA).

This document was drafted by National Park Service staff. Microsoft Copilot was used to assist with synthesis and refinement of the text. All content has been reviewed and approved by the National Park Service project team.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public outreach included a broad range of activities designed to introduce the National Heritage Area study, gather information about Guam's heritage resources, and provide opportunities for members of the public, organizations, and agencies to engage with the study team. Outreach was conducted through in-person and virtual public meetings, community events, roundtable discussions, and meetings with community leaders. Guampedia, the Guam Preservation Trust, the University of Guam, and the National Park Service provided online and print informational materials. Local media outlets published over 20 articles about the study, raising awareness and encouraging participation. Local organizations also published information about the study through their websites, newsletters, and social media.

These activities provided opportunities to engage with community members and the greater Guam diaspora in a variety of settings and locations. Participants shared perspectives on Guam's heritage resources, traditions, cultural practices, village identities, historical landscapes, and relationships to place. Discussions addressed topics including traditional ecological and subsistence practices, oral histories, civilian and military experiences during World War II,

cultural stewardship, heritage tourism, preservation, access, sustainability, education, and the stewardship of resources on public and military lands.

Several events also provided opportunities for participants to share personal and family stories and connections to specific villages, cultural sites, and historical events. Meetings with the Mayors' Council, University of Guam, subject-matter experts, and other community and government leaders provided additional perspectives on the potential benefits, challenges, and implications of a National Heritage Area designation. Public-facing presentations, newsletters, and the public comment period further supported education about the study and opportunities to provide input.

Together, these outreach activities allowed the study team to hear from a broad range of organizations, agencies, and members of the public.

Summary of Public Outreach Activities

Date	Method	Description of Activity	Number of Participants
April 2026	Feasibility study introduction letter	Letter mailed to elected officials and agencies to introduce NHA feasibility study process	34 letters sent to elected officials and agencies
May 2026	Newsletter	Informational newsletter with QR code directing comments to project PEPC site, aimed to enhance public understanding of national heritage areas and encourage citizens to engage in the study process.	200 printed copies distributed by CESU partners and at events
May 2, 2026	"Estorian Inadahi Guåhan: Stories of Preservation in Guam," - Marianas Storytelling Series	Organized by Guampedia and Guam Museum Foundation, the Marianas Storytelling series builds on deeply rooted traditions of oral history. The May 2026 event focused on preservation efforts on the island as a kick-off to Preservation Month. It was the first public event introducing the NHA study.	~80 attendees
May 3-9, 2026	NHA Program Site Visit	A NPS NHA program representative visited resources in study area and held discussions with partners.	N/A
May 4, 2026	In-person Mayors' Council Meeting	Meeting organized to inform mayors on NHAs and current study; learn from mayors about how to best engage communities.	~20 attendees
May 5, 2026	NHA Program Presentation and Q&A Session	Keynote at Pacific Preservation Summit and a following break-out session for additional conversation and questions.	85 attendees
May 7, 2026	University of Guam Roundtable	Roundtable discussion of NHA program and benefits of designation to invited members of the University of Guam community.	25 participants

Date	Method	Description of Activity	Number of Participants
May 9, 2026	Back to Sumay Day	US Naval Base Guam Sumay Marina - The annual event, coordinated with the Sånta Rita-Sumai Mayor's Office, invites former residents of the pre-World War II village and their descendants back to the site. Former Sumay residents and descendants were invited to share their stories.	6 video interviews
May 16, 2026	Valley of the Latte River Festival	Valley of the Latte Cultural Park - Annually presented by the Mayors of Inalahan and Talo'fo'fo, the Guam Visitors Bureau, GTA Teleguam, and community partners. Attendees were invited to share their stories.	85 attendees
May 27, 2026	NHA Introduction Presentation – hybrid (in-person and virtual)	Chamber of Commerce full-membership meeting.	100 participants
May 30, 2026	I Rikesan I Tasi (A Piti Sea Festival)	Santos Park, Piti Guam - Family-friendly celebration of traditional seafaring and fishing practices with activities, demonstrations, and tours.	~50 people engaged with GPT
May-August 2026	Public Comment Period: Project Website	Public comment period on the informational newsletter (90 days) through the NPS PEPC Website.	40 written responses
June 17, 2026	Mayors' Council Meeting	Hyatt, Hagåtña - The Mayors' Council of Guam is comprised of the 19 mayors and the 6 vice mayors representing the villages of Guam. The Council schedules a meeting each month to meet with groups that request audiences with the Council.	21 participants
July 21, 2026	Liberation Day event	Outreach with attendees and an interview with Guam PBS at the parade grandstand area.	Not estimated
July 27, 2026	Virtual Public Meeting	Community Conversations and Q&A with NPS Study Team Members	6 attendees
July 29, 2026	Virtual Public Meeting	Community Conversations and Q&A with NPS Study Team Members	7 attendees
August 8, 2026	Virtual Public Meeting	Community Conversations and Q&A with NPS Study Team Members	5 attendees
August 8-14, 2026	NPS Team Member In-Person Meetings	Conversations with President of Mayor's Council, Hagatna Revitalization and Redevelopment	N/A
August 11, 2026	Subject-matter Expert Roundtable	Roundtable discussion with experts in Guam history, heritage, natural resources, and recreation.	22 participants

Date	Method	Description of Activity	Number of Participants
August 25, 2026	Virtual Public Meeting	Community Conversations and Q&A with NPS Study Team Members.	6 attendees
August 27, 2026	Community Conversation (in-person)	Public outreach event at the Malesso Senior Center.	21 attendees 4 video interviews

Request for Public Comment

From May 2 through August 31, 2026, the study team invited comments online through the project website (https://parkplanning.nps.gov/GuamNHA) and via email, where community members were encouraged to submit an audio recording or written response. Community members were asked the following questions:

1. What are the most important cultural and natural heritage sites on Guam, in your opinion?
2. Which heritage sites do you think would be appropriate to include in a national heritage area, and why?
3. What stories are most important to the history and culture of Guam, and where can these stories best be experienced?
4. Are there ongoing cultural traditions and practices that are connected to these important sites and stories?
5. Do opportunities exist to enhance heritage sites and resources through conservation, recreation, and education?
6. Is there a trusted local organization that might have the capacity to coordinate management of a national heritage area for the long-term and in partnership with the National Park Service?

Forty unique written responses and ten video correspondences were received through the project website and email during the public comment period. Twenty-two comments were received from individuals who identified with an organization, and approximately twenty-eight were individual citizens who did not identify affiliation with an organization.

Summary of Key Themes and Perspectives

Across all civic engagement formats, participants expressed an understanding of Guam's heritage as island-wide, interconnected, and inseparable from the lived experiences of the CHamoru people.

Participants repeatedly described Guam's heritage landscape as extending beyond the island itself, encompassing villages, jungles, caves, rivers, intertidal zones, and reef systems. These places are not considered separate or isolated; instead, they form a complex cultural ecosystem shaped by ancestral lifeways, traditional conservation methods, colonial transformations, the profound impacts of World War II, and current management boundaries. Across comments,

community members emphasized that "heritage is everywhere," woven into the everyday movement, memories, and cultural life of the island.

Among commenters who addressed the question, many supported designating the entire island as a National Heritage Area, observing that Guam's heritage cannot be fully represented through a set of discrete sites or districts. Participants described heritage meanings embedded across all villages and coastal areas, in ancient latte settlements, Spanish-era structures, World War II memorials and refuges, and living cultural spaces that sustain dance, language, art, ecological knowledge, and community identity. Many also pointed to Guam's adjacent waters, including intertidal zones, fishing grounds, and canoe routes, as essential parts of the island's heritage footprint.

Community members stressed that any heritage effort must be rooted in CHamoru values and community-led governance. They emphasized that elders, families, cultural practitioners, community leaders, humanities organizations, village mayors, and youth must have meaningful and ongoing roles in shaping how heritage is interpreted, documented, and shared. Participants expressed the need to respect cultural protocols—particularly around burial grounds, sacred spaces, and ceremonial landscapes—and highlighted the importance of oral storytelling and the CHamoru language as core sources of historical knowledge.

Conversations also revealed broad support for heritage education, documentation, and stewardship, and a sense of urgency in recording stories from World War II survivors, cultural elders, and tradition-bearers. Participants described opportunities to integrate heritage into school curricula, university programs, cultural festivals, and community tours. Many wanted collaborations that link oral histories, archaeological knowledge, ecological stewardship, and place-based education for youth.

Heritage tourism was widely discussed as a promising avenue for cultural and economic revitalization, particularly considering the continued recovery of Guam's tourism industry following the COVID-19 pandemic. Community members emphasized authentic, values-driven approaches, including interpretive trails, village-based experiences, multilingual QR-coded heritage stations, and safe access to natural and cultural sites, that can benefit both residents and visitors without compromising cultural integrity or carrying capacity.

Finally, participants welcomed opportunities for agency, organization, and community collaboration, pointing to the Guam Preservation Trust, Guampedia, the University of Guam, village governments, cultural organizations, environmental groups, and humanities institutions as important parts of a local NHA coordinating entity. Several noted that heritage designation could improve dialogue between military and Indigenous communities, particularly around land access and shared stewardship of significant places. Participants would like the coordinating entity to link communities across the island, facilitate shared storytelling and site stewardship, and sustain preservation and collaboration over time.

WHAT WE HEARD: SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

Themes reported below reflect a qualitative synthesis of approximately 50 written, audio, and video public comment submissions received through the project website and email, as well as detailed notes from the information gathered through public outreach activities, including in-person and virtual meetings, community conversations, roundtable discussions, public presentations, and meetings with community and organizational leaders. The analysis identifies recurring topics, common perspectives, and areas of interest related to Guam's cultural, natural, and historic resources and the potential designation of a National Heritage Area.

Comments and engagement notes were reviewed and organized around the six questions posed during the public comment period. The themes presented below are intended to summarize the range of perspectives and priorities shared with the study team; they do not represent a quantitative or statistically representative assessment of the views of Guam's entire population. Individual comments and representative quotes are included to illustrate the perspectives expressed and preserve the diversity of experiences and viewpoints shared throughout the engagement process.

1. What are the most important cultural and natural heritage sites on Guam, in your opinion?

Respondents emphasized that Guam's most important heritage resources span ancient CHamoru village sites, Spanish colonial landscapes, World War II sites, and ecologically significant natural environments found across the entire island. It was stressed that heritage is not confined to single locations but woven throughout villages, coasts, jungles, caves, and reef systems, forming an interconnected cultural landscape deeply tied to ancestral memory and lived experience. Many commenters emphasized the importance of interpreting how the CHamoru people existed before colonial influence, through preservation of ancient burial sites and places where latte stones are found. Several commenters recommended lists of specific locations.

Key Themes

- Island-wide significance / entire island as heritage
- Ancient CHamoru sites and latte villages
- Spanish-era structures and districts
- World War II sites of occupation, displacement, and massacre
- Natural landscapes of cultural importance (reefs, limestone forests, caves, rivers)

Representative Quotes

- **Whole island**
    - "Guam is a very unique island with a rich history that spans over thousands of years. It would be unrealistic to designate a single site."

    - "The ancient latte sites across Guam, as well as the Spanish structures, and the World War II massacre sites, fortifications, battle-sites and concentration sites are all of value in telling the story of Guam."
    - "Places that witnessed massacres of beheadings and torture deserve a place of respect that must never be forgotten by succeeding generations."
    - "The coastlines, the reefs, the undeveloped jungle areas, the upland farms, the beaches, the ancient ancestral sure . . . the entire island holds memory of the ancient CHamoru ancestors."
    - "I support the designation of the entire island of Guam and its surrounding waters as a National Heritage Area. Guam has a unique cultural identity and CHamoru value system that is woven into everyday life and deeply connected to the land, ocean, plants, animals, and its communities. Guam's natural and cultural resources are not separate from its history and traditions; they are part of the stories, practices, and relationships that have been shaped by the people of Guam."
- **Specific locations**
    - "1. Plaza De Espania in Hagatna, 2. Gadao Cave in Inalahan, 3. Fuuna Rock in Umatak."
    - "Caves in Inarajan, Caves in Ritidian, San Vitores and Calusod martyrdom site, Joint Region Marianas HQ - contains furniture and other important artifacts about the Vietnam War."
    - "There are so many important cultural and natural heritage sites on Guam, but a few that come to mind are Fort Soledad in Humatak, Latte Stone Park in Hagatna, Plaza de Espana in Hagatna, Tagachang Beach Park in Yona, Inarajan Pools, and Fort Apugan in Agana Heights."
    - "I believe that it is important for this village of Sumay to be recognized as a heritage site because it is a very important place that was taken from the Native people, especially during the war. And it is still such a recent history that many of our elders still remember growing up here in this village. I believe that honoring this place as a heritage site can help maintain and preserve the the history of this place and our people."
    - "the area that is known as Sagan Kotturan CHamoru; the Palauan Cultural Centers (abai) in Dededo, and the traditional canoe house in Piti."

2. Which heritage sites do you think would be appropriate to include in a national heritage area, and why?

Respondents consistently recommended either whole-island designation or a connected network of cultural, historic, and natural landscapes that together tell Guam's full story. Many stated that heritage is holistic, not dividable into isolated sites, and that inclusion should reflect Indigenous lifeways, Spanish colonial impact, World War II trauma and survival, and ongoing cultural resilience. Several individuals emphasized that all proposed heritage sites for inclusion in a national heritage area should be reviewed by a local board or entity.

Key Themes

- Whole-island designation cited repeatedly
- Inclusion of ancient village/latte sites, Litekyan (Ritidian Point), Spanish forts and bridges, World War II sites, Pågat, Humåtak/Umatac, Inalåhan, Hagåtña, Tumon Bay, Village of Sumay
- Thematic grouping of sites to interpret periods of history
- Recognition that coasts, reefs, forests, and inland landscapes are inseparable from cultural narratives

Representative Quotes

- "I believe the entire island of Guam should be included as a NHA."
- "Sites appropriate for inclusion in a National Heritage Area should include a connected network of ancient CHamoru sites, historic villages, natural landscapes, and WWII-related places, rather than only isolated landmarks. These places are appropriate because Guam's heritage is not separated neatly into "natural" and "cultural" categories."
- "Habitats where plants are used for medicines by the Iyo'amte; Suruhana/Suruhano (traditional healers), *Rivers / Streams that collect Rainwater. *Natural Aquifers (Northern Area of Guam) (underground freshwater source that supplies Guam drinking water), *ALL Ancient Villages or Living Areas; Burial Sites; Areas that prove the CHamoru People lived before Spanish Colonization."
- "Sagan Kotturan CHamoru would be a heritage site to consider as a national heritage area because it is s an important cultural site because they house some artists and cultural practitioners to do their work and traditions. the space also allows for residents to visit, participate in workshops, and contribute to its sustainability by renting out spaces or contracting directly with the artists."
- "It is especially to remember the people of Sumay who were forced to leave this beautiful, beautiful location on village and community that was so prosperous and thriving, but ended with the war and, and forced them to leave."

3. What stories are most important to the history and culture of Guam, and where can these stories best be experienced?

Respondents highlighted stories spanning ancient settlement and navigation, the resiliency of the CHamoru people, cultural practices such as fishing, weaving, and boat-making, colonial rule, land loss, missionization under Spanish colonization, World War II occupation and liberation, and the ongoing pursuit of cultural resilience and self-determination. Many emphasized that these stories are most impactful when experienced in the landscapes where they occurred, supported by oral histories, village tours, cultural centers, and museums.

Key Themes

- Ancient CHamoru lifeways (navigation, settlement, subsistence, reef stewardship)
- Spanish and American colonial history

- World War II experiences (occupation, massacres, survival, liberation of Guam)
- Living culture (family stories, language, tradition, identity)
- Best experienced on-site, at villages, coasts, caves, historic districts, and through community-led interpretation

Representative Quotes

- "I believe the stories that matter most to Guam's history and culture are those told by the people who lived in these places and times: the CHamoru people and the diverse communities who have called the island home."
- "The stories of survival and thriving in an "isolated" region. Each place in the island holds different experiential opportunities."
- "Stories of survival at all levels in all contexts reflecting the resiliency of our people."
- "The origin story at Fuuna Rock. The story can best be experienced at the Rock site itself. [Also], boat-making, sailing, and fishing traditions."
- "I think if anyone was to stop and really think about it, how would you feel to be moved from your home, to know that your family's passed on, and you couldn't come back on this island? It hurts very hard. I think anyone, no matter your race, no matter your what part of this world that you live on, if you were to stop and ask the question, how would you feel if you were displaced and the stories were silenced, where would you be?"

4. Are there ongoing cultural traditions and practices that are connected to these important sites and stories?

Respondents noted that traditions remain active and closely tied to specific places, although access can be limited. Some participants emphasized that traditions can be revitalized through collaborative, community-based efforts. Traditions range from religious ceremonies, cultural festivals, and annual treks to practices such as weaving, fishing, canoe building, chanting, medicinal plant use, and oral storytelling.

Key Themes

- Traditional practices (weaving, carving, fishing, chanting, farming, canoe-making)
- Cultural continuity through family and village life
- Annual ceremonies and commemorations (Fouha/Fu'una, Manenggon, Ceremony at Fuuna Rock)
- Village fiestas, parades, and religious traditions
- Some practices restricted by access limitations on military-managed lands

Representative Quotes

- "Yes… ongoing chants, dances, and cultural practices drawn from pictographs."
- "Unfortunately, they cannot always be held on sacred ancestral spaces due to military blockage."
- "Village festivals and religious celebrations continue this tradition of placemaking."

- “When cultural practitioners are called on for medicinal healing "iyo'amte. During Ceremonial Gatherings: for example - when an Area is being presented or to be used for the improvement of the Lives of the People of Guam. Blessings during Burial Ceremonies. Cultural Practices are incorporated in programs that promote: Environmental Stewardship. Songs connect our people to the of Traditional Practices and/or Legends of Seafaring; Traditional Healing; Farming, etc.”
- “We have a tradition where we pay respects to the massacre sites. We do prayer and follow by educating everyone on our history.”

5. Do opportunities exist to enhance heritage sites and resources through conservation, recreation, and education?

Respondents strongly agreed that opportunities currently exist to improve heritage sites, but emphasized the need for funding, coordination, and careful stewardship so they can endure. Commenters referenced specific entities such as Prutehi LIteksan, Inetnon Gef Pago, Breaking Wave Theater Company, the Guam Philharmonic Foundation, and the Guma Cultural Houses.

Suggestions included strengthening site conservation, bilingual interpretation, community-led tours, signage improvements, climate resilience, and oral history projects, while ensuring access does not harm fragile landscapes. Commenters emphasized the importance of empowering the CHamoru people to tell their own story, with a central voice in defining what Guam’s heritage means.

Key Themes

- Education and interpretation (CHamoru-led tours, village programming, school curricula, oral histories)
- Conservation needs (reefs, forests, caves, freshwater, historic structures, burial sites)
- Recreation opportunities (low-impact hiking, paddling, community events)
- Funding gaps and resource limitations
- Desire for collaboration across agencies, NGOs, and cultural practitioners

Representative Quotes

- “Opportunities do exist to enhance heritage sites and their resources through conservation (recognition, clean-ups, preservation), recreation (paddling, hiking, swimming, cooking), and education (on-site interpretive signage, primary secondary and university classes, and yearly mayor's welcoming billboards).”
- “If additional funding were available, I am confident they could significantly increase public awareness and more effectively promote their goals locally and abroad.”
- “[The Pacific Historic Parks published their Community Empowerment Project: Needs Assessment Report in 2024, which] called for a collaborative preservation framework that brought together local communities, government agencies, and Indigenous and local leaders to guide decision-making and stewardship. Participants emphasized the

importance of improving physical access to historic sites, developing high-quality educational resources, and ensuring consistent maintenance and upkeep."

- "Yes. Especially for younger people, via DOE/GDOE school field and interpretive trips, tourist trips and excursions, and nonprofit organization educational programs and support."
- "Guam's heritage should reflect what our communities themselves value, remember, practice, and hope to carry forward to future generations. This includes the knowledge of elders and cultural practitioners and the relationships that have connected people to Guam's landscapes for generations."
- "Elders sharing story with youth keeps the culture going. It keeps us educated."
- "We have to be stewards so the narrative does not become just a telling of an old way of life."

6. Is there a trusted local organization that might have the capacity to coordinate management of a national heritage area for the long-term and in partnership with the National Park Service?

Most respondents agreed that no single organization should be responsible for long-term management alone. Instead, they recommended a consortium model that brings together heritage, cultural, governmental, academic, and village-based organizations. The Guam Preservation Trust (GPT) was the most frequently and positively cited entity to serve as a lead coordinating entity.

Key Themes

- The Guam Preservation Trust recommended repeatedly as a core partner
- Support for consortium/coalition models
- Additional mentioned organizations to lead or participate in a consortium:
    - Pacific Historic Parks
    - Guampedia
    - Guam Museum
    - University of Guam
    - Mayors' Council / village mayors
    - Department of CHamoru Affairs
    - Prutehi Guåhan
    - Cultural, environmental, and youth organizations
- A few commenters expressed distrust of certain entities, emphasizing cultural competence and community leadership as essential. Participants emphasized the importance of cultural competence, transparency, and community accountability when establishing a coordinating entity.

Representative Quotes

- "I believe that a consortium of organizations such as the Guam Preservation Trust (GPT) and Pacific Historic Parks (PHP) can work together to coordinate the management of Guam as a National Heritage Area with the National Park Service."
- "The Guam Preservation Trust has been dedicated for 30 years to coordinating management and engagement of local, community, and national heritage areas such as the historic villages and Cultural and Historic Landscapes and Landmarks visited by local residents, our NMI and Micronesian visitors, US Military residents, and national and international tourists."
- "Prutehi Guåhan is the only group I currently trust to make good decisions about Guam's future."
- "Investing in the planning and placemaking and community planning capacity of the Guam Mayors Council and village-based NGOs should be part of the structure for aligning and coordinating heritage planning and coordination and evaluation."

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