



# Ocmulgee River Corridor Special Resource Study

## ■ CIVIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

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# CONTENTS

<b>Summary of Public Outreach Efforts . . . . .</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Public Interest Analysis . . . . .</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Public Feedback. . . . .</b>	<b>7</b>
Vision for the Ocmulgee River Corridor . . . . .	7
Support for NPS Designation . . . . .	7
Opposition to NPS Designation . . . . .	8
Joint Management . . . . .	8
Activities and Experiences along the Ocmulgee River Corridor. . . . .	9
Hunting and Fishing . . . . .	9
Recreation . . . . .	10
Educational Opportunities . . . . .	10
Sites, Resources, and Values. . . . .	11
Cultural Resources . . . . .	11
Natural Resources . . . . .	11
Landscape Conservation and Connectivity . . . . .	13
Concerns and Observations . . . . .	14
Socioeconomic Considerations . . . . .	14
Threats and Issues . . . . .	14
Level of Access and Recreation Impacts. . . . .	15
Costs and Maintenance. . . . .	15
Recommendations for the Study Team . . . . .	16
Inclusion of Various Perspectives . . . . .	16
Recommended References . . . . .	17
Questions. . . . .	18
Study Area Boundary . . . . .	19
Recommended Additions to Study Area . . . . .	19
Other Comments Related to Study Area Boundary . . . . .	21

## SUMMARY OF PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS

The National Park Service (NPS) initiated the Special Resource Study of the Ocmulgee River Corridor in middle Georgia in late 2019 as authorized in accordance with the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019. In the initial steps of the process, the National Park Service conducted extensive research, including targeted stakeholder consultation, to document the environmental and cultural history of the study area. The environmental context and cultural and historic context documents were presented for public comment along with a list of topic questions to further inform the special resource study in early 2021.

During this civic engagement process, the National Park Service solicited feedback using two online methods. In the first method, the public could submit comments on the project website at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/OcmulgeeRiver>. In the second method, the public could submit comments online using an interactive platform called a “storymap,” which was dedicated to increasing public understanding and facilitating spatial comments (accessed at [shorturl.at/cstK6](https://shorturl.at/cstK6)). The study team also hosted two virtual public meetings. The opportunity to comment either online or by mail, as well as the public meetings, was advertised through a press release in local and regional media.

The official 60-day public comment period opened on Monday, January 25, 2021, and closed on Friday, March 26, 2021. The study team hosted two virtual public meetings: one evening meeting on February 16 and one daytime meeting on February 17, both via the Microsoft Teams Live platform. The evening meeting was held from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (EST) and the daytime meeting was held from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. (EST). The goals of the meetings were to share information about the purpose and process for special resource studies, provide an overview of the criteria the National Park Service applies when conducting special resource studies, provide an overview of the area and current uses, and provide direction for how to provide feedback.

## PUBLIC INTEREST ANALYSIS

Approximately 70 people attended the two virtual public meetings and many asked questions or provided informal feedback on the study.

During the public comment period, the study team received 2,664 correspondences. Of these, 1,856 correspondences were submitted in response to topic questions on the project website, 23 correspondences were submitted on the *Ocmulgee River Corridor Environmental Context Report* on the project website, and 25 correspondences were submitted on the *Ocmulgee River Corridor Cultural and Historic Context Report* on the project website. The project storymap logged 85 spatial comments. The study team received 667 correspondences via the US Postal Service and 8 correspondences via email. National Park Service staff entered unique emailed and postal service correspondences into the project website for analysis.

Many of the correspondences received were form letters. The study team identified two master form letters electronically in the project website. The first master form letter substantially matched 625 other electronic correspondences, while the second master form letter substantially matched 6 other correspondences. Most of the correspondences received by mail were form letters. These 604 mailed form letters followed a different master than those submitted electronically. After accounting for the form letters, the study team received 1,344 unique correspondences.

Public comments were submitted from individuals in 49 states as well as the District of Columbia. South Dakota was the only state not represented in the correspondences. However, the majority of correspondences were received from Georgia. Table 1 shows the state distribution of public comments that the public submitted directly to the project website or that the study team entered into the project website.

**Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Correspondences  
Entered on the Project Website\***

State	Percentage	Number of Correspondences
GA	51.70%	997
CA	5.60%	107
FL	5.60%	107
NC	2.50%	48
WA	2.40%	46
CO	2.00%	38
PA	2.00%	38
IL	1.90%	36
MD	1.80%	34
NY	1.70%	33
TN	1.60%	31
MI	1.60%	31
VA	1.50%	29
NJ	1.30%	26
OH	1.30%	26
AL	1.20%	23
WI	1.10%	22
IN	1.00%	19

\*States representing less than 1% of correspondences were omitted.

Of the 604 form letters received by mail, 587 (97.2%) were postmarked from Georgia. These in-state form letters came from 103 different counties, although about half came from the Macon (Bibb County) and Atlanta (DeKalb, Fulton, Cobb, and Gwinnet counties) areas (Table 2).

**Table 2. Distribution of Form Letters from Georgia Counties**

County	Percentage	Number of Mailed Form Letters
Bibb	17.21%	101
DeKalb	8.35%	49
Fulton	7.33%	43
Cobb	7.16%	42
Gwinnett	5.45%	32
Clarke	3.58%	21
Chatham	2.21%	13
Houston	2.21%	13
Cherokee	2.04%	12
Jones	2.04%	12
Columbia	1.70%	10
Muscogee	1.70%	10
Twiggs	1.70%	10
Hall	1.53%	9
Oconee	1.53%	9
Glynn	1.36%	8
Fayette	1.19%	7
Baldwin	1.02%	6
Floyd	1.02%	6
Gilmer	1.02%	6
Walton	1.02%	6
80 Other Counties (5 or fewer, each)	27.60%	162

Most of the correspondences were from individuals, although the study team received many letters from organizations as well. The National Park Service received official correspondence from the following tribal governments, local governments, state and federal agencies, organizations, and businesses:

- Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
- Center for Biological Diversity & Defenders of Wildlife
- Cochran-Bleckley Industrial and Economic Development Authority
- Fall-Line Alliance for a Clean Environment
- Friends of Georgia, Inc.
- Georgia Conservancy
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- Georgia River Network
- Georgia Sentinel Landscape
- Georgia Wildlife Federation
- Georgia Women (And Those Who Stand With Us)
- Hawkinsville-Pulaski Economic Development Office
- National Parks Conservation Association
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- National Wildlife Refuge Association
- Ocmulgee Archaeological Society
- Ocmulgee Mounds Association, Inc.
- Ocmulgee National Park & Preserve Initiative
- Ocmulgee Outdoor Expeditions
- Ogeechee Riverkeeper
- Robins Air Force Base
- Southern Georgia Regional Commission
- Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning
- The Muscogee (Creek) Nation
- The Nature Conservancy
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Visit Macon



## PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The National Park Service study team sought feedback on the special resource study by asking five questions on the project website:

1. What sites, resources, values, and stories from the river corridor study area do you believe are most important and why?
2. Within the river corridor study area, what types of activities and experiences are most important to you? What types of activities and experiences would you like to see available in the study area?
3. What is your vision for the Ocmulgee River Corridor and how would you like to see the area managed?
4. Do you have any concerns that the National Park Service should be aware of while the study progresses?
5. Do you have any other ideas, comments, or questions you would like to share with us?

The study team also sought open-ended feedback on the *Ocmulgee River Corridor Cultural and Historic Context Report* and the *Ocmulgee River Corridor Environmental Context Report*. In addition, the team solicited spatial comments via the storymap, an interactive web-mapping interface. The following section presents a brief overview of the public comments received in all of these venues, organized by primary topics of concern.

### Vision for the Ocmulgee River Corridor

#### **SUPPORT FOR NPS DESIGNATION**

A majority of the public comments were in favor of NPS designation along the Ocmulgee River Corridor. Reasons included:

- Preserving the area in a quickly developing area and its associated pollution from an urban and suburban landscape
- Establishing a contiguous strip and managing it wisely for present and future generations
- Protecting a natural and cultural space for the public to enjoy the outdoors
- Providing opportunities for the public to have recreational resources in close proximity to urban areas
- Expecting that the National Park Service would bring a cohesive experience to the network of protected sites making the area an attractive destination

In addition, many commenters observed the lack of national park units in the Southeast that have a wide range of natural, cultural, and recreational potential. The public comments valued the combination of natural and cultural resources as being unique and important to protect. A large number of commenters compared the Ocmulgee River Corridor to many of the national park units in the West and noted the importance of allowing people from all over the United States to visit and learn about the significance of this area. Many commenters shared stories of visiting the area as a child and building stewardship for the area and its resources and noted that they are actively passing along the love of the land to their children and grandchildren.

## **OPPOSITION TO NPS DESIGNATION**

Some commenters who showed opposition to NPS management commented that the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is managing the area well within its wildlife management areas. Commenters expressed opposition to a federal presence and would like to see the area continue to be managed in the same way. Some comments mentioned that state management allowed preservation of historical artifacts while keeping access available for public recreation, including hunting and fishing.

Comments included support for keeping management local and a fear that the federal government would not include input from local entities. Some commenters were concerned that an NPS designation would result in loss of public hunting opportunities and stressed the importance of preserving these opportunities for future generations. Several of these comments noted that conservation of these lands has been funded by hunting and fishing revenues. Others based their opposition to NPS designation on the belief that it would force people out of their homes and off their land.

Some comments stated that it would be challenging for the National Park Service to actively manage the area and would reduce the effectiveness of hunting as a tool for managing species. Some comments showed concern that the National Park Service would struggle with appropriate funding to manage the area.

## **JOINT MANAGEMENT**

A portion of comments included support for collaborative, multiagency management among the US Department of Defense, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Commenters noted that multiple agencies, including both state and federal entities, could manage the large study boundary jointly. Commenters suggested a national park and preserve, national recreation area, or other types of designations that could be modeled after other multiagency partnerships existing within the national park system such as Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area to provide federal, state, and tribal support and conservation funding and to leverage private fundraising. However, other comments noted that there would be advantages to management by one organization or agency to provide uniformity and consistency in policy and direction.

## **Activities and Experiences along the Ocmulgee River Corridor**

### **HUNTING AND FISHING**

The public showed support for maintaining current hunting and fishing opportunities along the corridor. Many comments showed concern that these opportunities would be limited or eliminated with an NPS designation. Other commenters suggested designating a national park and preserve as a means of retaining hunting and fishing opportunities.

Several commenters reported benefits to allowing hunting to control the deer and feral hog populations and stressed the importance of allowing this experience for future generations. Some commenters mentioned that they were not hunters but saw value in continuing to allow hunting, since it is a long-standing tradition in the area. Without hunting opportunities in this area, hunters would have limited areas to hunt and would have to travel further distances to hunt on state land, which could potentially have negative impacts on those lands.

A small minority of commenters who mentioned hunting advocated for discontinuing the practice. Comments cited various reasons to not allow hunting, including a desire to protect thriving populations of birds, amphibians, and wildlife; allowing wildlife space to live peacefully, renew, and replenish; and the potential danger to visitors. Other comments expressed a desire to minimize hunting activities but recognized some wildlife management may be necessary. These comments tended to support specific recommendations, such as protecting certain wildlife (e.g., bears) but not others (e.g., feral hogs), or a proposal to keep wildlife management areas open to hunting but closing any new park lands to hunting.





## **RECREATION**

The public expressed support for making the corridor more accessible via trail connectivity to urban areas for cyclists and hikers, personal vehicle access, maintaining and potentially adding boat ramps, and proper access for hunting and fishing. Comments included creating multiuse trails to connect Macon and Hawkinsville with each other as well as other towns along the corridor. Many commenters mentioned that they would like to see appropriate visitor services along the corridor for access but also would like to leave the area in a natural state for visitor enjoyment. They noted that consideration should be given for easy access for the public, including people with disabilities.

Public comments valued preservation of natural and cultural resources while still having access for recreation. The public comments described recreation as an important component for building stewardship for resources along the corridor. Public comments were in support of access to historic sites with guided tours and waysides to learn about the resources and historical significance. Recreational activities mentioned included hiking, biking, horseback riding, paddling (e.g., canoe, kayak, stand-up paddleboarding), camping, wildlife viewing, and birding.

Some commenters told stories of paddling along the continuous river corridor with access to camping and their enjoyment of that experience. Public comments were in favor of both primitive and developed camping opportunities. The public comments were in favor of limiting paved roads and limiting motorized use (i.e., off-road vehicles) in order to maintain integrity of the natural resources.

## **EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Commenters noted the unique combination of resources and the educational programs and experiences to interpret the natural and cultural significance of the area. These commenters noted that they would like to see natural and cultural history studied. Commenters suggested educational tours for families and especially children to begin building an awareness of, appreciation for, and support for preservation of these resources. Some commenters shared stories of school field trips to the corridor and the lasting impression it had, often noting that getting out into the area (as opposed to learning through books) builds relationships to natural and cultural resources over time. The public suggested archeological study, school tours, wildlife tours, nature writing, and river history classes.

## **Sites, Resources, and Values**

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### **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Many commenters mentioned the cultural resources of the Ocmulgee River corridor. The ancient mounds beyond the existing national historical park, in particular, were frequently mentioned as a resource of great interest. In fact, many commenters reflected on the primacy of the mound resources over other resources and values in the corridor, although several did recognize that the mosaic of the cultural resources with other natural features of interest set this area apart. Many comments noted the interpretive and research potential of the mounds and related resources, often referred to as national treasures, and the uniqueness of actually being able to go inside the earthlodge and experience that history. Commenters see the mounds as classrooms or portals of history that need to be preserved and interpreted to increase awareness and knowledge of a dark chapter in American history that often isn't adequately addressed in schools (i.e., the forced removal of the Muscogee (Creek) people from their homelands, often referred to as the Trail of Tears). Elevating awareness of these resources outside of middle Georgia and ensuring their protection were seen as key reasons why a national park site should be created.

Discussion of the mounds and other Native American resources like the Ocmulgee Old Fields Traditional Cultural Property often included emphasis on protecting these resources in partnership with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. Suggestions about the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's role included a range from providing input about interpretation, to direct input into management, to ultimate decision-making authority over what happens on their ancestral homelands.

Commenters also noted a number of other cultural resources that are important within the corridor, including Fort Hawkins (which is related to the story of removal of the Creek people from their homeland); Works Progress Administration-era archeology and related discoveries from the New Deal; African American resources, including nearby settlements, communities, cemeteries, places of refuge, and pathways to freedom; a WWI and WWII training camp southeast of Macon (Camp Wheeler); and Civil War relics. Overall, commenters viewed the record of continuous human presence dating back 17,000 years—ranked by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as among the nation's richest archaeological landscapes—as a resource of paramount importance.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The wildlife of the Ocmulgee River corridor was frequently referenced as an important resource worthy of protection. Black bears were the most frequently mentioned species, with commenters noting that the area is home to one of three populations in the state. The genetic isolation of this population and its small size was a concern. Commenters mentioned the importance of the river corridor as a migratory travel route for bears and that frequent flooding forces bears into upland areas where they face threats from vehicular traffic and hunting. Commenters also frequently mentioned threatened and endangered species at the federal and state level, including Atlantic sturgeon, shortnose sturgeon, and gopher tortoise.

Other threatened and endangered species that were less frequently mentioned include robust redhorse sucker, Altamaha shiner, goldstripe darter, shoal bass, spotted turtle, gopher frog, Altamaha arc-mussel, Ocmulgee marstonia, relict populations of lobed spleenworts and Ocmulgee scutularia, and the potential presence of Altamaha spiny mussel. Commenters also noted the importance of the area for other terrestrial and aquatic species such as bobcats, otters, feral hogs, coyote, foxes, and white-tailed deer. Commenters had particular concern for the tremendous diversity of reptiles and amphibians like alligators, snakes, and the American eel. Commenters also mentioned migratory and breeding birds, including Swainson's warbler, red-cockaded woodpecker, wood stork, swallows, owls, hawks, ducks, wild turkeys, and bald eagles.

Commenters expressed concern for the protection of wildlife habitat and advocated for the general importance of rivers and bottomlands as migration corridors to wildlife. The fact that wildlife has less and less space due to development encroachment and habitat fragmentation was seen as reason to improve protection of this area. Commenters noted the area for its role as a space of refuge for bald eagles when their populations dwindled. Commenters also noted that some species, such as red wolves, used to live in the Ocmulgee area but are now locally extinct. Commenters did not want black bears and other species to be extinct as well. Relatedly, several commenters noted a need for habitat restoration to benefit species like bobwhite quail and loggerhead shrike as well as the need to rid the area of invasive species. One commenter noted that the area is the center for biodiversity in the country with an unmatched number of species of fish, freshwater mussels, and trees.

Some commenters mentioned plants and vegetation. Most frequently, commenters noted that the Ocmulgee area represents one of the largest areas of contiguous bottomland-hardwood swamp on the Upper Coastal Plain. The threat to mature forests in Georgia was oft noted, and commenters remarked on the need to allow for the establishment of long-leaf pine, pond/bald cypress, and shagbark hickory. Commenters noted that reestablishing these slow-growing species would take active habitat restoration, including reintroducing fire to the landscape, as simple preservation of extant vegetation would not promote the growth of native species. Several commenters mentioned the importance of protecting this biodiversity for research and potential medicinal uses. *Franklinia*, a species once found in this region and now extinct in the wild, was mentioned by some commenters, as was the fact that some plants grow only in the Ocmulgee River Corridor.

Public commenters also mentioned other natural resources that are important to protect, including clean water and watersheds; ecosystem services, such as filtration of stormwater runoff; ecological balance; delicate ecosystems, such as swamps, marshes, wetlands, and blackland prairies; the natural beauty of the landscape; the landscape's resiliency to climate change; and karst springs.



## **LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND CONNECTIVITY**

Many commenters raised the values of landscape-scale conservation and advocated for the National Park Service to understand the scale, undisturbed or undeveloped nature, and interconnectedness as the primary resource or value present along the Ocmulgee River Corridor. Comments focused on the fact that few large areas of relatively intact ecosystems remain in the eastern United States and that given the ever-present threat of development of these places, those that remain should be protected. These areas are relatively rare and irreplaceable and are of great value to fish and wildlife, water quality, and carbon sequestration.

Several of these comments focused on the fact that the Ocmulgee/Altamaha river system is undammed between Jackson Lake and the Atlantic Ocean, making it one of the longest undammed river systems in the eastern United States. The lack of dams provides excellent aquatic and migratory fish connectivity. In a similar vein, comments remarked on the value the Ocmulgee River corridor has as a migration corridor for wildlife, including black bears and potentially red-cockaded woodpeckers. The unrestricted wildlife movement in this area overcomes one of the primary challenges for rare and declining species. Commenters also noted the ecological and symbolic role a park connecting the Piedmont region of Georgia with the Coastal Plain region would play.

The value of landscape-scale conservation was noted to extend beyond natural resource benefits and include cultural resources and visitor opportunities. From a cultural resource perspective, the mounds were noted as being central to the river system as part of Creek peoples' cultural story. Commenters argued that isolated sites and smaller objects are often seen as devoid of meaning or significance when separated from their broader cultural context on the landscape. These comments asserted that a landscape of cultural resources is inherently more valuable than isolated resources. Similar to the natural resources, commenters argued that because many of the cultural landscapes of the Ocmulgee River corridor are relatively undisturbed, they are rare and worthy of protection.

From a visitor perspective, comments noted that the Southeast is largely devoid of large, connected areas that provide wilderness-like opportunities and experiences. The opportunities for long paddles and other longer experiences along the Ocmulgee River make its possible preservation a special opportunity.

Lastly, some comments noted that the criteria used by National Park Service to determine significance, such as the national natural landmark criteria and the national historic landmark criteria, may be too narrow. They noted that the National Park Service may have other means of determining national significance.

## **Concerns and Observations**

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### **SOCIOECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS**

The public comments noted the economic benefits of an NPS designation for struggling communities in the area. Several comments noted a lack of public open space in close proximity to the Ocmulgee River Corridor and that a park unit could bring additional tourism, leading to additional jobs in the local area. One commenter envisioned this area to be a destination for visitors and local residents for recreation opportunities, but comments still held preservation of the resources as a priority and discussed the balance between drawing in tourism and protecting resources. Public comments noted the commercial services that could be provided in support of recreation, including equipment rentals, food and beverage, guided services, and lodging to boost the economy. Many comments stemmed from the value of recreation to cultivate regional tourism.

Commenters noted that the visiting public values traveling to NPS units and would enjoy the opportunity to bring environmental stewardship to the area, supporting local economies. The comments valued preservation and stewardship of resources as integral to the economic goals of the region.

One commenter showed concern that the local community could see negative impacts from making the area overdeveloped.

### **THREATS AND ISSUES**

The public provided several comments regarding potential threats to the area, most notably pollution, development, extractive industry, unsustainable agriculture, and invasive species. Pollution and litter threats were some of the most commonly mentioned, with some commenters pointing to specific sources of pollution, including city sewage potentially leaching into the river, a potential unlined coal-ash pond, illegal dumping of tires and plastics, expelled cartridges from hunting, and drinking and partying introducing aluminum cans to the area. Many commenters recounted experiences of the shocking levels of trash they found while participating in river cleanup events.

Several commenters also pointed to the threat posed by development encroaching on this previously undeveloped area, with one commenter citing a study suggesting that 39% of the study area is expected to be developed by 2060. Commenters noted that due to threats posed by climate change, forested lands like those along the Ocmulgee River need to be protected and expanded to keep carbon out of the atmosphere. Other commenters focused on the threats posed by invasive species, including feral hogs, catfish, and invasive plants. Extractive industry and agriculture were also concerning for some, with timber harvesting, surface mining (due to cheap land and valuable minerals in the soil), and the “unsustainable” way in which much of the area’s agriculture is done all cited as concerns. The combination of all these issues had several commenters concerned about species extirpation, with one commenter noting that 28% of the study area’s fish, more than 48% of its crayfish, and more than 70% of its mussels are at risk for local extirpation. Other concerns or threats included potential mound vandalization and the fact that some current landowners have enacted road closures, thus blocking access to the area for others.

## **LEVEL OF ACCESS AND RECREATION IMPACTS**

Commenters remarked on the level of access and recreational opportunities they believed would come with designation as a national park unit. Many of these commenters celebrated what they saw as a potential increase in access and recreational opportunity, with some providing specific recommendations for ways to increase access, such as adding boat launches and campgrounds to allow for multiday river trips, hiking and biking trails, horseback riding opportunities, and lands for hunting and fishing. Other commenters were concerned that the designation of a national park site would decrease their access and recreational opportunities, particularly for hunting and fishing.

Many commenters expressed concern about the level of development that could accompany designation as a national park unit. The undeveloped nature of the area is what several commenters particularly value about the area, and they encouraged the National Park Service to minimize roads, parking lots, visitor centers, and other forms of development if there were to be an NPS designation. These comments noted that with a national park unit often comes more development. The fragile swamp environment may not be resilient to visitation and commenters expressed a desire for the area not to be negatively impacted. On the other hand, commenters also noted that more access often means more awareness of an area that ultimately inspires people to care about the area. The relative lack of public lands in central Georgia was seen as a reason to designate a park at the Ocmulgee River corridor and spread out recreational use.

## **COSTS AND MAINTENANCE**

Some commenters expressed concerns about the potential costs associated with maintaining a national park unit, with some mentioning the National Park System's deferred maintenance backlog and wondering why the agency would accept further maintenance responsibilities. Other commenters were concerned that any potential new park unit would be inadequately funded by the federal government or that the funding would be subject to political whims. To help address this foreseeable shortage of funding, some commenters offered to help fund the park, mentioned groups that could provide financial support, or recommended that friends groups be established. Finally, some commenters expressed the belief that the study, and any potential national park unit, is a waste of taxpayer money.



## **Recommendations for the Study Team**

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### **INCLUSION OF VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES**

Commenters generally showed concern for existing and historic communities that have called the Ocmulgee River Corridor home and urged NPS to involve them in the study process. Foremost among these comments, the NPS was urged to give voice to, and listen to, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and other tribes as vital partners in the study process. Commenters also noted the tribes should have a voice in eventual park management similar to what is done in many national parks in Australia. Commenters also urged NPS to work closely with several other groups during the study process, including Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve Initiative, National Trust for Historic Preservation, local landowners, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, historically Black communities around the study area, and people with disabilities. Commenters also urged NPS to treat local landowners, many of whom may be poor and/or people of color, with dignity and respect throughout the study process. To encourage a broad spectrum of participation, some commenters even volunteered to be on steering committees to guide the effort.

## RECOMMENDED REFERENCES

Commenters recommended a number of references, including subject matter experts and published works that the Special Resource Study team may find useful:

- Stephen Hammock, historian and archeologist. Regarded as well educated about the Ocmulgee area and a great potential resource for specific archaeological sites and information in the coverage area.
- A Mercer University survey of known historical and archaeological sites along the 70 river miles between Macon and Hawkinsville. Recently completed as a part of the park proposal. Dominic Day catalogued and mapped almost 900 historic sites that had been previously documented.
- NPS Prehistoric Site Survey (10,000 BC to 1500 AD) by Mark Barnes. Used in assisting the development of Dr. Keel's southeast archeological overview.
- NPS draft national historic landmark documentation of the Lamar site by Mark Barnes. Created in preparation for the larger Multiple Property National Register/ National Historic Landmark nomination. The Lamar site study identified the site as potentially nationally significant and was submitted to the landmarks office in Washington, DC.
- Thomas J. Pluckhahn's 2003 book, *Kolomoki, Settlement, Ceremony, and Status in the Deep South, AD 350 to 750*.
- Ocmulgee Audubon Society and Georgia Ornithological Society.
- Mike Hooker, PhD, bear researcher. Has researched the middle Georgia bear population.
- Resilient and connected landscapes study (Anderson, M. G., Barnett, A., Clark, M., Prince, J., Olivero Sheldon, A. and Vickery B., 2016). "Resilient and Connected Landscapes for Terrestrial Conservation." The Nature Conservancy, Eastern Conservation Science, Eastern Regional Office. Boston, MA. This project was supported by grants from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.)

## QUESTIONS

Below are paraphrased questions from commenters (in italics), followed by answers from the study team.

*If the area is designated as a national park, will hunting still be allowed on Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and the three state-managed wildlife management areas?*

If an NPS unit were to be created that included these lands whole or in part, it would not necessarily change how the Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service or how the state wildlife management areas are managed by Georgia DNR. This includes these organizations' regulations regarding hunting and fishing.

There are many examples of national park units that encompass or contain lands managed by other state or federal land managers. Examples include Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina (includes Pea Island NWR), Cuyahoga Valley National Park near Cleveland, Ohio (includes various metro parks), and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area near Los Angeles (includes multiple state and city parks). In these situations, rules and regulations and their enforcement are the responsibility of the land-managing agency.

*How will the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and other tribes be involved in the project?*

The NPS study team is consulting with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and other interested tribes on the national significance evaluation. We have also relied upon their input and information shared with us to help with the production of the two context documents and with the identification of the draft study boundary.

*How will the public be updated about the study's progress?*

The National Park Service will publicly release a study report after it has been transmitted to Congress. The National Park Service generally does not release preliminary findings or drafts of a study or indicate whether or not a study is likely to recommend inclusion in the national park system.

*When will the study team reach a determination?*

The general timeline for study completion is fall 2022.

*How can the study be supported?*

The National Park Service does not accept outside funding for authorized special studies. The NPS Park Planning and Special Studies Division provides funding, oversight, and policy direction for studies of potential new park units and other national designations when authorized by Congress. The special resource study and related processes are designed to provide Congress with information about the resource qualities at the site and alternatives for protection, which is used in the legislative process of designating a new national park unit, or unit of the National Trails System, National Wild and Scenic Rivers system, or a new National Heritage Area.

## Study Area Boundary

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### RECOMMENDED ADDITIONS TO STUDY AREA

Commenters recommended several specific areas be added to the study area boundary. Those recommendations, and any associated rationale, are included below. Figure 1 shows these areas spatially in a consolidated view.

- The corridor along the Ocmulgee River north of Macon, as far north as Jackson Lake/Lloyd Shoals Dam. This was the most common recommended addition, and various rationales were provided. The first rationale is the protection of historically significant resources along the river. Another reason is because contaminants and pollution that enter the river upstream will ultimately flow downstream into the study area. Commenters noted that this stretch of river is bound by the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge and the Oconee National Forest. Commenters also remarked that extending the study area up to Arkwright would diversify recreation options, most notably more challenging rafting, as well as diversifying the geographic regions represented by the study area, including lands on both sides of the Fall Line. A few commenters justified including the river north of Macon up to the Bibb County line and noted that the “City of Macon” ceased to exist as a jurisdictional entity in 2014, before the signing of Dingell Act. Therefore, “Macon” in the special resource study authorizing legislation should be interpreted as the consolidated city-county government known as Macon-Bibb County, which is recognized by the US Census Bureau, according to the commenters.
- The corridor along the Ocmulgee River south of Hawkinsville to Sand Hammock Boat Landing, or to the Pulaski County line. Commenters lauded this area for its quality wildlife habitat and the slower, more meandering river.
- The Altamaha and Satilla Rivers. Commenters mentioned the importance and value of protecting the whole river corridor system of southeast Georgia.
- Rock Eagle Mound
- Etowah Mound
- Kettle Creek
- Walnut Creek
- Fort Hawkins
- Lakeside Park. Commenters noted childhood memories of this place.
- All undeveloped portions of Robins Air Force Base
- All undeveloped portions along Tobesofkee Creek and Echeconee Creek up to US Highway 129
- All portions of the Ocmulgee Old Fields Traditional Cultural property
- An area around Ocmulgee Wildlife Management Area on the east side of the river



- An area around Oaky Woods Wildlife Management Area on the west side of the river
- Big Indian Creek corridor
- Griswoldville Civil War battlefield

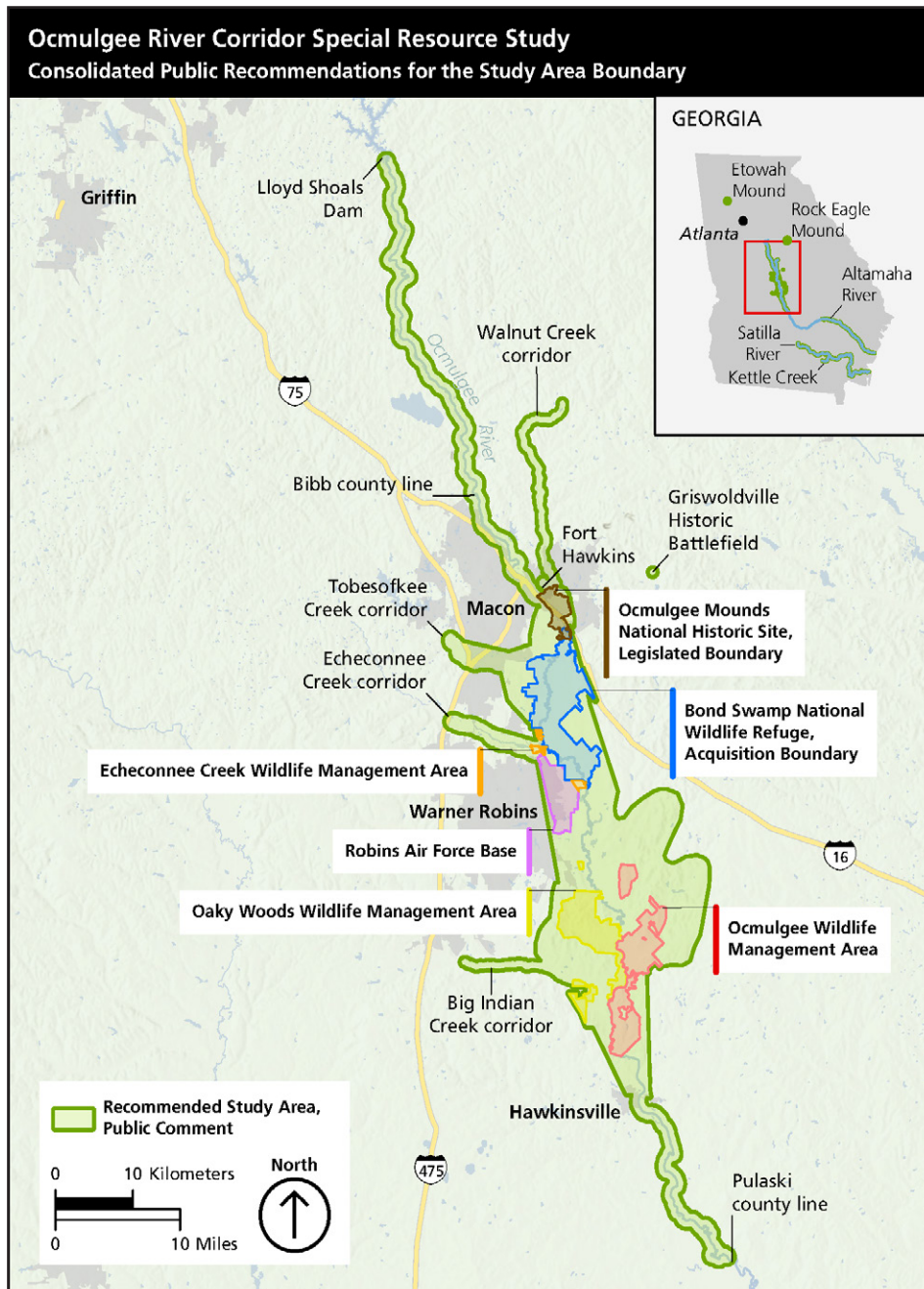


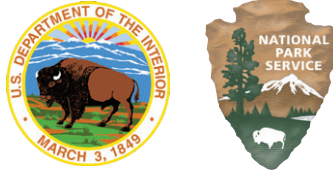
Figure 1. A Consolidated View of All Recommended Places to Include as a Part of the Ocmulgee River Corridor Study Area

In addition to these specific recommendations for areas to include in the study area, some commenters also made more conceptual recommendations for ways to improve the study area boundary. These recommendations stated that the study area should include more than just floodplains and should include connected sites in the uplands to meet conservation needs of a broader diversity of wildlife and provide corridors for seasonal and circadian movements of many species. Another recommendation was to include the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park within the study area to create an integrated national park. Suggestions also included using conservation easements to protect the entire river basin. Another suggestion was to expand the study area to include surrounding wetlands. The creation of a larger buffer along the river to protect water quality in areas where the draft study area boundary gets close to the river's edge was also suggested. Notably, a few commenters urged the National Park Service not to bisect existing land management areas like the Georgia Department of Natural Resources wildlife management areas, Brown's Mount, or Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, as doing so would create a confusing patchwork of land management agencies, designations, jurisdictions, and regulatory guidelines. Some of these comments recommended including the authorized boundaries of all of these designated spaces within the study area.

#### **OTHER COMMENTS RELATED TO STUDY AREA BOUNDARY**

Some commenters suggested that existing federal lands—including Robins Air Force Base and the Bond Swamp National Wildlife Refuge—as well as lands under the management of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, should not be included in whole or in part in the study area. These commenters pointed to the managing agencies' success in conserving natural and cultural resources as evidence of the agencies' qualifications in managing and conserving high-priority river corridor lands. Commenters also noted that a national park would likely encroach on the respective missions of the managing agencies. Some commenters expressed a desire for current land managers to continue this management if they are included within the study area boundary or an eventual national park unit.

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As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historic places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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