



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

MAY 17 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman, Committee on Energy
and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

I hereby transmit the enclosed *Lower Mississippi River Area Special Resource Study*. The study was completed pursuant to Public Law 113-291, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate the potential of establishing a unit of the national park system to commemorate and protect sites along the lower Mississippi River in the State of Louisiana. The study area, as defined in the legislation, includes Fort St. Philip, Fort Jackson, the Head of Passes, and any related and supporting historical, cultural, or recreational resource located in Plaquemines Parish. The study was conducted by the National Park Service (NPS).

Section 100507 of Title 54, United States Code, establishes the criteria to be considered in the study of an area for potential inclusion in the national park system. A study area must possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources and represent one of the most important examples of a particular resource type in the country; be suitable and feasible for addition to the system; and be appropriate for direct NPS management.

After evaluating Fort St. Philip, Fort Jackson, the Head of Passes, and a number of other potentially related and supporting historical, cultural, and recreational resources located in Plaquemines Parish, the NPS focused the special resource study on Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson. Designated National Historic Landmarks (NHL) in 1960, these forts located on the eastern and western banks of the Mississippi River are historic military garrisons that highlight the defining features of the Third System fortifications. Fort St. Philip, the older of the two sites, was constructed by the French in 1746 and later rebuilt by the Spanish in 1791. Construction began on Fort Jackson in 1822 and was completed in 1832. Both forts played a pivotal role in the defense of New Orleans during the War of 1812 and the Civil War, and were later decommissioned in 1920.

The NPS-defined study area encompasses lands within the original boundaries that were established for the Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson NHL districts, as well as supporting sites located just to the southwest of the NHL boundaries, totaling approximately 122 acres. Today, Fort Jackson is operated by Plaquemines Parish as a public park with a nearby museum. However, public access to the fort is only available during guided tours or special events. Fort St. Philip is privately owned and closed to the public, and access to the site is difficult.

The NPS finds that Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson meet the national significance criterion by virtue of their designation as NHLs. Their national significance is conveyed under the broad NPS theme of "Shaping the Political Landscape" and the subtopic of "Military Institutions and Activities." After

evaluation of the suitability criterion, the forts were determined to be suitable for inclusion in the national park system. They continue to exhibit architectural features that highlight the defining features of the Third System fortifications, with its emphasis on bastioned masonry revetment walls, high-powered artillery, and other features designed primarily to defend against naval assault.

Regarding the evaluation of feasibility, although certain components were met, both sites were determined by the NPS to be infeasible. Fort St. Philip's historical integrity and ability to convey its significance have been substantially diminished by flooding and weathering that have damaged its architectural features. In addition, there are challenges associated with accessing the fort, as well as safety concerns associated with traversing the busy Mississippi River. Similar to Fort St. Philip, Fort Jackson is susceptible to ongoing threats from flooding and wind damage from hurricanes as well as spring flooding of the Mississippi. These factors have diminished its structural stability and integrity. In addition, a total cost of facility ownership analysis conducted for Fort Jackson and associated facilities found that the total cost to maintain these sites would be approximately \$70.2 million over 40 years. Due to these factors, the preservation, development, operation, and maintenance costs are determined to be infeasible. Given the negative finding, the fourth criterion, need for direct NPS management, was not evaluated.

In conclusion, Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson were not found to meet the congressionally mandated criteria for new units of the national park system. In cases where resources meet special resource study criteria for national significance and suitability but do not meet other criteria for inclusion in the national park system, an alternative designation such as an affiliated area or national heritage area might be appropriate. Such a designation could assist in the long-term stewardship of the forts and supporting resources.

Thank you for your interest in the National Park Service. A similar letter is being sent to the Honorable Joe Manchin III, Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate; the Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives; and the Honorable Rob Bishop, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives. The affected Louisiana delegations will also receive a copy of the report and this letter.

Sincerely,



P. Daniel Smith
Deputy Director
Exercising the Authority of the Director

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Steve Scalise
The Honorable Bill Cassidy
The Honorable John Kennedy



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Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

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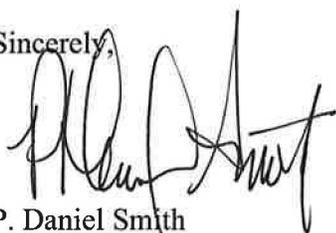
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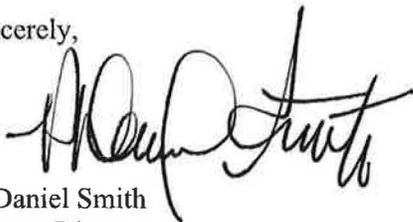
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