



United States Department of the Interior



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IN REPLY REFER TO:
SER-P

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Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Management Plan/Categorical Exclusion Errata Sheet

Summary: The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Management Plan (Plan) was released to the public for review and comment between July 18, and August 17, 2012. The Plan was developed as a categorical exclusion (CE) under the National Environmental Policy Act. The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission's (Commission) interest in receiving public input, therefore, was driven not by specific regulatory or statutory requirements, but by a recognition that the Plan has benefitted substantially from feedback received throughout its development. The Commission determined that comments received during this period would be summarized and published as a part of the project record, and would be addressed, as appropriate, by the Commission during the implementation of the Plan.

Between September 11 and 14, 2012 the Commission received additional comments, related to the Commission's "Support for the Harris Neck Land Trust Proposal" (on page 142 of the Plan) and the Commission's December 8, 2011 letter to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Natural Resources (in Appendix F). These comments warrant a response, and the preparation and distribution of an errata sheet, to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Commission relative to those of the National Park Service, and to distinguish the positions of these two entities on the subject of the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge and the Harris Neck Land Trust.

The errata sheet is combined with the Plan, its Appendices, and the Public Comment Report (revised December 20, 2012) to form the complete and final record on which the National Park Service bases its recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior for approval of the Plan.

Background: Members of the Harris Neck Land Trust (HNLT) have sought to regain ownership of lands formerly owned by Gullah Geechee residents of the Harris Neck, GA community which were acquired by the United States through eminent domain, for military defense purposes, in 1943. In a series of subsequent land conveyances, the property was transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 1962, to be managed as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The HNLT has proposed a legislative transfer of the property now comprising a portion of the Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge to its members. The Gullah Geechee Corridor Commission wrote a letter of support for this proposal to U.S. House of Representatives'

Committee on Natural Resources on December 8, 2011 and then briefly summarized their support and action in the Plan, as an example of early implementation actions taken during their management planning process.

Comments: The Commission received comments from the USFWS, Southeast Region, and the Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges (Friends) expressing concern about the inclusion of the Commission's letter of support as well as the summary in the Plan (See Public Comment Report, revised December 20, 2012). The USFWS provided references to documentation relative to the claims of the HNLТ and described ongoing efforts by the agency to engage the Gullah Geechee community of Harris Neck as well as the HNLТ. The Friends group countered information summarized by the Commission in the Plan and suggested that certain sections be removed from the Plan.

Response:

The Commission was designated by Congress as the Local Coordinating Entity for the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (Corridor), in the same legislation that established the Corridor (Public Law 109-338). The law outlines the duties and authorities of the Commission to prepare and implement the Plan and further the purposes of the Corridor.

The law further establishes a role for the Secretary of the Interior, to provide technical and financial assistance for the development and implementation of the Plan. In this capacity, the National Park Service (NPS) has assisted in facilitating the planning process and in producing the written document. The Commission is not, however, managed by the NPS, nor are the goals and strategies outlined in the Plan a direct extension of NPS management policies.

Neither the inclusion of the Commission's position on the HNLТ proposal in the Plan, nor the letter written by the Commission to the House Natural Resource Committee constitutes support or endorsement of the proposal by the Secretary of the Interior.