



Lower Mississippi Special Resource Study

DRAFT Public Scoping Summary Report

July 28, 2016

Summary

This document provides a brief summary of input gathered from interested and affected individuals, groups, and agencies during the Lower Mississippi Special Resource Study scoping period. Information collected during public scoping will assist the special resource planning team with identification of issues and concerns related to the study area, and help the National Park Service (NPS) gauge the level of interest in new unit designation.

Public Outreach

During the public scoping period, the National Park Service solicited feedback from the public through a public scoping newsletter, the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website (this is considered the project website), and two public meetings which were announced via press release to local and regional media and social media administered by Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve and Jazz National Historical Park, and on park websites. Copies of the newsletter were distributed to regional stakeholders, including federal, state, and nongovernmental agencies and organizations, in early May 2016. The newsletter included a brief overview of the Lower Mississippi Area, the purpose and description of the study, the criteria used in special resource and boundary studies, and an invitation to attend the public meetings. The newsletter also provided information on how to comment via the project website, or mailed correspondence.

The official public scoping comment period opened on June 1, 2016 and closed on July 6, 2016. Comments were received via the project website, comment cards gathered at public meetings, and through mailed correspondence. Two evening public meetings were held during the comment period—one in Buras, Louisiana and the other in Belle Chasse, Louisiana. Thirty-nine people attended the two public meetings.

Public Opinions, Perceptions, and Values

A total of 49 comments were received via the PEPC website, mailed-in comment cards, and mailed letters. The National Park Service sought public feedback by requesting responses to five questions related to the special resource study. The questions were listed in the public scoping newsletter as well as at the comment stations at the public meetings. The questions were:



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1. What are your general opinions about preserving the Fort Jackson, Fort St. Philip, and any related and supporting historical, cultural, or recreational resources located in Plaquemines Parish? (Please be as specific as possible)
2. What are your concerns about Fort Jackson, Fort St. Philip, and any related and supporting historical, cultural, or recreational resources? (Please be as specific as possible)
3. Please identify what lands you think should and should not be included in the study area and provide your rationale.
4. Please describe your suggestions for how Fort Jackson, Fort St. Philip, and any related and supporting historical, cultural, or recreational resources may be managed.
5. Do you have any additional comments or ideas you would like to share?

The following is a brief overview of the comments made by respondents, broken down by the four main topics related to the scoping questions listed above.

Preserving and Interpreting Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip

By designating this area as an NPS unit, commenters feel it would shine a spotlight on a host of unique natural and historic resources in the area that they believe are virtually unknown to many Americans. Commenters also feel designating this area as an NPS unit would provide the resources necessary to create more access for visitors to enjoy these unique resources. Residents perceive preservation of the forts as critical.

One commenter stated that granting national significance to the site through formal recognition of a national park service unit could also contribute to the ongoing restoration of the area, and help bring attention to current erosion issues in the area, and prevent future ecological problems.

Historical, Cultural, and Recreational Resource Concerns

Commenters described the importance of their recreational traditions associated with the Fort Jackson site (BBQs, picnics, fireworks, river tours, citrus festivals, etc.) and expressed the desire to maintain these traditions for years to come.

Commenters stated they are experiencing declining access to their cherished spots from year to year, given the need for further levee improvements in the area (citing rising water, more gators, etc.). They are concerned that they will lose their landmarks to some of these impending environmental threats and believe the National Park Service could offer broad support which may include ecological restoration and or financial support to stabilize these areas. Commenters also expressed concern that they may be restricted from using some of their typical recreational areas and from holding special events that are held at Fort Jackson, should the federal government take control of the resources.



Commenters expressed concern about the current economic situation in their community, but also worried that they will not be the ones to benefit from any money that comes into the area from an influx of tourism. Commenters request to be trained on the best ways to take advantage of any new NPS designation (i.e., to learn about which types of businesses benefit visitors most and how to start running them). Commenters also noted that since any NPS designated site would be funded by taxpayers, it should be run as efficiently as possible.

Suggested Management Options

Comments received from the public meetings and through the project website included ideas for suggested management options and creative uses of potential resources. It was suggested that a future park could be run with as few as 6-10 employees and should recruit from within the local area. A commenter stated that volunteers and partner committees could help provide a good amount of staffing support for free (because, as a government agency, the NPS should “do more with less”). Commenters also included suggestions about pursuing outside funding sources (since funding is lacking in their area), in conjunction with local partner “corporations.”

Other suggestions included a lighthouse monument at the “end of the road” be constructed, allowing for consolidated educational and aesthetic values at one location. Another commenter suggested that Fort Jackson could be renovated and used as the main visitor hub, since it is easier to access than some of the other sites in the parish.

Commenters also suggested that tourists could include school groups, history buffs and hunters/anglers; however, recreation should remain as a priority. Strong opinions were voiced that any recreation concessionaires should be given limited timeframes on their contracts (i.e., 5-10 years), so as to provide for fairness/competitiveness.

Commenters suggested a study area boundary to include Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip while the following each received one mention: Head of the Passes, Port Eads, Pilottown, and Woodland Plantation.

Other Ideas and Concerns

There were a variety of other ideas and concerns voiced by commenters in public scoping. One commenter stated that a future NPS unit in this area could utilize the necessary infrastructure already in place in the region to connect with tourists who travel to and through New Orleans every year. It was also noted that this NPS unit could serve in a Homeland Security capacity, as well, given its strategic location. Commenters suggested that the inclusion of this unit into the national park system should be expedited while there is still momentum for its designation at the grassroots level. One commenter noted that this idea has been discussed since 2002, so they would like to see it finally come to fruition.