

PURPOSE AND NEED

INTRODUCTION

Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Cane River National Heritage Area are situated along the Cane River in northwestern Louisiana in Natchitoches Parish. The park and heritage area are along Interstate 49 between Natchitoches and Monette's Ferry, about two hundred miles northwest of Baton Rouge. The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing to construct a visitor center for the park and the heritage area. This plan and the accompanying environmental assessment are being written to describe and analyze alternative representative areas along Interstate 49 for development of the visitor center. This interpretive visitor center complex would provide an overview of the area's heritage, its resources, and the ongoing efforts to protect and preserve those resources.

The park and the heritage area were established in November of 1994 to commemorate the cultures whose long and complex history began with American Indian trade and early 18th century European exploration and settlement in Louisiana's Red River Valley. The park and the heritage area also interpret and commemorate the resulting cultural interaction and interdependence among the French, Spanish, Africans, and American Indians, as well as the subsequent development and evolution of Creole culture and plantation life along the Cane River. The two complementary entities, the national park and the national heritage area, were established at the same time. The legislation determined that this partnership approach would best serve the preservation needs of the area, ensure the vital need for cultural sensitivity, emphasize local partnerships, and minimize the need for federal land acquisition or management.

NEED FOR THE PLAN

Presently the park and heritage area's administrative facilities are split between two different offices in downtown Natchitoches. Park staff also maintain a daily presence at Magnolia Plantation and Oakland Plantation. Magnolia Plantation is also open daily and can be staffed intermittently, depending upon funding. Both the national park and national heritage area's facilities are currently inadequate, and the quality of the visitor experience is not up-to-date with current National Park Service standards.

Because of the limited size and the fragmented nature of the facilities, there is no single site where visitors can go to receive orientation to the area; view exhibits, interpretive programs, demonstrations, and audiovisual materials; learn about the history of the area and understand Creole culture; meet to join tours; buy books about the region; or find basic facilities such as restrooms, telephones, water fountains, and first aid. The opportunity for visitors to appreciate the history of the area and understand the Creole culture and its significance and to plan their visits is limited by the lack of a centralized, shared interpretive center.

Visitors entering the area from the south (e.g., if coming from Baton Rouge) on I-49 would have bypassed the Cane River area's primary resources by the time they reach

1 Natchitoches, missing some of the most attractive experiences the park and heritage
2 area have to offer. Visitors coming from the north may seek out specific resources in the
3 heritage area and park, based on information in the city of Natchitoches, but there also
4 is a need to provide them with an orientation to visitor services and amenities available
5 in the entire heritage area and park.

6 No appropriate space or facilities exist where staff can prepare exhibits and develop
7 programs and interpretive messages. Many of the heritage area's resources and stories
8 are promoted individually by different management entities, so the coordination,
9 identification, interpretation, and marketing of the Cane River National Heritage Area is
10 limited. Both the heritage area and park offices in Natchitoches are constrained by the
11 amount of available space. In addition, downtown traffic is congested, and the heritage
12 area's Natchitoches office lacks adequate parking space.

13 Existing park and heritage area offices are difficult for some visitors to locate. Many
14 visitors end up at the local chamber of commerce. Although the park office is situated
15 on Louisiana State Highway 1, a route some visitors use to reach Natchitoches after
16 visiting the Oakland and Magnolia Plantations, the office is set back from the road some
17 distance behind another building and is hard to see. Highway signing along I-49 to
18 direct visitors to park and heritage area sites is limited as well.

19 **PURPOSE OF THE PLAN**

20 The shortcomings described above must be addressed for the development concept
21 plan to be considered a success. The NPS proposed action would address the needs
22 outlined above by:

- 23 • Providing a single, easily identifiable, and readily accessible facility where visitors
24 could receive orientation to the region, learn about the area's resources and culture,
25 receive safety messages, and have available a wide variety of interpretive experiences
26 and media;
- 27 • Fostering public support and appreciation for Cane River's cultural resources by
28 providing quality educational and interpretive services and facilities for visitors; and
- 29 • Providing readily accessible facilities for park and heritage area staff that are
30 adequate in size and properly equipped so that day-to-day operations can be
31 conducted in an efficient and effective manner.

32 This environmental assessment analyzes the impacts on the human environment of five
33 alternatives, including the no-action alternative, the preferred alternative, and three
34 other reasonable alternatives. Among the action alternatives there are three potential
35 locales for a proposed new visitor center. This environmental assessment will clearly
36 outline alternatives that are feasible and affordable and includes an analysis of the
37 design, cost, and layout of the proposed new facility to ensure that necessary visitor and
38 staff needs are met. Alternatives to improve the interpretive program and the visitor
39 experience are called for in the park's general management plan and resource

1 management plan, in the heritage area’s management plan, and are necessary to meet
2 Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) goals.

3 This current development concept plan/environmental assessment tiers off and is
4 consistent with the 2001 Cane River Creole National Historical Park General
5 Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement and the 2003 Cane River Heritage
6 Area Management Plan. The proposed action is consistent with National Park Service
7 management policies and was prepared in accordance with the

- 8 • National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969;
- 9 • Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National
10 Environmental Policy Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500-1508);
- 11 • National Park Service’s Director’s Order (DO) #12 and Handbook: Conservation
12 Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision Making (NPS 2001b); and
- 13 • National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and its implementing regulations at 36
14 Code of Federal Regulations 800 and Director’s Order 28, Cultural Resource
15 Management (NPS 1998).
- 16 • Cane River Creole National Historical Park and National Heritage Area Act (Public
17 Law 103-449).

18 *OBJECTIVES*

19 The primary objectives for development of the plan are focused on improvement in
20 visitor and park/heritage area staff facilities and programs. The plan also includes
21 provisions for preservation of vital cultural and natural resources, as well as the
22 protection of public health and safety as mandated by National Park Service policy. The
23 primary objectives for the development of a visitor center for Cane River Creole
24 National Historical Park and the Cane River National Heritage Area were determined
25 by park and regional staff and the public, and must be met to ensure successful project
26 implementation. The objectives of this action are to:

- 27 • Enhance visitor understanding and appreciation of the Cane River Creole cultures;
- 28 • Improve visitor wayfinding throughout the park and heritage area;
- 29 • Protect and preserve significant cultural resources related to the Cane River Creole
30 culture and other cultures; and
- 31 • Bring together potential partners to enhance educational opportunities and provide
32 mutual assistance among various agencies.

33 **PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARK AND THE HERITAGE AREA**

34 Cane River Creole National Historical Park and Cane River National Heritage Area
35 were established in November of 1994 by Public Law 103-449 (16 USC 410cc) to
36 commemorate the cultures whose long and complex history began with American
37 Indian trade and early 18th century European exploration and settlement in Louisiana’s

1 Red River Valley. The park and the heritage area also interpret and commemorate the
2 resulting cultural interaction and interdependence among the French, Spanish, Africans,
3 and Indians, as well as the subsequent development and evolution of Creole culture and
4 plantation life along the Cane River. The authorizing legislation noted that Cane River
5 Creole culture “was a nationally significant element of the cultural heritage of the
6 United States” and recommended that the new park should focus their interpretive and
7 educational programs on the history of the area while helping to preserve historic sites
8 along the river (NPS 2001a). The two complementary entities, the park and the heritage
9 area, were established at the same time to provide a culturally sensitive approach to
10 preservation of the Cane River region through local partnerships, thus minimizing the
11 need for federal land acquisition or management.

12 The enabling legislation also authorized the Secretary of the Interior to designate an
13 area of land not-to-exceed 10 acres for the construction of an interpretive center
14 complex to serve the needs of the park and heritage area. The act also authorized the
15 Secretary to construct, operate, and maintain an interpretive center to provide for the
16 general information and orientation needs of the park and heritage area.

17 **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

18 *DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA*

19 Cane River National Heritage Area is primarily in Natchitoches Parish, extending east
20 from Interstate 49 to the Red River, with the north/south boundaries marked by
21 Highway 478/Waterwell Road on the north side and Monette's Ferry to the south
22 (Figure 1). The congressionally designated heritage area also includes the Natchitoches
23 National Historic Landmark District and six other national historic landmarks. It
24 encompasses approximately 116,000 acres. Although a small fraction of the land within
25 the heritage area is owned by local, state and federal agencies, the bulk of the property is
26 privately-owned land that will remain private.

27 Cane River Creole National Historical Park is situated within the Cane River National
28 Heritage Area and includes 44.16 acres of Oakland Plantation and 18.75 acres of
29 Magnolia Plantation (Figures 2a and 2b). The park has two units (each a portion of the
30 Oakland and Magnolia plantations), located within the heritage area, 10 and 20 miles
31 south of Natchitoches, respectively. The park's currently authorized boundary
32 encompasses about 207 acres, of which about 63 are under federal control; the other 144
33 acres are in private ownership by descendents of the original Prud'homme family.

34 The Magnolia Plantation unit of the park is partially owned by the National Park Service
35 (the rest of the historic plantation is owned and operated by descendents of the original
36 LeComte family). Many of the plantation's outbuildings and dependencies remain and
37 are preserved within the park unit. The 27-room Magnolia Plantation house (adjacent to
38 the park's Magnolia unit) is privately owned but is open for tours and lodging as part of
39 the heritage area. The two park sites include a total of 67 historic structures remnant
40 from 200 years of plantation life.

1 Established in 1714, Natchitoches is the oldest permanent European settlement in the
2 Louisiana Purchase territory. Included within the Natchitoches National Historic
3 Landmark District is a 37-block area of downtown Natchitoches that includes historic
4 homes, commercial buildings, and churches. These structures are clustered along the
5 upper Cane River, also known as Cane River Lake (Figure 1).

6 In addition to the Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District (in the town of
7 Natchitoches), the heritage area also includes a number of privately-owned historic sites
8 including the Kate Chopin House, Melrose Plantation, the Badin-Roque House,
9 Cherokee Plantation, and Beau Fort Plantation. St. Charles Chapel, and St. Augustine
10 Church also are contributing parts of the heritage area. Other sites in the heritage area
11 are the state historic sites of the Spanish fort and mission site of Los Adaes, (a national
12 historic landmark near Robeline, Louisiana), an American fort and national historic
13 landmark, Fort Jesup (in Sabine Parish), and, in Natchitoches, a reconstruction of the
14 original French fort known as Fort St. Jean Baptiste.

15 These various sites demonstrate the history of colonization, frontier influences, French
16 and Creole architecture, cotton agriculture, slavery and tenancy labor systems, changing
17 technologies, and evolving social practices over two hundred years.

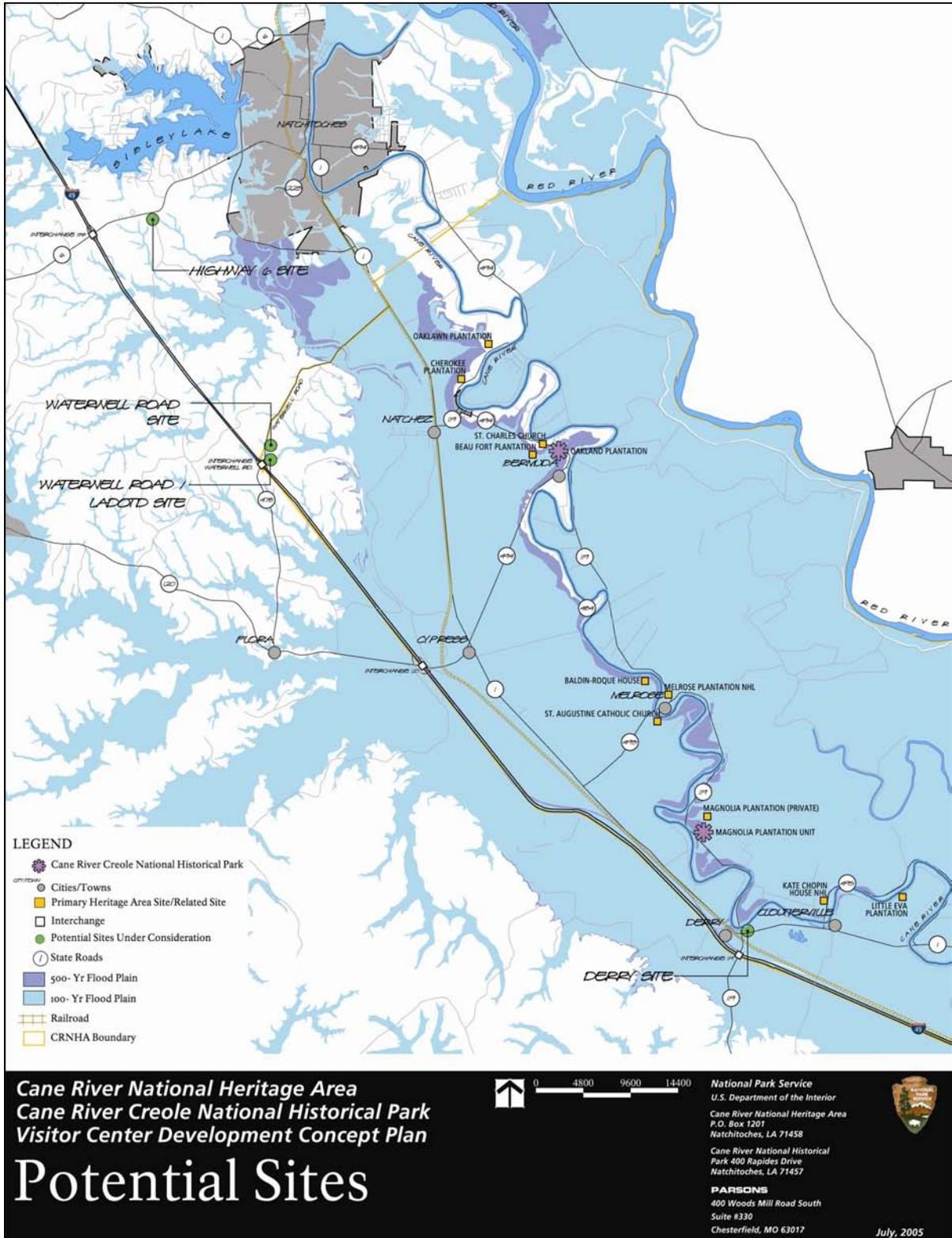


FIGURE 1: MAP OF CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA, INCLUDING CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

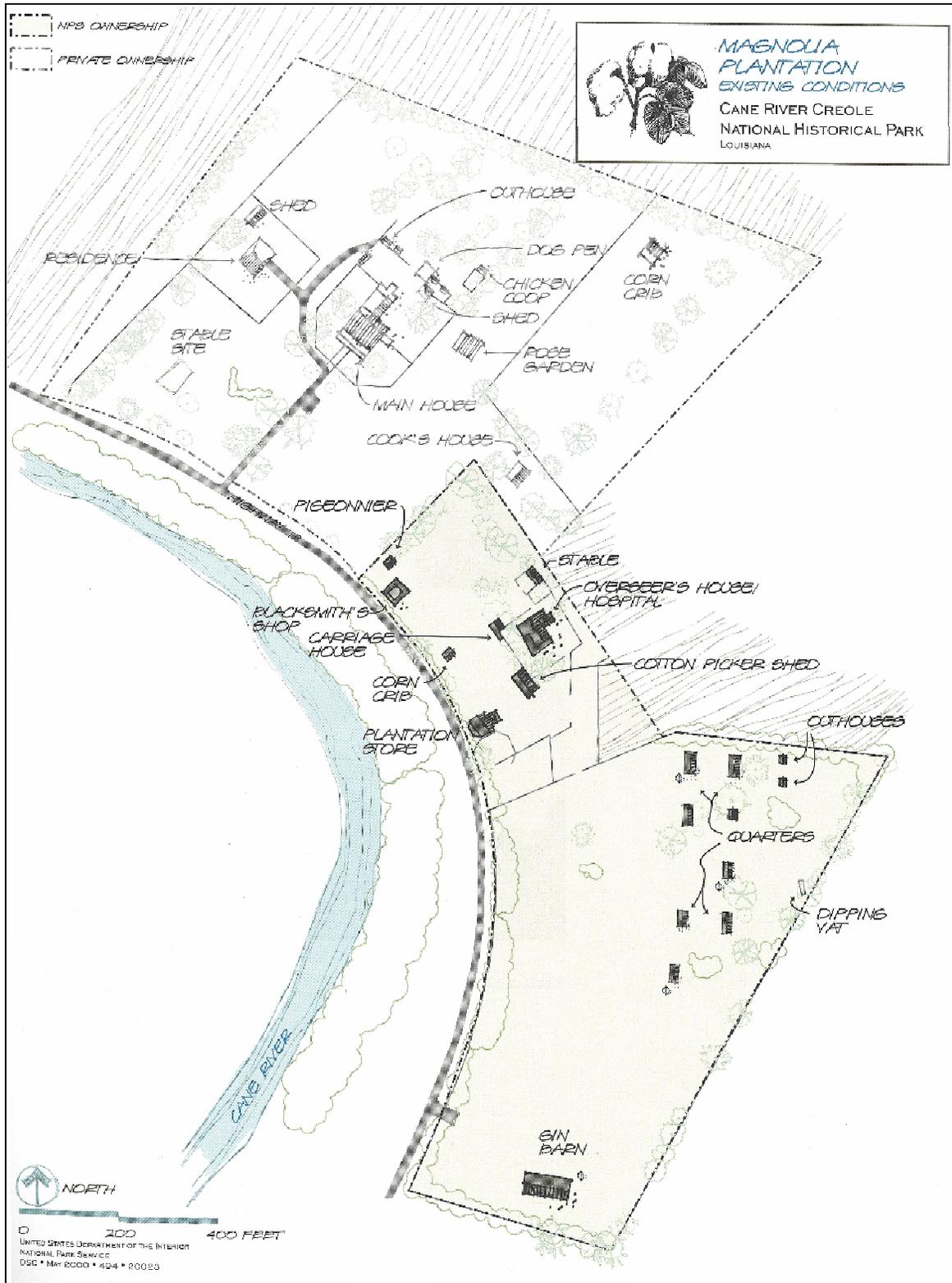


FIGURE 2A: MAGNOLIA PLANTATION PARK UNIT

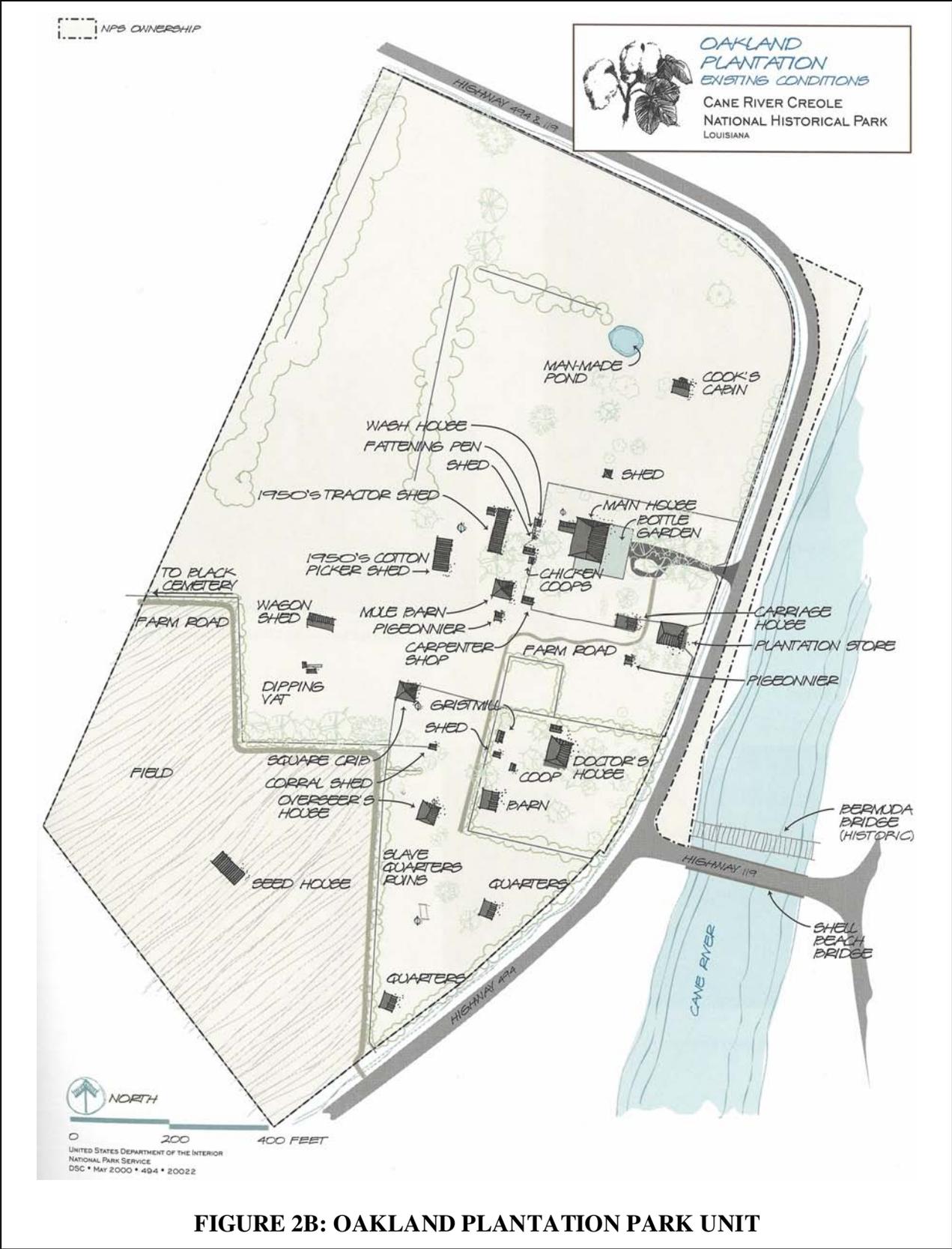


FIGURE 2B: OAKLAND PLANTATION PARK UNIT

1 *RELATED PROJECTS AND PLANS*

2 Several projects and plans that the National Park Service and other organizations
3 have in place, in progress, or planned for the near future may affect decisions
4 regarding this project to construct a visitor center. As part of the analysis and
5 consideration of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, the project team
6 identified the following potential projects that may occur in or near the project area.

7 **Cane River Creole National Historical Park General Management**
8 **Plan/Environmental Impact Statement and Cane River National Heritage Area**
9 **Management Plan.** The alternatives presented in this Development Concept Plan
10 would be consistent with the Cane River Creole National Historical Park General
11 Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement, which is the primary planning
12 guide for the park (NPS 2001a). The development concept plan alternatives also
13 would be consistent with the Cane River National Heritage Area Management Plan
14 (Commission/NPS 2003). All other planning documents, including this development
15 concept plan/environmental assessment, must conform with and tier from the
16 general management plan and the management plan.

17 A number of projects and plans that the park and the heritage area, the city and
18 parish of Natchitoches, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Louisiana Department of
19 Transportation and Development have in place, in progress, or planned for the near
20 future may affect decisions regarding this project to construct a shared visitor center.
21 As part of the analysis and consideration of potential direct, indirect, and cumulative
22 impacts, the project team identified the following potential projects that may occur
23 in or near the project area and include:

24 **Natchitoches Rest Area and Information Center.** The Louisiana Department of
25 Transportation and Development is planning to develop a new rest stop along
26 Interstate 49 at exit 132. The city of Natchitoches has begun planning for this area as
27 well and has extended the city limits to encompass the area adjacent to the proposed
28 rest stop. Also proposed are a trail system and a lake/water feature with a dam. There
29 is the potential for a stand alone exhibit for the national heritage area and park (this
30 would be applicable only to Alternatives A through D).

31 **Signage, Branding, and Wayfinding Project.** The heritage area and park are
32 currently collaborating on a project to add orientation signs, including along I-49.
33 These signs are for the purpose of improving wayfinding in the national heritage area
34 and to locate park units. Wayside exhibits in the city of Natchitoches and
35 surrounding rural areas will be added. Some signs will designate that the visitor is
36 entering the national heritage area. This project is being carried out in conjunction
37 with this environmental assessment, so as to properly orient visitors to the new
38 visitor center.

39 **Curatorial Storage Facility.** The Cane River Creole National Historical Park is in
40 the initial planning stages for a storage facility for housing its many historical objects.
41 A potential location at Northwestern State University has been identified. This

1 storage facility would be a collaborative effort between the park and Northwestern
2 State University in Natchitoches.

3 **Heritage Tourism Program.** Local entities (the park, heritage area, Main Street
4 Program, and Historic District Development Commission) have begun collaborating
5 with the National Trust for Historical Preservation to develop a heritage tourism
6 program for the area.

7 **Creole Heritage Center.** This center of Creole culture has received funding from
8 the national heritage area for the previous four years, as establishing legislation for
9 the park and heritage area includes encouraging the interpretation and preservation
10 of Creole culture. The potential for the heritage center to include exhibits in the
11 shared visitor center exists.

12 **Zoning regulations in the city of Natchitoches and Natchitoches Parish.** The city
13 of Natchitoches and Natchitoches Parish each have separate zoning regulations
14 (ordinances) that regulate the types of land use within their respective areas. All land
15 outside of the city limits is considered industry/agriculture, although spot rezoning
16 could occur to accommodate construction of a visitor center (e.g., lands could be
17 reclassified as A-1 [Parks and Playgrounds]). Both the city and the parish have signed
18 restrictive flood ordinances, which place restrictions on development in the
19 floodplain. The city of Natchitoches is also conducting a master planning study,
20 which includes Waterwell Road, with partial funds from national heritage area
21 grants. The state of Louisiana is proposing widening and improving Waterwell Road,
22 which would occur as a result of this study.

23 *SCOPING*

24 Scoping is the effort to involve agencies and the general public in determining the
25 issues to be addressed in an environmental assessment. Among other tasks, scoping
26 determines important issues and eliminates unimportant issues; allocates
27 assignments among the interdisciplinary team members and other participating
28 agencies; identifies related projects and associated documents; identifies other
29 permits, surveys, or consultations required by other agencies; and creates a schedule
30 which allows adequate time to prepare and distribute the environmental document
31 for public review and comment before a final decision is made. Scoping includes
32 early input from any interested agency or any agency with jurisdiction by law or
33 expertise.

34 Several internal scoping meetings and design workshops took place between Spring
35 2004 and July 2005. The planning team met with city and parish officials to obtain
36 basic information. Internal scoping meetings early in the planning process identified
37 the main issues and impact topics that should be evaluated in the environmental
38 assessment. A number of potential locations for a new shared visitor center were
39 discussed and researched, and choices were narrowed to three general
40 representative sites, based on analysis, results of a series of meetings with

1 stakeholders and through an evaluation process known as “Choosing by
2 Advantages” (CBA) used by the National Park Service, held in July of 2005.

3 A summary of the consultation and coordination efforts for this project may be
4 found in the “Consultation and Coordination” section of this environmental
5 assessment. Copies of consultation correspondence can be found in Appendix A.

6 **Partnerships**

7 Many different individuals and entities are involved in the preservation and
8 interpretation of Cane River area resources. To accomplish the objectives listed
9 above, it is advantageous to continue developing partnerships among various
10 community and parish organizations and with state and federal government entities.
11 Groups who have been involved in the initial discussions of this visitor center and
12 that may become partners (formal or informal) with the National Park Service
13 include the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Louisiana
14 Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Creole Heritage Center, Louisiana
15 Department of Transportation and Development, city of Natchitoches, and
16 Louisiana State Parks.

17 *ISSUES*

18 Issues and concerns affecting this proposal were identified from past National Park
19 Service planning efforts and input from state and federal agencies. The major issues
20 include the following:

- 21 • There is no single, conveniently located place where visitors can go to view
22 exhibits, participate in interpretive programs, buy books about the region, or find
23 out about the park and heritage area’s cultural resources and ongoing programs;
- 24 • Existing facilities do not adequately communicate the ongoing efforts to protect
25 and preserve the park and heritage center’s many resources;
- 26 • Existing facilities do not have adequate space or equipment to adequately serve
27 staff and visitor needs;
- 28 • Because of the difficulty in locating existing facilities, visitors may miss out on the
29 complex and diverse cultural stories of the region (e.g., African American, Creole,
30 French, Spanish, American Indian);
- 31 • Maintaining separate facilities in different locales for the park and the heritage
32 area results in duplication of effort and difficulties in communication and
33 coordination of staff and programs; and
- 34 • Existing facilities are inadequate to properly conserve historic photographs,
35 manuscripts, artifacts, and other collections and archival materials necessary for
36 interpretation and documentation of the heritage area and the park.

1 *IMPACT TOPICS*

2 Impact topics were used to focus the evaluation of the potential environmental
3 consequences of the alternatives. Candidate impact topics were identified based on
4 legislative requirements, executive orders, topics specified in *Director’s Order #12*
5 *and Handbook* (NPS 2001b), *NPS Management Policies 2001* (NPS 2000), guidance
6 from the National Park Service, input from other agencies, public concerns, and
7 resource information specific to Cane River Creole National Historical Park and
8 Cane River National Heritage Area. A brief rationale for the selection of each impact
9 topic is given below, as well as the rationale for dismissing specific topics from
10 further consideration.

11 **Impact Topics Retained**

12 The impact topics considered for the project to locate and construct a new shared
13 interpretive center in the Cane River area are presented in Table 1. The table includes
14 key regulations or policies for each impact topic. Impact topics that were retained for
15 consideration in this environmental assessment included cultural resources, visitor
16 use and experience, park and heritage area operations, paleontological resources,
17 vegetation, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, soils, and wetlands and
18 floodplains.

TABLE 1: IMPACT TOPICS FOR THE PROJECT TO BUILD A SHARED VISITOR CENTER FOR CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Impact Topic	Relevant Regulations or Policies
Cultural resources (archeological, historic, and ethnographic resources, collections and cultural landscapes)	Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act; 36 CFR 800; Executive Order 11593; American Antiquities Act; Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act; Archaeological Resources Protection Act; Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act; National Environmental Policy Act; Executive Order 13007; Presidential Memorandum (1994) on Government-to-Government Relations; <i>Director’s Order 28</i> ; <i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i> ; Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation; <i>Director’s Order 71A, Government to Government Relationships with Tribal Governments</i>
Visitor use and experience	Organic Act; <i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i>
Park and heritage area operations	<i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i>
Paleontological resources	<i>Director’s Order 77 Natural Resources Data Management Guidance, NPS-75, Natural Resources Inventory and Monitoring; Reference Manual 77, Natural Resource Management; NPS Management Policies 2001</i>

TABLE 1: IMPACT TOPICS FOR THE PROJECT TO BUILD A SHARED VISITOR CENTER FOR CANE RIVER CREOLE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AND CANE RIVER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

Impact Topic	Relevant Regulations or Policies
Vegetation	<i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i>
Wildlife	<i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i>
Threatened and endangered species	Endangered Species Act; <i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i>
Soils	<i>NPS Management Policies 2001</i>
Wetlands and floodplains	Executive Order 11990, Clean Water Act Section 404, <i>Director's Order #77-1</i> and <i>#77-2</i> , Executive Order 11988

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2 **Impact Topics Dismissed from Further Analysis with Rationale for Dismissal**

3 The resource topics described in this section will not be included or evaluated in this
 4 environmental assessment. These impact topics were not identified during scoping
 5 as being of concern. Additional reasons for their dismissal are provided below.

6 **Public health and safety, with accessibility:** Effects to public health and safety
 7 would not vary among the alternatives, as the design would be identical for three of
 8 the action alternatives, and very similar for the fourth (Alternative E). Currently,
 9 public health and safety issues are minimal at the park and heritage area, and the
 10 same negligible effect would be expected to occur if a visitor center with offices were
 11 to be constructed. Incidents would be infrequent and likely be limited to vehicle
 12 accidents, vehicle/pedestrian accidents, and minor first aid incidents from insect
 13 bites and stings at the site.

14 The heritage area headquarters are currently completely accessible, while the park
 15 headquarters are accessible with assistance, because of a one-inch lip at the front
 16 door. Were a new visitor center with park offices to be constructed, the park
 17 headquarters would become completely accessible, as the visitor center building
 18 would be completely accessible in all of the action alternatives. The improvement in
 19 accessibility of the headquarters under the action alternatives would provide a long-
 20 term, minor, beneficial effect.

21 Because none of the effects from any of the alternatives on public health and safety
 22 with accessibility would be greater than minor and the effects vary little among
 23 alternatives, this impact topic is dismissed from further analysis.

24 **Water quality:** All representative sites analyzed for the visitor center location would
 25 be located near rivers or streams: the lower Cane River, the Big Henry Branch, and
 26 an unnamed stream. However, impacts from construction would be minimal, as best

1 management practices, such as silt fencing, would be used to ensure no sediment or
2 contaminants would enter nearby waterbodies. Because of this, effects to water
3 quality would be no greater than long-term, local, minor, and adverse under any
4 alternative. As such, this impact topic is dismissed from further analysis.

5 **Air quality:** Best management practices would be used under any of the action
6 alternatives involving constructing the visitor center. This would minimize fugitive
7 dust and exhaust emissions into the air, resulting in negligible effects to air quality.
8 Because of this, air quality is dismissed from further analysis.

9 **Conflicts with land use plans, policies, or controls:** Constructing a visitor center
10 for the park and heritage area in one of the three representative sites would involve
11 applying for a zoning amendment with the Natchitoches Parish or the city of
12 Natchitoches. Once this zoning amendment was obtained, which would alter the
13 zone to “Parks and Playgrounds” in the Parish or in the city, there would be no
14 conflicts with land use plans, policies, or controls in Natchitoches Parish or the city
15 of Natchitoches. Therefore, this impact topic is dismissed from further analysis.

16 **Ecologically critical areas or other unique natural resources:** Neither the park
17 nor the heritage area contain any designated ecologically critical areas, wild and
18 scenic rivers, or other unique natural resources, as referenced in 40 Code of Federal
19 Regulations 1508.27; 62 Code of Federal Regulation for National Landmarks; or as
20 outlined in NPS *Management Policies 2001*.

21 **Indian trust resources:** Indian trust assets are owned by American Indians but are
22 held in trust by the United States. Requirements are included in the Secretary of the
23 Interior’s Secretarial Order No. 3206, “American Indian Tribal Rites, Federal –
24 Tribal Trust Responsibilities, and the Endangered Species Act,” and Secretarial
25 Order No. 3175, “Departmental Responsibilities for Indian Trust Resources.”
26 According to Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Indian trust assets do not
27 occur within the areas analyzed for a building site. Therefore, there would be no
28 effects on Indian trust resources under this environmental assessment.

29 **Environmental justice:** Executive Order 12898, “General Actions to Address
30 Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,”
31 requires that all federal agencies address the effects of policies on minorities and
32 low-income populations and communities. None of the alternatives analyzed in this
33 assessment would have disproportionate effects on populations as defined by the
34 U.S. Environmental Agency’s 1996 guidance on environmental justice.

35 **Wilderness:** There are no wilderness areas within the park or the heritage area.
36 Therefore, this topic is dismissed from further analysis.

37 **Energy requirements and conservation potential:** Under the preferred alternative,
38 the park and heritage area would locate the visitor center and park offices in a
39 preexisting building constructed by Louisiana Department of Transportation and
40 Development. Because the space would be shared, heating and air conditioning use
41 would be minimized, and other energy expenditures, such as lights and computers,

1 would be minimal. These limited uses of energy would have a negligible effect on
2 energy requirements and conservation potential; therefore, this topic is dismissed
3 from further analysis.

4 **Prime and unique agricultural lands:** The Red River Valley contains a large
5 acreage of soils that would be considered prime and unique agricultural soils; over
6 373,100 acres are located within Natchitoches Parish. At a maximum, only 10 acres of
7 prime and unique agricultural lands would be impacted under any of the alternatives
8 in this assessment, less than 0.003 percent of the total prime and unique agricultural
9 lands in Natchitoches Parish. Because of this low percentage, impacts to prime and
10 unique soils under any of the alternatives would be no greater than negligible.
11 Therefore, Prime and Unique Agricultural Lands are dismissed from further analysis.

12 **Socioeconomics:** The primary economic activities in the parish are manufacturing
13 and industry, agricultural production, and tourism. Each of these activities
14 contributes over \$30 million dollars to the local economy annually (U.S. Census
15 Bureau 2002, USDA 2002).

16 While not located in a large urban setting, the heritage area is reasonably accessible
17 from Baton Rouge and Shreveport. Considering the heritage area is not near other
18 major tourist destinations, it would be safe to assume that most visitors travel here
19 specifically to tour the historic region, including both privately-owned and federally-
20 owned sites in the national heritage area.

21 Therefore, it is not likely that adding a visitor center would be an effective way to
22 increase local tourism. Because most visitors see the heritage area as a primary
23 destination, any of the proposed alternatives would not likely increase economic
24 activity measurably or result in detectable additional numbers of visitors or local
25 tourists.

26 Some travelers may enter a visitor center out of curiosity without the intention of
27 touring the area's historic resources, and the new facility would encourage these
28 visitors to linger and investigate some of the local sites. This small increase in
29 visitation, and subsequently, tourism expenditures would, however, result in a
30 negligible to minor beneficial effect to socioeconomics.

31

