



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
**U.S. Department
of the Interior**

www.doi.gov

News Release

Date: June 29, 2011

Contact: Kate Kelly (DOI) 202-208-6416

Jeffrey Olson (NPS) 202-208-6843

Secretary Salazar Tours Fort Monroe; Holds Dialogue on Future Preservation of Historic Site

Holds Listening Session with Community, State and Congressional Leaders

HAMPTON, VA— U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and National Park Service (NPS) Director Jonathan B. Jarvis today toured Fort Monroe before holding a public listening session with community leaders and stakeholders regarding plans for preserving the historic site and soon-to-be abandoned military post.

“You can read many chapters of our nation’s history in the stones of Fort Monroe, which is one of the many reasons people feel so passionately about the protection of this special place,” Salazar said after the tour, which included looking out atop a parapet from which soldiers once kept watch for foreign warships at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay. “This stone fort is one of our nation’s special historic and cultural treasures, and we must work together to ensure this place is preserved for future generations.”

Participants in today’s meeting included: Congressman Bobby Scott, Congressman Scott Rigell, Mayor of Hampton Molly Joseph Ward, Virginia’s Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security and Chair of the Fort Monroe Authority Board of Trustees Terrie Suit, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army Jerry Hansen, and Garrison Commander Colonel Anthony D. Reyes.

Secretary Salazar has asked the National Park Service to hold additional public meetings in Hampton in the upcoming weeks to continue the dialogue with the community on next steps. These meetings are at the heart of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative to support locally-driven efforts to preserve and protect places that hold special historical and cultural meaning to communities across the country.

Fort Monroe, a 565-acre national historic landmark that represents the largest stone fortification built in the United States, has been in operation for more than 180 years. It was a crucial location

during the Civil War and one of the few Union military installations in the South never occupied by Confederate forces.

Fort Monroe also played an important role in our nation's march toward equality when, in 1861, General Benjamin Butler refused to return escaped Confederate slaves to their masters, declaring them 'contrabands of war.' The decision permitted thousands of enslaved people to find safe haven after crossing Union lines during the course of the war and helped lay the groundwork for President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

"Fort Monroe is a compelling chapter in our nation's arc from Civil War to Civil Rights," said Director Jarvis. "With such a rich history, it's no wonder that so many in the community feel strongly about ensuring the Fort is preserved. The National Park Service will continue to work hand-in-hand with the state and stakeholders on this front."

The Department of Defense placed the Fort Monroe on its Base Closure and Realignment Commission list in 2005. Several proposals for reuse of the fort after Defense's scheduled departure in September are being considered. The proposals outline ways to combine preservation of the fort's historic and natural resources with adaptive reuse of the Army post for economic development. An option to transfer portions of the installation to the National Park Service has wide support in the Hampton community and with the Governor's office and the state's Congressional delegation.

Built for coastal defense between 1819 and 1834 and in operation since then, Fort Monroe has been called "The Fortress of Freedom." Completely surrounded by a moat, the six-sided stone fort is the only one of its kind left in the United States that is still an active Army post. It served as the staging area for General George B. McClellan's 1862 Peninsula Campaign and Confederate President Jefferson Davis was imprisoned at the fort for two years after the Civil War.

###