



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Westerman:

I am pleased to transmit the enclosed *Mississippi Civil Rights Sites Special Resource Study*. The study was conducted pursuant to Public Law 115-31, which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study (SRS) of nationally significant civil rights sites in the State of Mississippi (MS). The law identified the following five sites to be included in the study:

- The home of the late civil rights activist Medgar Evers located at 2332 Margaret Walker Alexander Drive, Jackson, MS;
- The Tallahatchie County Courthouse located at 100 North Court Street, Sumner, MS;
- The site of Bryant's Store located at the intersection of County Road 518 and County Road 24, Money, MS;
- The site of the former office of Dr. Gilbert Mason, Sr. located at 670 Division Street, Biloxi, MS; and
- The old Neshoba County Jail located at 422 East Myrtle Avenue, Philadelphia, MS.

Because the study legislation is not limited to these five study sites, additional sites were identified for evaluation during the study process. The study was conducted by the National Park Service (NPS). In total, the NPS considered over 220 sites related to the history of civil rights in MS. These additional sites were identified through research, scholarly review, and public input, and consist of a variety of buildings, structures, landscapes, and objects across the State. The NPS consulted subject-matter experts to inform the study process, including a Mississippi-based group of historians, professors, museum directors, and activists.

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. To be considered for recommendation as a new unit, a study area must possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources; be suitable and feasible for addition to the system; and appropriate for direct NPS management.

In evaluating the first criterion, 22 individual sites, including three districts, were found to have national significance. These sites/districts are:

- 1) “Emmett Till sites,” a discontinuous historic district consisting of 11 sites in Leflore, Sunflower, and Tallahatchie Counties, MS (including the Tallahatchie County Courthouse and the Bryant's Store, both identified in the legislation);
- 2) “1964 Freedom Summer sites,” a discontinuous historic district consisting of seven sites in Neshoba and Lauderdale Counties, MS (including the old Neshoba County jail identified in the legislation);
- 3) M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge, Jackson, MS;
- 4) Taborian Hospital in Mound Bayou, MS;
- 5) Isaiah T. Montgomery House in Mound Bayou, MS; and
- 6) Lyceum - The Circle Historic District at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS.

The former office of Dr. Gilbert Mason, Sr. did not meet the SRS criterion for national significance, and the Medgar Evers home was not evaluated further because Congress designated it the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument via Section 2301 of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019 (Public Law 166-9).

In evaluating suitability, all of the nationally significant sites were also found to be suitable additions to the national park system. The sites represent historic events, resources, and themes that are not interpreted or available for public visitor experience and understanding at comparable sites within and outside of the national park system. They also fill underrepresented topic areas identified in the NPS System Plan (2017) related to the history of civil rights in the United States.

In evaluating feasibility, the NPS found that nine of the 22 sites are feasible based on their ability to fully meet all or most feasibility factors, including anticipated costs associated with development, management, and operations of a potential NPS unit. Of the Emmett Till-related sites, five contributing historic sites are found to be feasible for potential inclusion in an NPS unit in the Mississippi Delta. These are: the Bryant’s Grocery Store (along with the adjacent Ben Roy’s Service Station) and East Money Church of God in Christ Cemetery site, in Money, MS; Glendora Cotton Gin (along with the adjacent community center) and Graball Landing River site in Glendora, MS; and the Tallahatchie County Courthouse (and nearby interpretive center) in Sumner, MS. Five of the 11 Emmett Till sites are found to be conditionally feasible, which means that current conditions that make the sites infeasible now could change in the future. These sites are: the Moses Wright Home site in Money, MS; Seed Barn in Drew, MS; J.W. Milam Home site, and King’s Place Juke Joint site in Glendora, MS; and Tutwiler Funeral Home site in Tutwiler, MS. The Tallahatchie County Jail in Charleston, MS, was found infeasible due to its continued use as a county jail for the indefinite future.

For the 1964 Freedom Summer sites: three contributing historic sites are found to be feasible. These are: Mt. Zion Methodist Church site and the Neshoba County Courthouse square in Philadelphia, MS; and the Burned Station Wagon site in rural Neshoba County. The old Neshoba County jail in Philadelphia, MS, is conditionally feasible due to the property’s recent change in ownership and modifications to the building.

The NPS found that the M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge in Jackson, MS, is feasible, because the lodge has a high potential to be considered as a partner-managed site within a potential NPS unit. The

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Upon evaluation of the fourth SRS criterion, the NPS determined that the following sites are appropriate for direct NPS management: Bryant's Grocery Store and Ben Roy's Service Station, East Money Church of God in Christ Cemetery site, Glendora Cotton Gin and Community Center, Graball Landing River Site, Tallahatchie County Courthouse, and the Emmett Till Interpretive Center.

Of the 1964 Freedom Summer sites, only the Mt. Zion Methodist Church site was found to meet this criterion. The Burned Station Wagon site and the Neshoba County Courthouse square are not appropriate for direct NPS management due to their location and current use; therefore, partnerships to develop interpretive opportunities would be the superior management model for these two sites. Similarly, the M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge did not meet this SRS criterion because the site is being well-preserved and managed by its current owner. A partnership with the organization could fulfill the potential for NPS interpretive opportunities at this site.

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For example, many of the study sites are within existing national heritage areas (NHA). NHAs are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage. The Mississippi Delta NHA encompasses the Emmett Till sites, the Taborian Hospital and Isaiah T. Montgomery House sites in Mound Bayou, and many more important civil rights sites that are significant at the State and local levels.

A future NPS unit designation could lead to formal partnerships with non-federal partners that manage resources within or near the boundary of the established NPS unit, including partners who manage resources that are considered fundamental resources associated with park purpose and national significance.

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

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Shannon Estenoz
Assistant Secretary
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Bennie Thompson
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Enclosure

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Upon evaluation of the fourth SRS criterion, the NPS determined that the following sites are appropriate for direct NPS management: Bryant's Grocery Store and Ben Roy's Service Station, East Money Church of God in Christ Cemetery site, Glendora Cotton Gin and Community Center, Graball Landing River Site, Tallahatchie County Courthouse, and the Emmett Till Interpretive Center.

Of the 1964 Freedom Summer sites, only the Mt. Zion Methodist Church site was found to meet this criterion. The Burned Station Wagon site and the Neshoba County Courthouse square are not appropriate for direct NPS management due to their location and current use; therefore, partnerships to develop interpretive opportunities would be the superior management model for these two sites. Similarly, the M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge did not meet this SRS criterion because the site is being well-preserved and managed by its current owner. A partnership with the organization could fulfill the potential for NPS interpretive opportunities at this site.

For the sites that met all four criteria, the NPS developed two concepts for management as potential national park units. These concepts identify the most efficient and effective way to protect significant resources and provide opportunities for public benefit and interpretation. The first concept involves an NPS unit consisting of multiple Emmett Till sites across the Mississippi Delta and the other involves the creation of a Mississippi Freedom NPS unit that consists of the 1964 Freedom Summer sites and M.W. Stringer Grand Lodge. The NPS recognizes that, beyond the findings of the study, there is strong public support and there are many potential opportunities for enhancing the interpretation and preservation of the civil rights resources evaluated during the study process. These opportunities are included in the study report and could be pursued independently of potential NPS unit designation.

For example, many of the study sites are within existing national heritage areas (NHA). NHAs are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage. The Mississippi Delta NHA encompasses the Emmett Till sites, the Taborian Hospital and Isaiah T. Montgomery House sites in Mound Bayou, and many more important civil rights sites that are significant at the State and local levels.

A future NPS unit designation could lead to formal partnerships with non-federal partners that manage resources within or near the boundary of the established NPS unit, including partners who manage resources that are considered fundamental resources associated with park purpose and national significance.

Thank you for your interest in the National Park Service. A similar letter is being sent to the Honorable Joe Manchin III, Chairman, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate; the Honorable John Barrasso, Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate; and the Honorable Bruce Westerman, Ranking Member, Committee on Natural Resources, U.S. House of Representatives. The affected members of the Mississippi delegation will also receive a copy of the study report and this letter.

Sincerely,

 Date: 2022.12.21
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Shannon Estenoz
Assistant Secretary
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Bennie Thompson
The Honorable Trent Kelly
The Honorable Michael Guest
The Honorable Steven Palazzo
The Honorable Roger Wicker
The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith