

Cumberland Island National Seashore

Proposed Land Exchange Environmental Assessment
Public Meeting

Wednesday, September 23, 2026





Presentation Agenda

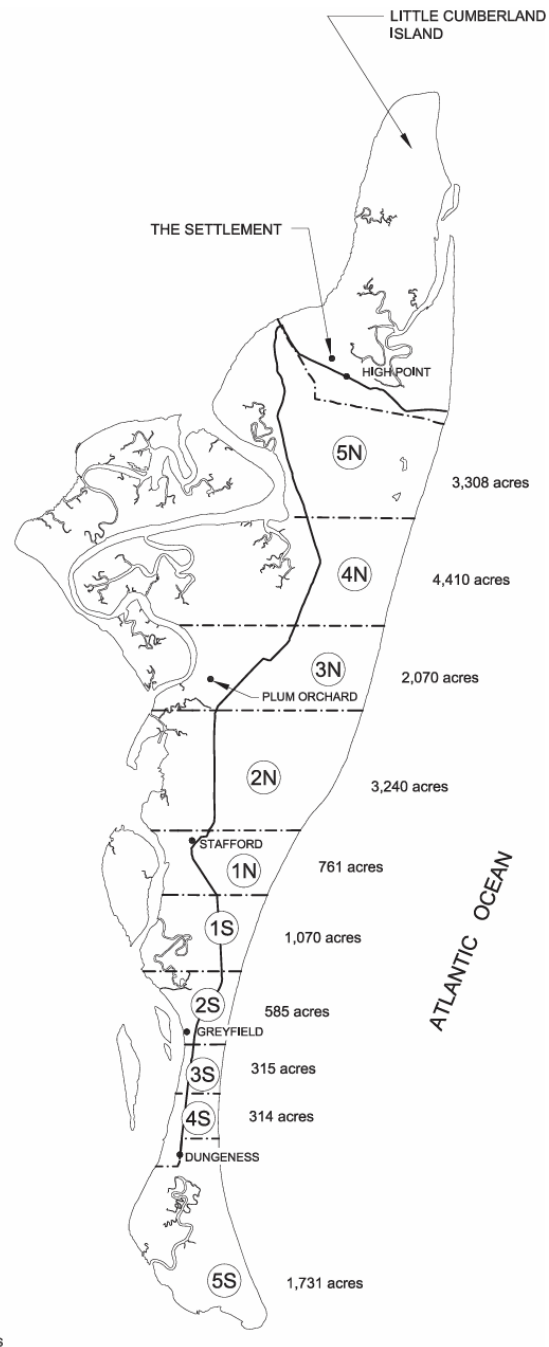
- Background & Overview
- Purpose & Need for the Project
- Objectives & Desired Conditions
- Review Alternatives
- Schedule & Next Steps
- How to Comment



McKinnon, John. "Map of Cumberland Island." Georgia Archives. 1802, <https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/hmf/id/55>.

Cumberland Island over 4,000 years of human habitation and history

- Indigenous peoples
- Spanish Missions
- Military Fortifications
- Agricultural Systems
- Revolutionary War
- Carnegie Era
- The Settlement
- National Seashore



Carnegie Ownership

By the late 1880's the majority of the island was owned by the Carnegie Family.

End of an Era in 1962.

- ❖ Passing of the last of Thomas and Lucy's nine children.
- ❖ Carnegie Estate Trust dissolved.



Map 2.5. The land division by the heirs of Lucy C. Carnegie. (Data from a map of the same title, Georgia Archives, acc. no. 69-501, ser. 11, folder 11-1-009)

Protect for the Future

Land was sold outside the family, which caused fear of threats from development to the island's natural appeal.

Efforts to protect the island led to its federal designation as a National Seashore.



The airport being gouged out of the wilderness by developer Fraser is 200 feet wide and over 5,000 feet long. Aviation experts say the strip will comfortably accept most modern jet aircraft if it is paved.

Aerial Footage of Construction of Fraser's Cumberland Island Airstrip – Photo by Georgia Conservancy, Spring 1970.

Island Facts and Info

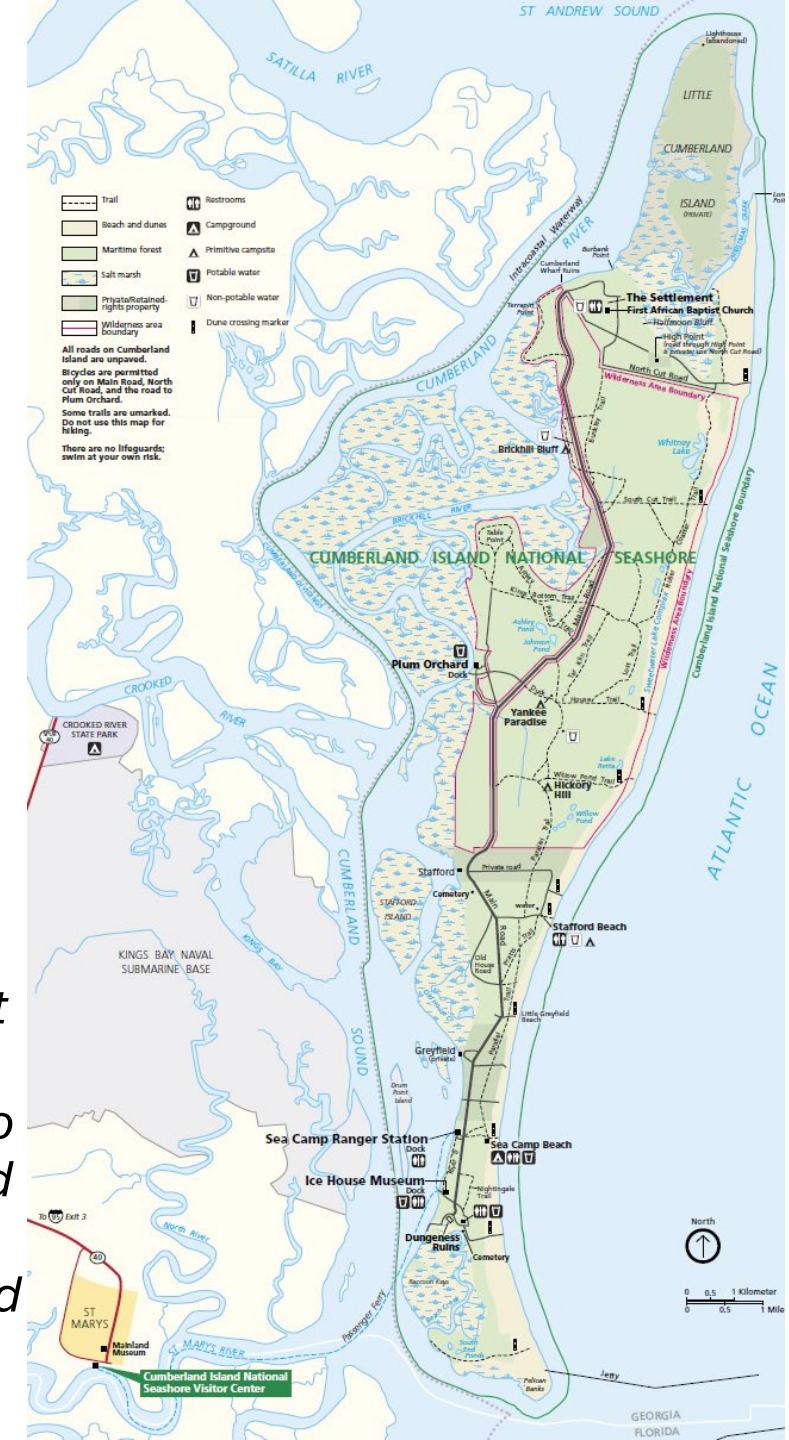
- ❖ Established in 1972.
- ❖ The largest and southernmost of Georgia's barrier islands.
- ❖ Located 1.0 to 3.0 miles off the mainland.
- ❖ 17.5 miles long undeveloped beach.
- ❖ 36,415 acres.
- ❖ Over 4,000 years of human habitation and history.
- ❖ Over 50 miles of trails.





Enabling Legislation

“That in order to provide for public outdoor recreation use and enjoyment of certain significant shoreline lands and waters of the United States, and to preserve related scenic, scientific, and historical values, there is established in the State of Georgia the Cumberland Island National Seashore.”



Congressional Intent

Acquire private land into National Park Service (NPS) System.

Methods Include:

- Donations
- Purchases
- Exchanges
- Condemnations
- Use and Occupancy Deeds
(Life Estates)



Fee Simple vs Life Estate

Fee Simple: Complete Private Ownership of the Land

The owner has the same rights to use the land as any private landowner within Camden County.

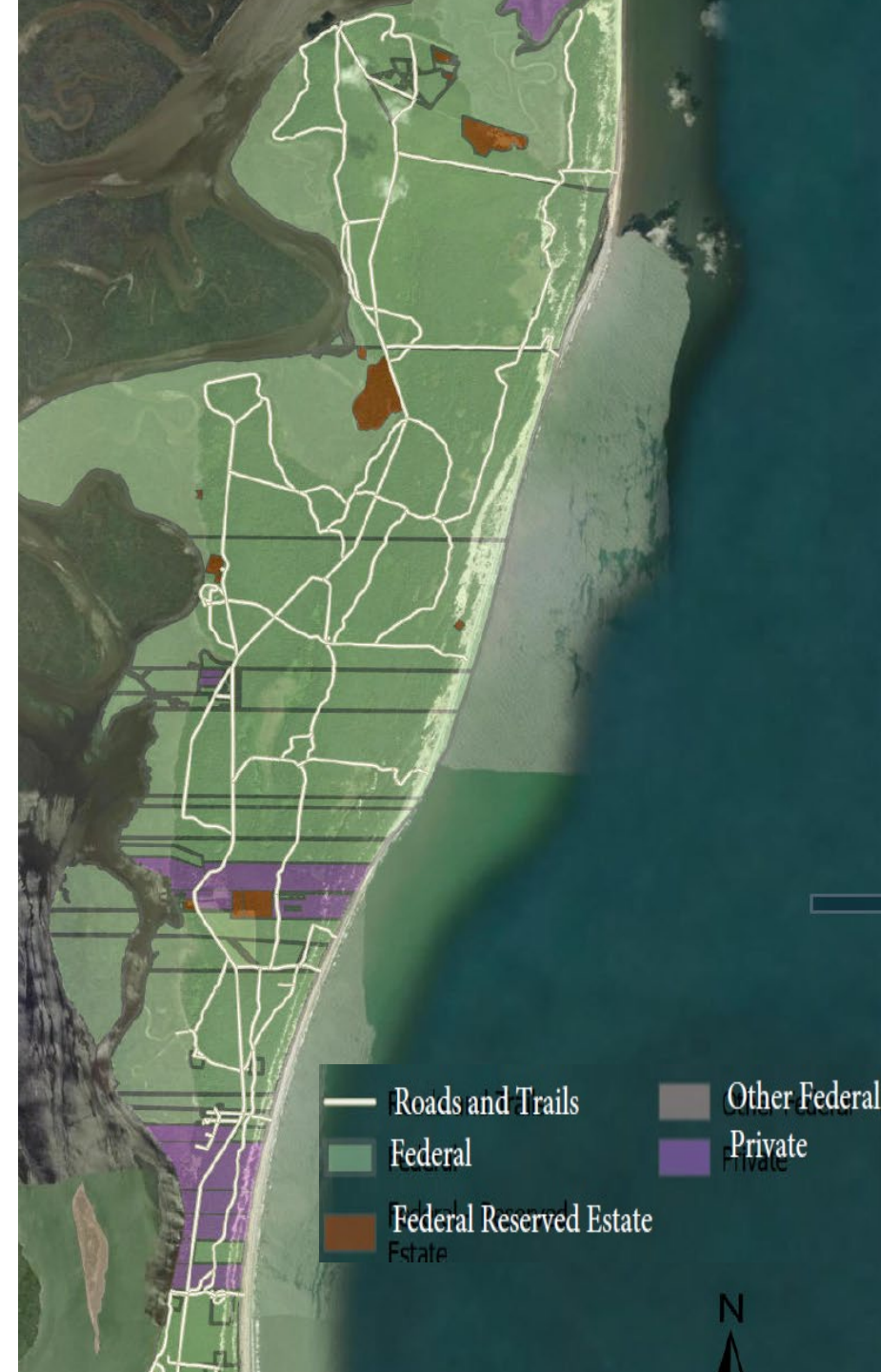
Life Estate:

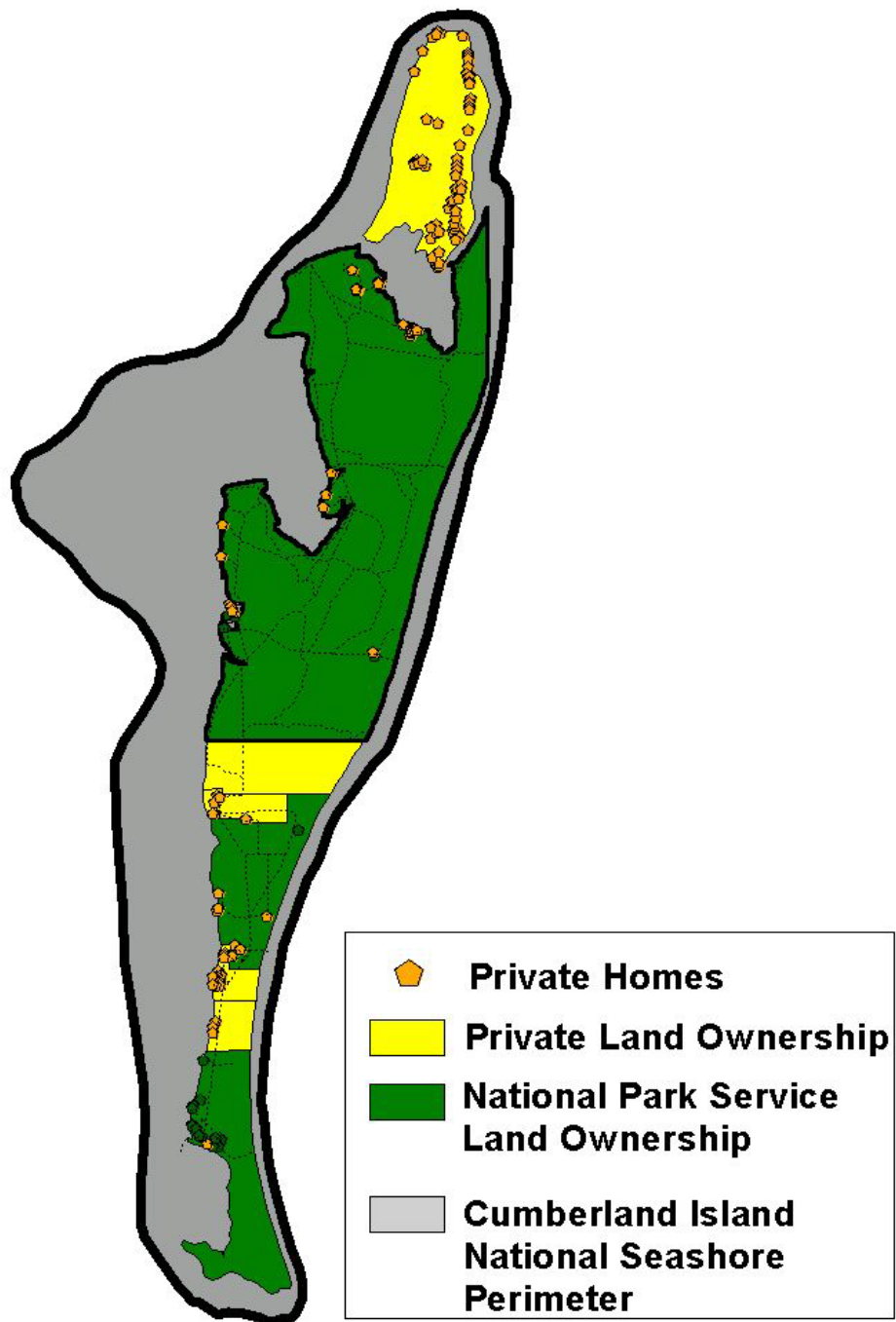
The Federal Government purchased the land from willing sellers and conveyed rights of use and occupancy to the seller.

A life estate is when someone is allowed to live in and use a property for the rest of agreed upon family members lives. When those people pass, the property automatically reverts to the federal government, and no extra legal steps are needed.

The two proposed land exchanges are with Fee Simple property owners.

If we do nothing, this land can be developed; the exchange would protect it for the future.





DRAFT 7/21/2003 D. Greenlee

Continuation of Congressional Intent

- ❖ Since 1972 NPS has been working toward securing over 150 parcels into NPS ownership.
- ❖ A few significant tracts continue to be held in private fee simple ownership.
- ❖ The NPS is open to discussions with all remaining willing fee simple landowners.

Why Now?

At the request of Camden County, the NPS and private landowners started discussions.

- In 2016, a private landowner requested a hardship variance to waive the zoning code to be able to be subdivide. This variance has a potential for private development at a higher density than currently exists directly adjacent to primary visitor areas and designated Wilderness.
- Camden County's planning department and board initially approved the request for a ten-lot subdivision, which the Environmental Law Center quickly appealed on behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association and St. Mary's EarthKeepers.
- Camden County Board of Commissioners tabled appeals to encourage NPS and private landowners to develop long-term solutions for private property on Cumberland Island.
- Renewed interest from private landowners to discuss options.
- If we do nothing, this land can be developed; the exchange would protect it for the future.

BREAKING: Subdivision Approved for Cumberland Island National Seashore

DECEMBER 8, 2016 [WILL HARLAN](#) [GO OUTSIDE, NEWSWIRE](#)

2016

NEWS

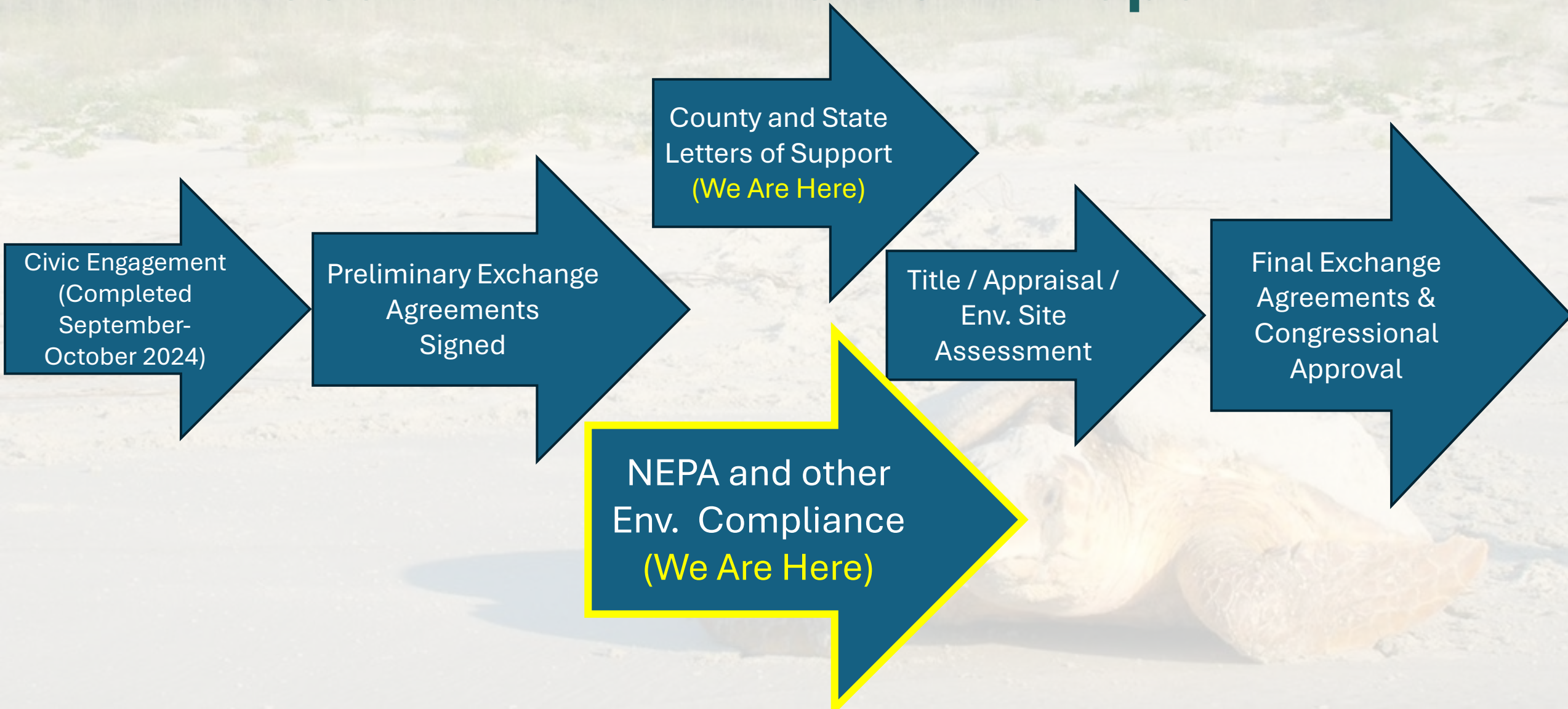
Zoning request sparks fear of Cumberland development

Conservancy balks at possibility of 10 lots on island wilderness

Mary Landers

Dec. 4, 2016, 6:48 p.m. ET

Where are we in the Proposed Exchange Process and What are Next Steps?





Proposal

The proposed project includes two preliminary land exchange agreements between the NPS and private landowners.

- NPS would acquire privately owned parcels located within core resource areas of the Seashore.
- In return, the NPS would convey federally owned property of comparable value to the private parties with permanent conservation easements.



Purpose and Need

Purpose of the Project

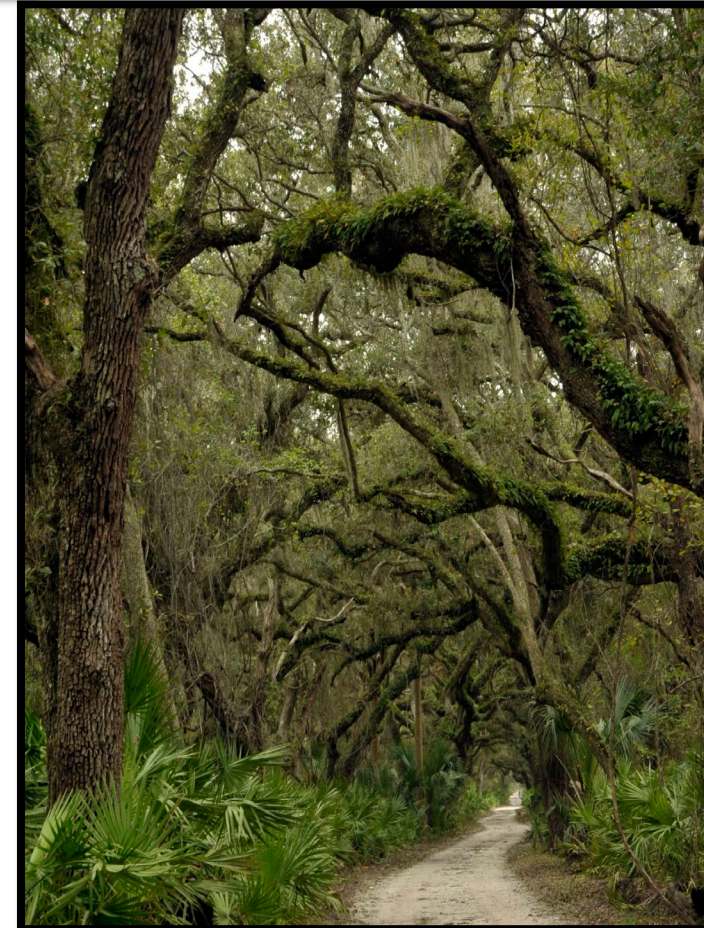
The purpose of the proposed action is to acquire, through voluntary land exchanges with conservation easements, parcels of privately owned land within the authorized boundary of the Seashore.

Need for the Project

The proposed action is needed to:

- provide a relatively contiguous corridor of federally owned land within core areas of the Seashore,
- improve the manageability of these potential exchange lands,
- preserve important resources, and
- prevent further development in core areas of the Seashore

The properties under consideration for NPS acquisition intersect the Seashore's Main Road and key visitor use trails. The properties contain important natural and cultural resources that the Seashore seeks to protect and conserve, including live oak maritime forests, archeological resources, an intact barrier island ecosystem, nesting for shorebirds



Objectives & Desired Conditions



The NPS is considering two land exchanges within Cumberland Island National Seashore (the Seashore) to:

- improve resource protection,
- preserve wilderness character, and
- enhance the overall manageability of Seashore lands.

The proposed land exchanges would support key objectives and desired conditions of the NPS, such as:

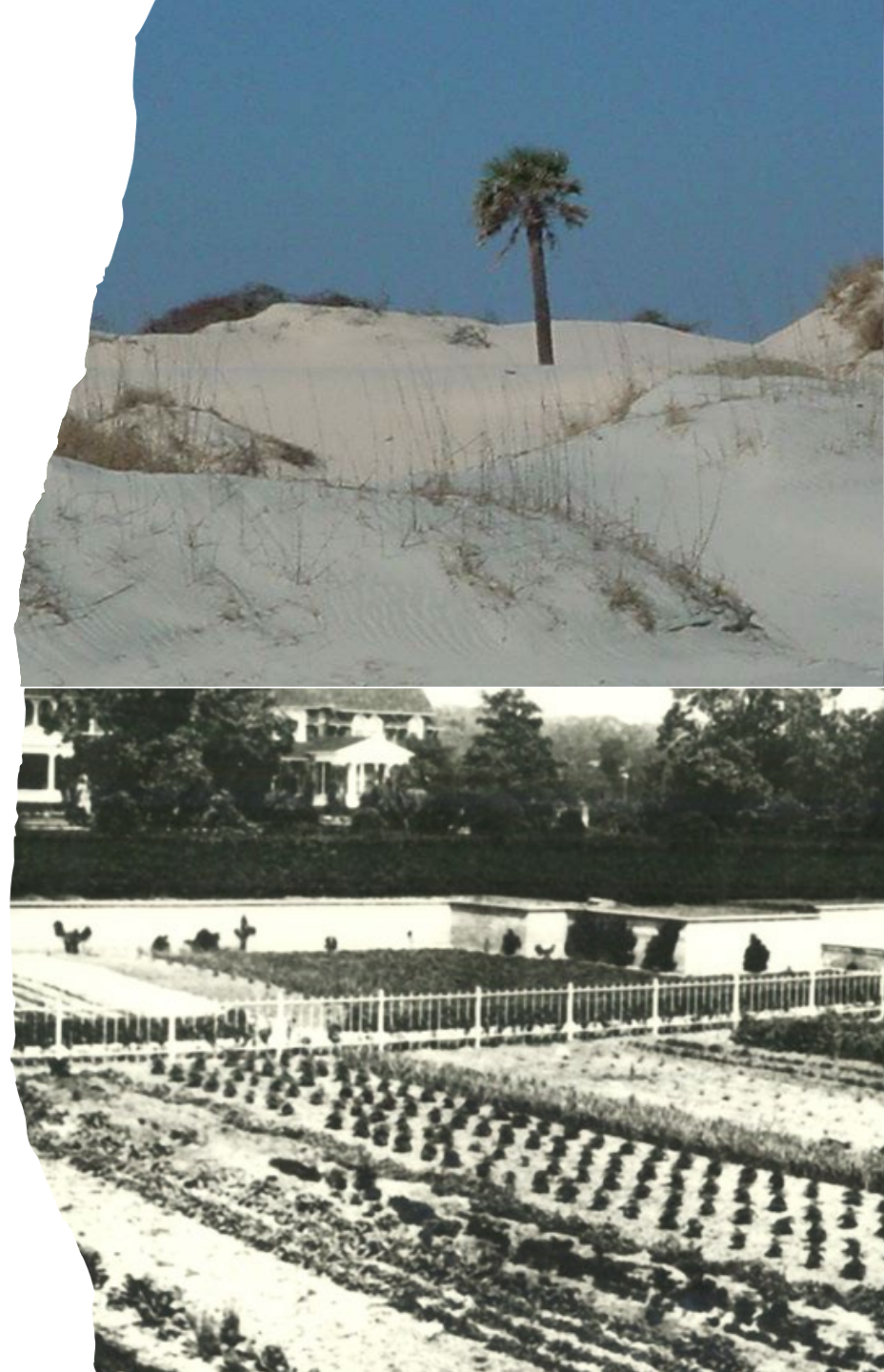
- Improving the continuity and connectivity of Seashore land to expand wildlife corridors and increase NPS management efficiency.
- Safeguarding critical habitat for federally protected species such as sea turtles and nesting shorebirds.
- Facilitating additional designation of wilderness.
- Preventing or limiting private development on or near significant cultural and natural resources.

Alternative 1: No Action

Under alternative 1 (the no-action alternative) the NPS would not proceed with the two proposed land exchanges.

Potential Impacts of the No Action Alternative

- The two private inholdings would remain developable, allowing future residential development or commercial use within the Seashore boundary.
- Increased risk of habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and disturbance to wildlife.
- Potential degradation of wilderness character, scenic quality, and opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.
- Potential rerouting, disruption, or loss of trail connectivity along the Old River Trail and Parallel Trail.
- Continued vulnerability of known and undiscovered archeological resources to future development and ground disturbance on private lands.
- Loss of opportunity to expand wilderness designation with NPS protection.





If We Do Nothing

If we do nothing, this land can be developed; the exchange would protect it for the future. Thanks to the partnerships and legacy these families want to leave behind we have this opportunity.

Currently these two private landowners are able to develop the property in various ways, which include commercial :

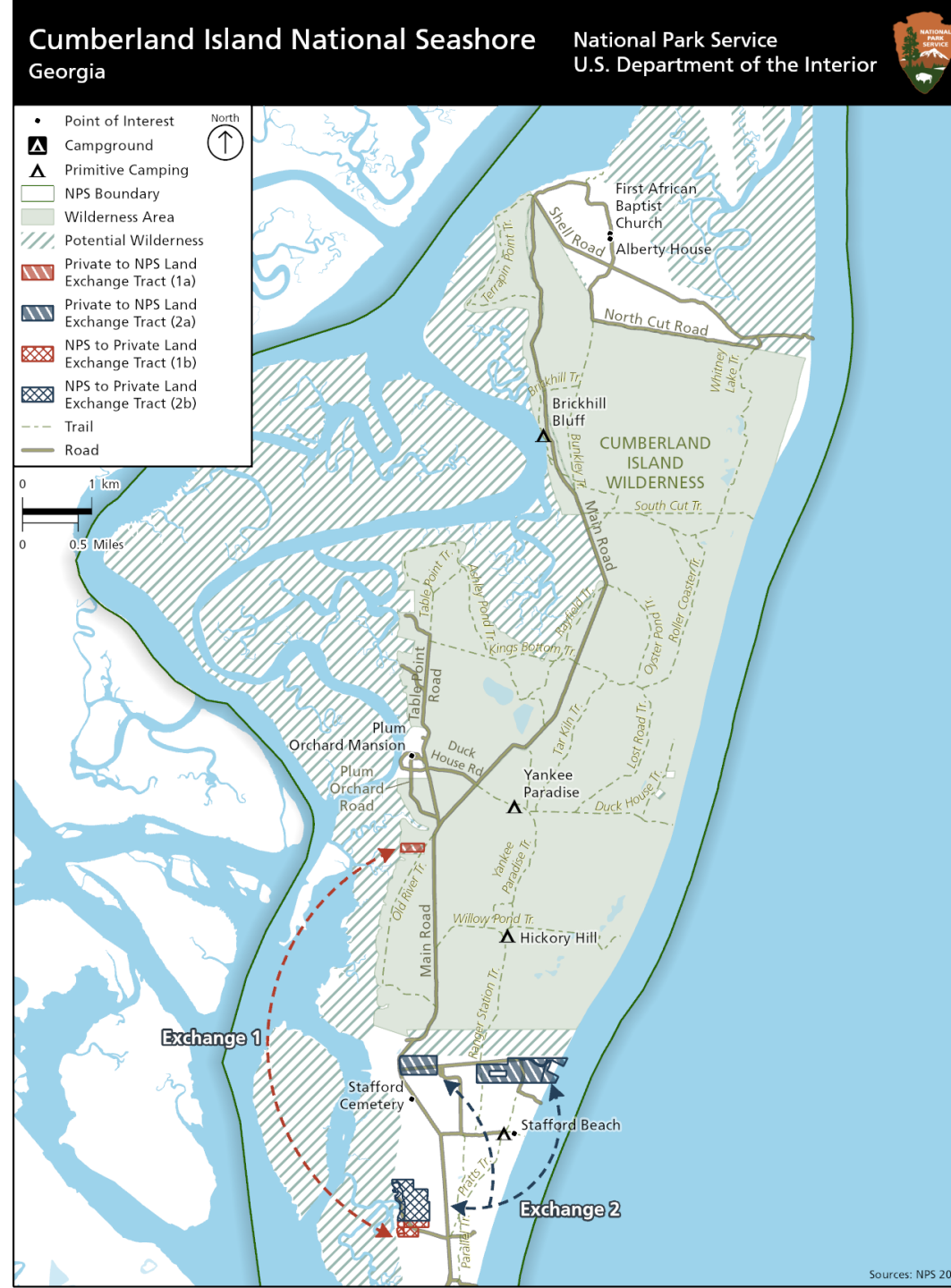
- Build residential buildings to be utilized as they choose.
- Commercial and tourist services.
- Wireless telecommunications and towers.



Alternative 2

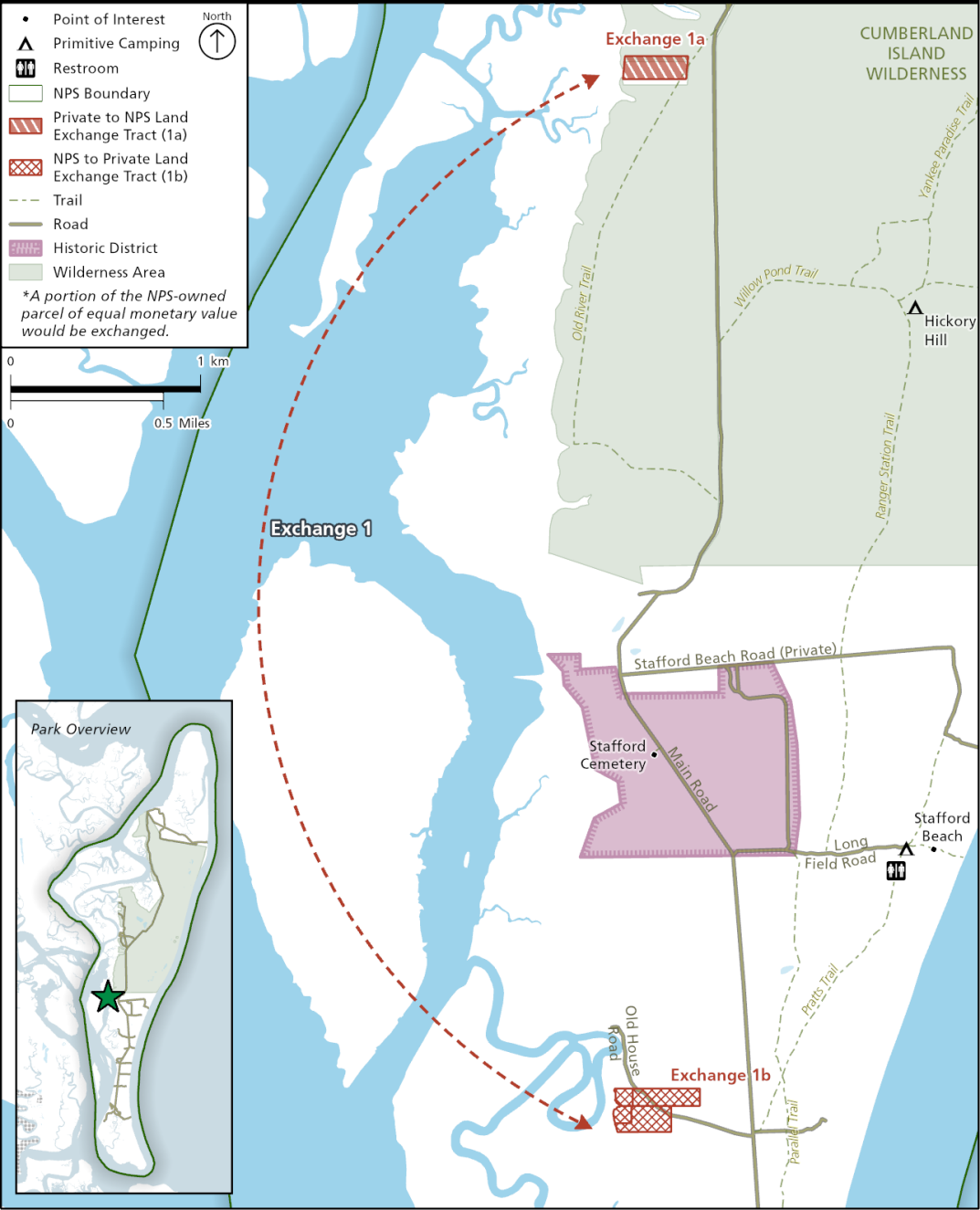
Land Exchanges

- The project area consists of five parcels of land referred to as exchange 1a and 1b and exchange 2a and 2b (2a is a combination of two parcels).
- The proposed project includes two preliminary land exchange agreements between the NPS and private landowners, through which the NPS would acquire privately owned parcels located within core resource areas of the Seashore. In return, the NPS would convey federally owned property of comparable value to the private parties.
- These exchanges aim to consolidate public ownership, direct development potential toward areas with fewer resource concerns, and promote long-term conservation and natural resource management.





Land Exchange 1



EXCHANGE 1A

Private Property Transferred to NPS

10
ACRES

- ▶ Located along the marsh side of Cumberland Island adjacent to the Old River Trail.
- ▶ Consists primarily of maritime forest with a small area of salt marsh.
- ▶ Provides habitat connectivity between upland and marsh environments.
- ▶ Located within an area legally identified as potential wilderness.

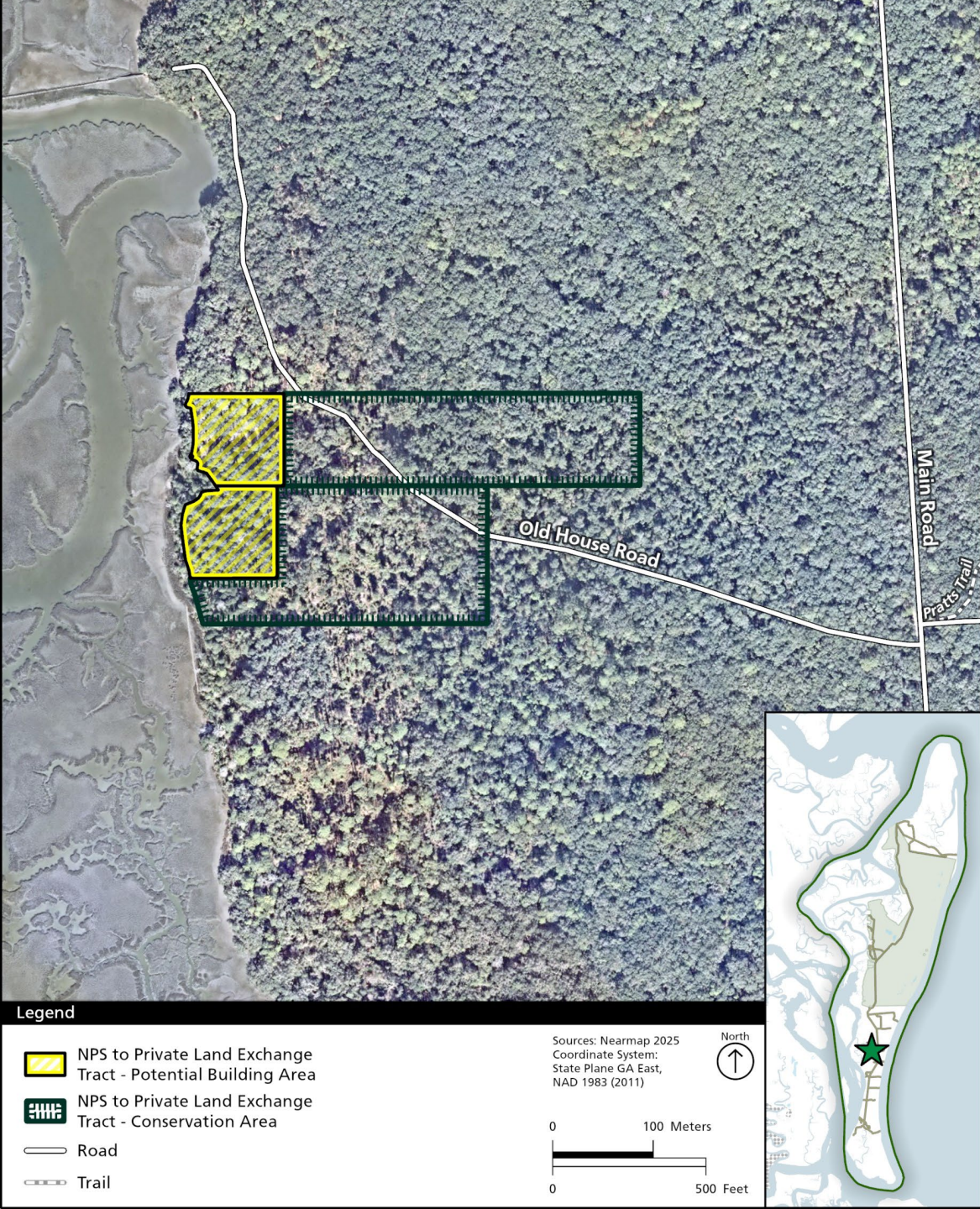
EXCHANGE 1B

NPS Property Transferred to Private Ownership

20
ACRES

- ▶ Primarily composed of live oak-palmetto maritime forest and maritime pine forest.
- ▶ Contains existing road and utility access.
- ▶ Located outside major visitor use areas.

Land Exchange 1



USE AND DEVELOPMENT RESTRICTIONS



+ Parcel Must Remain Intact

No subdivision, partitioning, or division of the property permitted.

+ NPS Right of Refusal

NPS retains purchase rights if land is ever sold.

+ Vegetation Protection Measures

Tree removal and land clearing require prior NPS approval.

+ Limited Development Potential

80%

16 ACRES

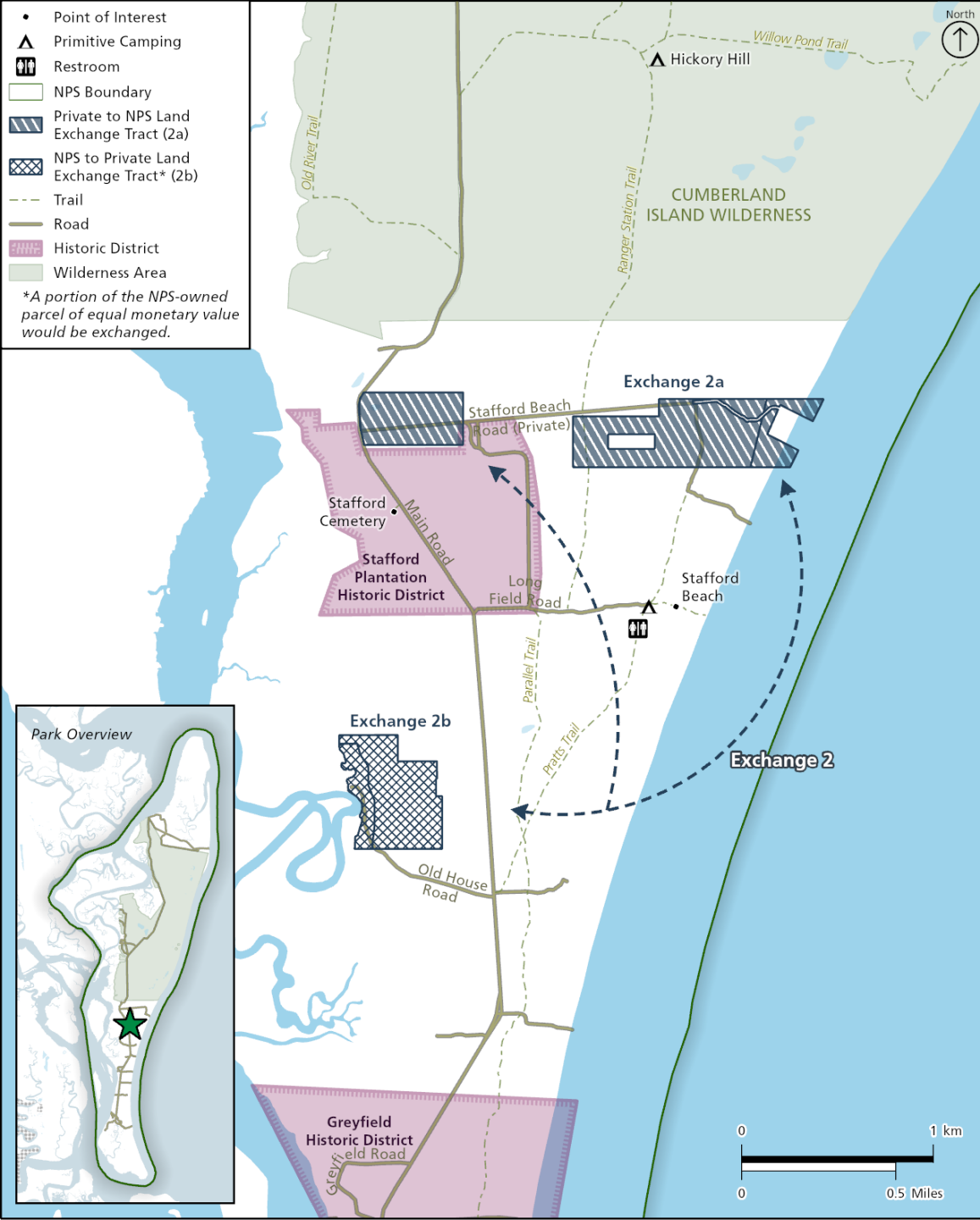
Permanently protected by Conservation Easement.

20%

4 ACRES

Designated as Potential Building Area where limited development could occur.

- ▶ Residential use only - no commercial use.
- ▶ Limit to a maximum of two single family residences.
- ▶ Further limited to a footprint of no more than 15,000 square feet total footprint per residence.
- ▶ Set height limitation of 35 feet.
- ▶ Development subject to local zoning laws.



Land Exchange 2

EXCHANGE 2A

Private Property Transferred to NPS

119.3
ACRES

- Includes maritime forest, salt marsh, dunes, beach habitat, and ocean frontage.
- Located east of the Main Road.
- Contains habitat for shorebirds, sea turtles, and other coastal wildlife.
- Allows for maintaining an undeveloped corridor connecting the Main Road, Parallel Trail, and Atlantic shoreline.

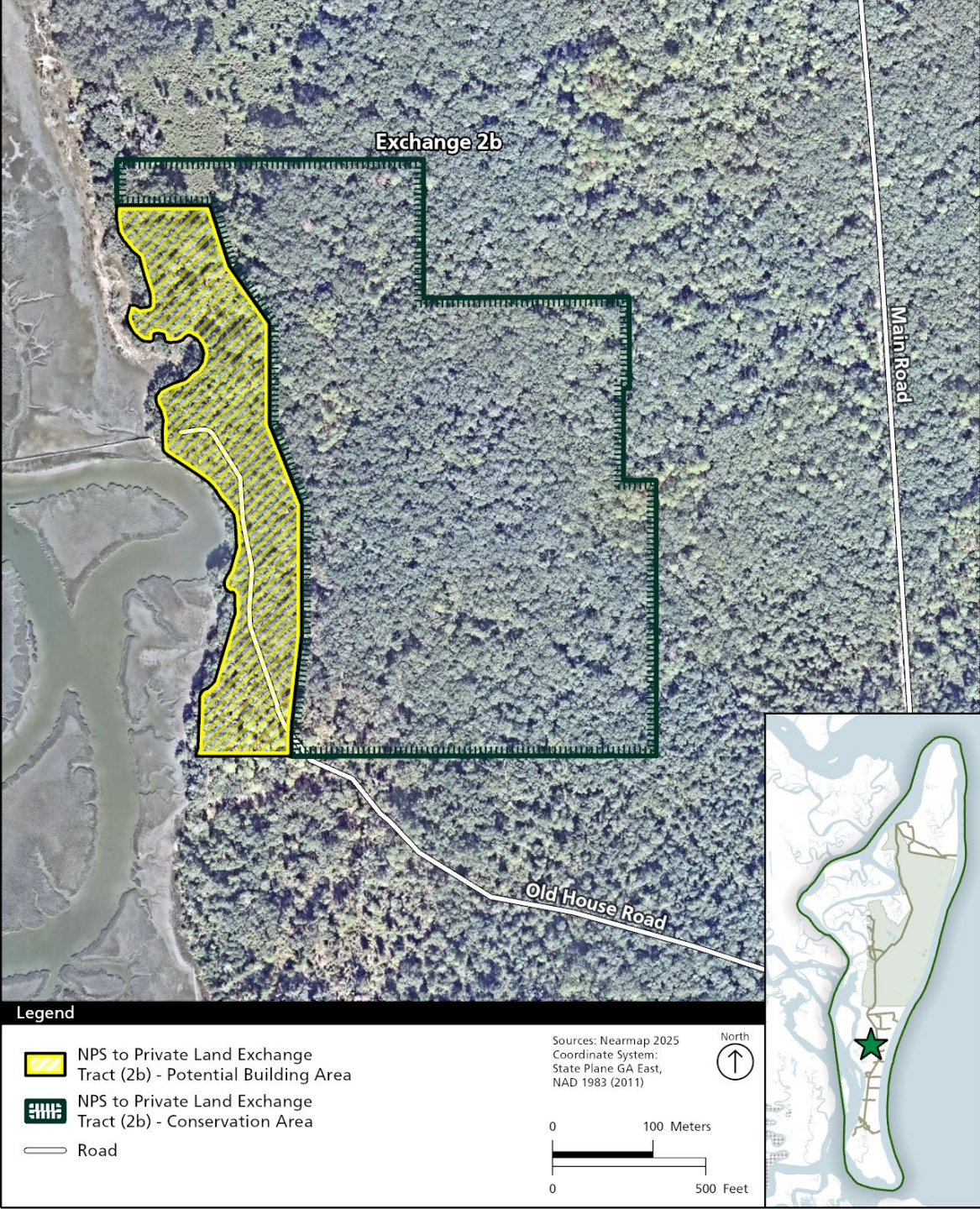
EXCHANGE 2B

NPS Property Transferred to Private Ownership

60
ACRES

- Consists primarily of maritime forest and freshwater wetland habitats.
- Includes freshwater wetlands, floodplain areas, and existing infrastructure access.
- Located outside areas of concentrated visitor use.

Land Exchange 2



USE AND DEVELOPMENT RESTRICTIONS



+ Parcel Must Remain Intact

No subdivision, partitioning, or division of the property permitted.

+ NPS Right of Refusal

NPS retains purchase rights if land is ever sold.

+ Vegetation Protection Measures

Tree removal and land clearing require prior NPS approval.

+ Limited Development Potential

80%

48 ACRES

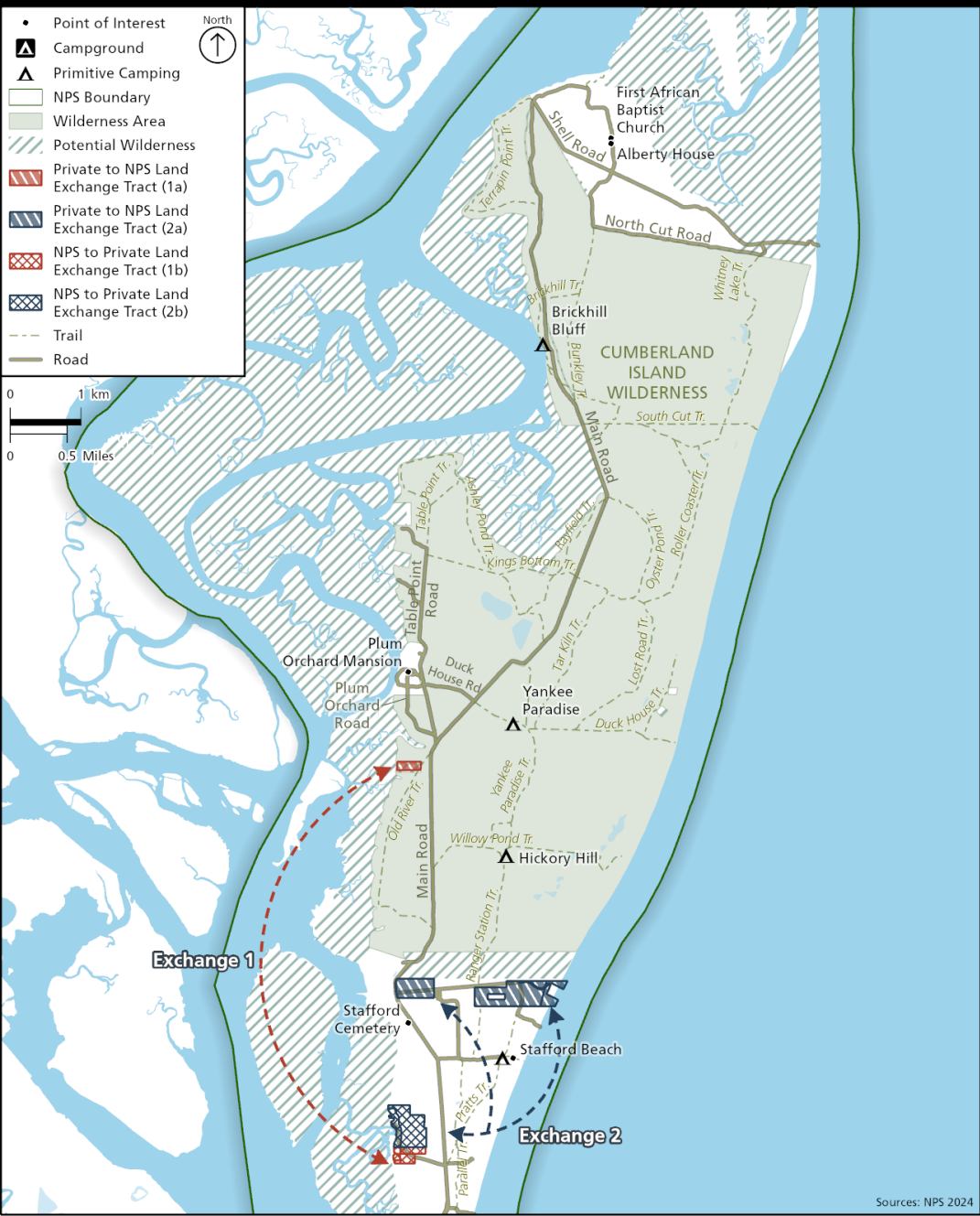
Permanently protected by Conservation Easement.

20%

12 ACRES

Designated as Potential Building Area where limited development could occur.

- ▶ Residential use only - no commercial use.
- ▶ Limit to a maximum of six single family residences.
- ▶ Further limited to a footprint of no more than 15,000 square feet total footprint per residence.
- ▶ Set height limitation of 35 feet.
- ▶ Development subject to local zoning laws.



Action Alternative Summary

Any future development would be limited to a specifically designated 20% of each conveyed parcel, subject to conservation restrictions, local zoning and permitting requirements, and federal, state, and local environmental regulations. The remaining 80% would remain protected from development.

EXCHANGE 1		ACRES
1A: From Privately Owned to NPS Parcel Exchange		10
Land to be Designated as Wilderness		10
1B: From NPS to Privately Owned Parcel Exchange		20
20% Potential Building Area		4
80% Conservation Area		16
EXCHANGE 2		ACRES
2A: From Privately Owned to NPS Parcel Exchange		119.3
Land to be Designated as Wilderness		0
2B: From NPS to Privately Owned Parcel Exchange		60
20% Potential Building Area		12
80% Conservation Area		48

Potential Adverse Impact Summary

Private landowners may develop within the **designated potential building area** in the future, **subject to local zoning ordinances and the restrictions outlined in the conservation agreement.**

Potential adverse impacts associated with future construction could include:

1. Vegetation clearing and habitat disturbance within designated building areas.
2. Localized disturbance to wildlife from construction activities, lighting, vehicle use, and human presence.
3. Temporary construction-related noise.
4. Minor soil disturbance and compaction from roads, utilities, and building construction.
5. Potential localized impacts to wetlands, floodplains, and water resources.
6. Small-scale changes to natural viewsheds and undeveloped character near development areas.



Beneficial Impacts

1. Acquisition of private inholdings for **permanent NPS protection and management**.
2. **Elimination of future development potential** on ecologically sensitive private parcels.
3. Expansion of contiguous federally managed **conservation lands and wildlife corridors**.
4. Preservation of Old River Trail and Parallel **Trail continuity and public access**.
5. Improved visitor experience through protection of scenic, undeveloped landscapes.
6. Reduced risk of habitat fragmentation for wildlife.
7. Protection of known archeological sites, including National Register-eligible resources, through NPS acquisition.
8. Support for NPS management goals by consolidating ownership and reducing incompatible land uses within the Seashore boundary.





FAQs

- What is the status of the other two proposed exchanges? There were 4 originally detailed to the public. Are negotiations ongoing or have they been abandoned? And were environmental assessments done on either or both of them? If so, when will those be released?
 - The NPS currently has two proposed land exchanges with signed preliminary agreements, and the environmental assessment for those two proposals are available for public review. [ParkPlanning - Voluntary Land Exchange Environmental Assessment - Cumberland Island National Seashore](#)
 - The NPS remains willing to discussions with any willing landowner.
 - We encourage you to review the environmental assessment for the two active proposals, as it provides the most current and factual information.



FAQs

- 15,000 sqf is huge! Why did you allow for a massive building?
 - The NPS wanted to limit the amount of construction that would be allowed. The 15,000 sf in the two preliminary agreements is for any and all improvements per two acre buildable lot.
- Can developers build hotels, and rentals, and commercial services?
 - There are no developers, only private landowners. The terms of the preliminary exchange agreements do not allow for any hotels, short term rentals, or commercial services. It also gives the NPS first purchase rights if they ever decide they wish to sell.

A photograph of a bald eagle perched on a sand dune. The eagle is facing left, with its white head and neck clearly visible against its dark body. The dune is covered in light-colored sand and sparse green vegetation. In the background, there is a dense line of green trees under a clear blue sky.

FAQs

- Why won't you just purchase the land?
 - The NPS considered this as an acquisition alternative; however, landowners were not interested in outright sale.
- Why won't the federal government use eminent domain or condemn and protect the island?
 - Per NPS management policies "As a general policy and in accordance with congressional direction, condemnation is the acquisition method of last resort for the Park Service when acquiring lands or interests in lands."
- What is right of first refusal?
 - Simply put, Right of First Refusal is the right to purchase the land first if the owner decides/intends to sell.

Schedule and Next Steps

This public meeting is a part of the public review process and provides a way for you to learn about what alternatives were analyzed, the potential environmental consequences of those alternatives, and provide feedback on the Environmental Assessment.

The public comment period for this Environmental Assessment is expected to be open from September 9, 2026, through October 16, 2026

Schedule:

- NPS Review of Public Comments: Fall 2026
- Decision Document: Winter 2027
- Land Appraisal: ongoing through 2027

For more information on the land acquisition process, please scan the QR code:



How to Comment

Submit comments electronically (preferred method):



https://parkplanning.nps.gov/cuis_land_exchange

To submit comments electronically, please scan the QR code or visit the link above:



Submit written comments by mail to:



Cumberland Island National Seashore
Attn: Proposed Lands Exchange
101 Wheeler Street
St. Marys, GA 31558



**Please submit all
comments by
October 16, 2026.**

Cumberland Island will only accept comments through the methods listed above. Bulk submissions or digital files outside of the online system will not be considered. Comments, including personal information, may be made public. You may request your personal information be withheld, but NPS cannot guarantee confidentiality.