



JAY DARDENNE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana
OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

POST OFFICE BOX 44243
BATON ROUGE, LA 70804

July 1, 2011

Dear Stakeholders:

I am pleased to present the *Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* developed by the Atchafalaya Trace Commission. The Plan is a model of collaboration among public agencies and private organizations. It proposes an integrated and cooperative approach for projects that will protect, interpret and enhance the natural, scenic, cultural, historical and recreational resources of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. The Plan outlines initiatives for the next 10 to 15 years that will strengthen the region culturally and economically.

We appreciate the input from the public and the help from the many agencies and organizations that participated in drafting this Plan. We welcome additional comments in this final review period, and we look forward to working with you as we implement this Plan.

With best regards, I am

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Dardenne", written over a large, stylized circular flourish.

Jay Dardenne
Lieutenant Governor

**Management Plan / Environmental Assessment
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area
Louisiana**

Congress authorized the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area on October 6, 2006 with the enactment of The National Heritage Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-338). The legislation designates the Atchafalaya Trace Commission as the local coordinating entity and requires the completion of a management plan to guide the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area (ANHA). This plan is intended to guide a coordinated effort, led by the Commission, to protect, develop, interpret, and promote the national heritage area's resources, in ways that reflect the area's national significance, for the benefit of current and future generations.

This plan examines four alternatives for managing the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area for the next 15–20 years. It also analyzes the impacts of implementing each of the alternatives.

Alternative A (no action) consists of the continuation of existing management and trends, and serves as the basis for evaluating the other alternatives. Under **alternative B**, natural resource protection and recreation, and the themes of “Adaptation and Survival” and “Influence of the Water on the Land and the People” would be the primary focus of management. Management under **alternative C** would focus on the protection and restoration of cultural resources, and the theme “Identity through a Cultural Blend” while providing some different visitor opportunities than alternative B. **Alternative D** (the preferred alternative) reflects the interrelationship of natural resources with culture and history and includes a focus on all three interpretive themes. As required by the legislation, an implementation plan and an interpretive plan are included in this document.

This *Management Plan / Environmental Assessment* will be released to the public for a 30-day comment period. The National Park Service will determine whether the environmental consequences of the preferred alternative require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

HOW TO COMMENT ON THIS PLAN

Comments on this Management Plan/Environmental Assessment are welcome and will be accepted for 30 days after the Environmental Protection Agency's notice of availability appears in the Federal Register, which is expected in spring 2011. To respond to the material in this plan, written comments may be submitted by one of several methods noted below. Commenters are encouraged to use the Internet if possible. Please submit only one set of comments.

Internet Website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/Atchafalaya>

Mail:

National Park Service, Denver Service Center – Planning Division
Atchafalaya National Heritage Area
PO Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225-0287

Comments from the public, stakeholders, and government agencies will be accepted until August 1, 2011.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you may ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

While Louisiana is continually developing and changing, its residents and visitors look to cherished places for recreation and for connecting with nature, culture, and history. The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, a 10,400-square-mile area of outdoor wonders and historic treasures, is one such place. The area, which begins at the junction of the Atchafalaya River and the Mississippi River and extends south through 14 parishes to the Gulf of Mexico, encompasses the nation's largest river swamp and a wide variety of cultural and recreational resources.

A comprehensive plan for a well-managed Atchafalaya National Heritage Area will set the stage to connect the great variety of resources within the heritage area and create support for local businesses, traditional artisans, and others, while increasing the quality of life for residents and enhancing the experiences of visitors.

The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Management Plan articulates a framework with specific recommendations to connect and enhance the heritage area's rich offerings. The plan is a result of extensive public input from citizens, governments, and other stakeholders who are deeply committed to preserving and promoting the heritage area's special character. The plan can serve as a model of public and private partnerships working together to implement policies that protect and connect the heritage area for future generations.

Establishing a vision and road map for managing the diverse resources well is the purpose, and the challenge, of this strategic management plan.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The purpose of this management plan for the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area is to provide a framework to guide the Atchafalaya Trace Commission (the Commission) over the next 15-20 years. This plan identifies programs and strategies to protect, interpret, and promote the heritage area's cultural, historic, recreational, educational, scenic, and natural resources; identifies existing and potential public and private partnerships; includes a comprehensive interpretation plan; recommends criteria and sources for financial assistance; and fosters cooperative relationships between federal, state, regional, and local agencies. Informed by an extensive public participation process, the plan integrates the ongoing efforts of multiple partners over a broad region, helping to prevent duplication of activity and resolve conflicts of interest.

The strategies of the management plan are intended to guide a coordinated effort, led by the Commission, to protect, develop, interpret, and promote the national heritage area's resources, in ways that reflect the area's national significance, for the benefit of current and future generations. Because the plan's strategies are comprehensive and programmatic in scope, few specific projects are discussed. Implementation of certain strategies or actions outlined in the plan may require additional site specific assessment in the future as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

The plan is designed to be flexible to adapt to varying factors, and the Commission is intended to be an actively engaged organization that reserves the right to reverse course or initiate new actions to mitigate unforeseen impacts or new opportunities presented by partners or funding opportunities. The Commission will

SUMMARY

continually monitor its accomplishments under the plan through regular evaluations of its projects and programs, consultations with state agencies and other partners, and an ongoing and active public engagement process including regular communications and recurring community forums.

Because implementation of the management plan will depend upon a number of factors—including levels of funding and actions by federal, state and local agencies, as well as nonprofit groups and private stakeholders—exact timeframes are not included in the plan.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PREFERRED MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area preferred management plan presents a comprehensive strategy for future management and protection of the heritage area's diverse historic sites, unusual natural habitats, and cultural traditions.

Vision

The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area is a truly fascinating and “foreign” place here in the middle of the U.S. culture. The area manages to be authentic and real, while offering outstanding amenities for residents and visitors who seek a relaxed but active break from the everyday.

Mission

The mission of the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area is to build understanding and identity, raising local, regional, and national awareness of the Atchafalaya region; to strengthen the fabric of the place; to expand economic opportunities and to increase the community collaboration and involvement within the parishes that constitute the heritage area while supporting a healthier Atchafalaya ecosystem and enhancing natural resource-based recreation opportunities.

Goals

The overarching vision for the heritage area is supported by four goals:

Goal 1: Enhance interpretation and awareness of the heritage area's key stories

Goal 2: Support sustainable cultural economic development opportunities in the heritage area

Goal 3: Increase appreciation for cultural resources

Goal 4: Increase appreciation for natural resources

Interpretive Themes

Three interpretive themes have been identified. Each theme is connected to a variety of resources that represent the themes in various depths.

Theme 1 - Adaptation and Survival: The early settlers acquired living skills unique to the environment.

Theme 2 - Identity Through a Cultural Blend: The region's identity evolved from a blend of many cultures.

Theme 3 - Influence of the Water on the Land and the People: Water is the distinctive influence on life in this area: through the ages it has created ever-changing landscapes, contributed to subtle and catastrophic natural events, and has been subjected to a long history of human manipulation; this relationship continues to evolve today through increased recreation and conservation efforts.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A (no action) consists of the continuation of existing management and trends, and serves as the basis for evaluating the other alternatives.

Under **alternative B**, natural resource protection and recreation, and the themes of “Adaptation and Survival” and “Influence of the Water on the Land and the People” would be the primary focus of management.

Management under **alternative C** would focus on the protection and restoration of cultural resources, and the theme “Identity through a Cultural Blend” while providing some different visitor opportunities than alternative B.

Alternative D reflects the interrelationship of natural resources with culture and history and includes a focus on all three interpretive themes.

The Preferred Alternative

The Commission’s preferred alternative for the future management of national heritage area is the Heritage Connection: Nature, Culture, History and Recreation. (Alternative D in the Environmental Assessment)

SUMMARY