

**National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve  
Florida**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Development Concept Plan/Environmental  
Assessment for Kingsley Plantation**

Recommended:

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Chris Hughes  
Superintendent  
Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve

Date

Approved:

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Mark A. Foust  
Regional Director  
Interior Region 2, National Park Service

Date

## INTRODUCTION

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service (NPS) prepared an environmental assessment to examine alternative actions and environmental impacts associated with the development concept plan for the historic Kingsley Plantation, located within Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve.

This Finding of No Significant Impact is the decision document for the Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment for Kingsley Plantation published in June of 2023. The environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact were prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended [42 United States Code (USC) 4321 et seq]; the 2022 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act implementing regulations [40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1500-1508]; the Department of the Interior NEPA regulations (43 CFR Part 46); and NPS Director's Order (DO) 12: Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis and Decision-making (DO-12) and its accompanying NPS NEPA Handbook.

The National Park Service has selected Alternative 3—Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative—as presented in the environmental assessment and summarized below. Attached to this document is the NPS determination that no impairment of park resources will result from implementation of the selected alternative (attachment C).

The statements and conclusion reached in this finding of no significant impact are based on the documentation and analysis provided in the environmental assessment and associated decision file. To the extent necessary, relevant sections of the environmental assessment are summarized and incorporated by reference below. The environmental assessment is available at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/KingsleyDCP>

## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the plan/environmental assessment is to establish management guidance for Kingsley Plantation related to improvements of and adjustments to historically and culturally sensitive infrastructure, visitor capacities, appropriate use, and management zoning. The need for the plan/environmental assessment is to address a range of issues and opportunities associated with the site that include:

- addressing the protection and appropriate interpretation of recent archeological discoveries at Kingsley Plantation
- considering updated guidance and treatment recommendations for the plantation's cultural landscape
- considering actions that could improve vehicle circulation and adequacy of parking at Kingsley Plantation
- considering changes to the trail network to improve site accessibility, visitor orientation, wayfinding, and circulation through the landscape
- reconsidering the 1996 general management plan's zoning at Kingsley Plantation to better align with park priorities to protect and interpret the site's cultural resources
- considering strategies to address increasing visitation at Kingsley Plantation and on Fort George Island

- developing strategies for managing noise, safety, and threats to resources caused by public boating and recreation outside the preserve’s boundaries on the Fort George River

## **SELECTED ALTERNATIVE**

The National Park Service analyzed three alternatives in detail in the environmental assessment: the no-action alternative, which represents current management and provides a basis for comparing environmental impacts of the action alternatives, and two action alternatives that proposed changes to the existing management of the Kingsley Plantation site. Based on the analysis presented in the environmental assessment and after considering public comments, the National Park Service selected alternative 3 (the proposed action and preferred alternative identified in the environmental assessment, hereinafter referred to as the “selected alternative”) because it best meets the purpose and need for action without causing significant impacts to park resources.

The selected alternative is described in full on pages 27 to 33 in the environmental assessment and is summarized below. The actions described are substantively the same as what is in the environmental assessment, but some minor grammatical changes have been incorporated and are disclosed in the errata to the environmental assessment (attachment B).

### **Desired Conditions**

Under the selected alternative, refined desired conditions—statements of aspiration that describe the resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that an agency strives to achieve and maintain in a particular area—for Kingsley Plantation that provide additional detail beyond what is described in the 1996 general management plan will be adopted.

### **Zoning**

Under the selected alternative, the 1996 general management plan will be amended to re-zone the small area at Kingsley Plantation currently zoned as “developed” to “historic.” This zoning change reflects the removal of the modern maintenance facility and will result in the entire plantation being placed in the park’s historic zone.

### **Vehicular Circulation**

Under the selected alternative, the Palmetto Avenue entrance will be retained as the primary vehicular entrance road into Kingsley Plantation. L’Engle Avenue east of Palmetto Avenue will continue to be used for administrative purposes only, with no public vehicular access. The existing park entrance sign will stay in its current location. Vehicles entering the park will continue on Palmetto Avenue and turn west onto L’Engle Avenue toward a new parking lot located west of the Army Navy Lodge and south of the dock. Palmetto Avenue will be limited to twenty feet wide, with larger passing space before the entrance gate and at the intersection of Palmetto Avenue and L’Engle Avenue. Traffic control (post-and-cable fencing) will be installed along Palmetto to separate vehicles from immediately adjacent pedestrian trails, and pedestrian crossings will be added. The new parking lot will be unpaved, with steel rods or other means installed to delineate parking. It will have a capacity for forty visitor vehicles (including four accessible spaces), four oversized parking stalls for buses and RVs, ten staff parking stalls, bike racks, a turnaround loop, and a bus dropoff area.

### **Administration/Maintenance**

Under the selected alternative, the functions of the maintenance area will be relocated to the Old State Barn area and the structures west of the Army Navy Lodge will be removed. The cleared maintenance area will serve as the location for the new parking lot with bear-proof refuse receptacles and a vault toilet. The large trash and recycling bins will remain in the new parking area and screened from view to the extent possible. The power lines and phone lines along Palmetto Avenue and L'Engle Avenue will be removed or buried along the road corridor. The pump house will remain in its current location. A hedge row will be established off the southwest corner of the Army Navy Lodge to screen the employee entrance area.

### **Visitor Facilities**

Under the selected alternative, the visitor contact station will be moved to the west side of the Army Navy Lodge building (to be established in the existing conference room of the structure) and into a larger space that will be in a direct line of sight to the new parking area. Park administrative use will move to the east side of the building. A vault toilet will be added near the new parking lot, with the existing accessible restrooms in the Army Navy Lodge remaining open to visitors. The accessible deck on the north side of the lodge will be remodeled to better complement the structure and serve the existing restrooms and the relocated contact station. A new picnic area southwest of the Army Navy Lodge, with accessible routes to it, will be provided. The viewshed between the picnic area and the Army Navy Lodge will be improved by relocating staff parking to the new parking lot. The picnic area will include a covered, accessible shelter that could accommodate up to thirty people. Existing picnic tables elsewhere on the landscape will be relocated to the new picnic area, under and adjacent to the new structure.

### **Visitor Circulation and Wayfinding**

Under the selected alternative, visitors will exit their vehicles at the new parking lot and immediately be exposed to a view of a historic waterfront landscape and access to visitor amenities, including bathrooms, drinking water, and accessible routes to the dock and visitor contact station.

The circulation around the plantation will include an accessible pedestrian path adjacent to Palmetto Avenue with post-and-cable fencing to separate pedestrians and vehicles along the entirety of the road. The circular accessible trail in front of the slave cabins will be rerouted and further defined. A bisecting accessible trail from the looping trail will cut across the vegetation to provide a shorter loop for visitors that will connect to Palmetto Avenue at the African Burial Ground and continue across the road connecting back to the slave cabin loop trail.

The two slave cabins on either side of Palmetto Avenue will be accessed via crushed coquina for improved accessibility. Accessible routes will also be provided to the picnic area, Planter's House, and sugar mill foundations, which will be cleared of obscuring vegetation, accented on the ground surface with crushed coquina (or a similar material sympathetic to the cultural landscape), and interpreted in place.

Wayfinding signage will be added and improved throughout the plantation landscape. Non-historic Ligustrum hedge rows north of the Army Navy lodge will be removed in order to restore water vistas and reduce spatial confusion for visitors navigating to the contact station.

### **Interpretation**

Under the selected alternative, the audio tour will continue to be provided. Existing interpretive signs will be updated and new signs will be provided at the picnic area, the sugar mill, and along Palmetto Avenue. The African Burial Ground will be publicly interpreted and include the installation

of new interpretive signs on-site. Individual burials will be marked on the ground surface via the placement of shells mixed with naturally occurring iron concretions (as identified as archeologically associated with the graves). A split-rail fence will surround the African Burial Ground, with the entrance and interpretive waysides situated to the east side of the site and associated with the new bisecting trail.

The Planter's House will be made accessible via a crushed coquina (or similar material) trail accessing a platform lift to the porch on the southern side of the building adjacent to the covered walkway. Several rooms will be open to the public during the normal operating hours of the plantation for a self-guided experience. Exhibits will be added to the open rooms to interpret the history and architecture of the Planter's House and the lives of the enslaved people who built it. Carpet runners will be placed in visitor-accessed areas (to protect original historic flooring), and plexiglass partitions will be utilized in doorways to limit physical access to some portions of the house while still permitting viewing.

### **Cultural Resources**

Under the selected alternative, noncontributing features in the cultural landscape such as picnic tables, garden fencing, benches, the portable indigo vat, wood bollards along Palmetto Avenue and the old parking area, and nonfunctional fire-suppression equipment will be removed or relocated to the peripheries of the historic landscape and to the new picnic area. Removal of the parking area will support treatment recommendations found in the plantation's cultural landscape report. The new picnic area and nonhistoric parking area will be installed in a less prominent location within the cultural landscape. The bound rubber mulch pathways will be replaced with crushed coquina (or a similar material), except at building approaches where rubber mulch or similar material will be used to reduce tracking of dust into historic structures. The historic structures and cultural landscape will continue to be maintained and preserved within existing management guidance, including regular resource monitoring, and in response to changing climate situations. Crushed coquina will continue to be used to highlight and interpret the foundation locations of the seven nonremaining slave cabins and be established for use at the sugar mill. Interpretive and contemplative features will be added to demarcate the African Burial Ground. Finally, the primary historic land-based entrance to the plantation through the slave cabin arc will be retained, and an unpaved pedestrian walkway will be delineated within the current roadway corridor.

### **Natural Resources**

Living shoreline projects will continue and the protection of the shoreline will be enhanced by closing it off to visitors. Through coordination with the City of Jacksonville, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Florida Department of Natural Resources, the park will seek the designation of a no-wake zone in the Fort George River north of the plantation. The park will continue to remove damaged and hazard trees in the cultural landscape and maintain an open understory to allow the viewshed between the slave cabins and the Planter's House to be preserved. Vegetation will be cleared in some areas to provide for the new entrance road and sugar mill interpretation, while some vegetation will be restored along Palmetto Avenue when its dimensions are reduced. As the park responds to increasing storm events and a changing climate, there is a likelihood that the seawall protecting the shoreline at the plantation will be extended to the southwest at a future date.

## **Visitor Use Management—Indicators and Visitor Capacities**

In order to support the management guidance within the development concept plan for resource protection, accessibility, and interpretation at Kingsley Plantation, under the selected alternative, the park will implement the following indicators for Kingsley Plantation:

1. number of visitors at one time at key points of interest
2. change in road width at the identified segments
3. number of oversized parking spaces occupied at one time

Indicators are specific resource or experiential attributes that can be measured to track changes in conditions so that progress toward achieving and maintaining desired conditions can be assessed. Detailed descriptions of these indicators can be found in appendix A of the environmental assessment. Thresholds—minimally acceptable conditions associated with each indicator—along with current, potential, and future management strategies to address changing conditions, were identified and are also detailed in appendix A of the environmental assessment. Under the selected alternative, current management strategies already in use may be increased in response to changing conditions, and potential management strategies may be implemented if and when monitoring indicates thresholds are being approached or exceeded.

The park will implement a daily visitor capacity for Kingsley Plantation of up to 600 people per day, with a special event capacity of up to 1,200 people per day, eight days a year. Visitor capacity is defined as the maximum amounts and types of visitor use that an area can accommodate, while achieving and maintaining the desired resource conditions and visitor experience.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION**

The selected alternative best meets the purpose and need for action by establishing management guidance for Kingsley Plantation related to improvements of and adjustments to historically and culturally sensitive infrastructure, visitor capacities, appropriate use, and management zoning. This alternative addresses the protection and appropriate interpretation of recent archeological discoveries at the plantation; incorporates updated guidance and treatment recommendations for the plantation's cultural landscape; improves vehicle circulation and adequacy of parking at Kingsley Plantation; updates the trail network to improve site accessibility, visitor orientation, wayfinding, and circulation through the landscape; amends the 1996 general management plan's zoning at Kingsley Plantation to better align with park priorities to protect and interpret the site's cultural resources; and identifies management strategies to address increasing visitation and noise, safety, and threats to resources caused by public boating and recreation outside the preserve's boundaries on the Fort George River. This decision has been made after considering environmental impacts to resources including the cultural landscape, archeological resources, historic structures, vegetation, soils, and visitor use and experience.

Alternative 2 includes similar elements of the selected alternative, with the biggest difference being that it instead proposes abandoning the Palmetto Avenue entrance into Kingsley Plantation, restoring the road to historic dimensions, and closing it to vehicular traffic. A new entrance and road into the site would be constructed. While this alternative would fulfill the purpose and need for action, construction of a new road would make it significantly more costly to implement. In addition, there were concerns that new road construction could disturb archeological resources and would result in more damage to soils and vegetative resources at the site. Lastly, relocating the historic entrance to the plantation—that exposes arriving visitors immediately to the slave cabin arc—would

impact a visitor experience that has been a historic aspect of the land-based Kingsley Plantation arrival since the site's initial historic occupation.

The no-action alternative does not adequately address the purpose and need for action. If the no-action alternative were selected, the park would not have updated or detailed direction for managing Kingsley Plantation into the future, and none of the recommendations for improving and protecting the condition of the cultural landscape described in the cultural landscape report would be implemented.

## **MITIGATION MEASURES**

The National Park Service places strong emphasis on avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating potentially adverse environmental impacts. Therefore, the National Park Service will implement multiple mitigation measures to protect the natural and cultural resources and the visitor experience the plan could affect. These measures and practices are described in detail in the environmental assessment on pages 32 and 33 and are hereby incorporated by reference. They will be implemented as part of the selected alternative. Additional mitigation measures were not needed to reduce environmental impacts below the significance threshold, as defined by the 2015 NPS NEPA Handbook.

The NPS authority to implement the mitigation measures presented in the environmental assessment comes from the Organic Act of 1916, the National Historic Preservation Act, NPS *Management Policies 2006*, park-specific regulations, and other applicable federal and state requirements.

## **SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA REVIEW**

### **Potentially Affected Environment**

The project area for the plan covers the historic Kingsley Plantation, a popular visitor destination of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. The plantation is located on the northernmost point of Fort George Island in Jacksonville, Florida, and lies on more than 60 acres. It includes the former Planter's House, the plantation's support buildings, and enslaved persons' quarters that were all constructed during the site's primary agricultural use period. These buildings formed the nucleus of the antebellum plantation activities of the island. The site also contains extensive archeological resources including the foundations of a sugar mill and an African Burial Ground, recently identified in the heart of the plantation site but currently invisible on the landscape. The plantation also includes buildings and features from the site's period of recreational and resort-era development as well as modern improvements.

Resources within the potentially affected environment that may be beneficially or adversely impacted include the cultural landscape, archeological resources, historic structures, vegetation and soils, and visitor use and experience.

### **Degree of the Effects of the Action**

The National Park Service considered the following actual or potential project effects in evaluating the degree of effects (40 CFR 1501.3(b)(2)) for this selected alternative.

#### *Beneficial and Adverse, Short-Term, and Long-Term Effects of the Selected Alternative*

No significant impacts to resources were identified that would require analysis in an environmental impact statement. Whether taken individually or as a whole, the impacts of the selected alternative,

including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, do not reach the level of a significant effect because most adverse impacts associated with implementation would result in minimal changes in resource conditions or the impacts would be temporary, lasting only as long as management actions are being executed. Best management practices and mitigation measures identified in chapter 2 of the environmental assessment would further minimize any potential adverse impacts.

### *Cultural Landscape*

As discussed in chapter 4 of the environmental assessment, pages 47 to 49, the selected alternative will have long-term beneficial and adverse impacts on the cultural landscape. Removing non-historic Ligustrum hedge rows, establishing a new picnic area southwest of the Army Navy Lodge and consolidating picnic facilities there, removing noncontributing features, relocating the existing parking lot in the middle of the cultural landscape to a location west of the Army Navy Lodge, replacing bound rubber mulch and marking missing historic features with crushed coquina (or similar material), remodeling the accessible deck on the north side of the Army Navy Lodge to be more compatible with the historic structure, removing or burying utility lines, and maintaining the cultural landscape and historic structures will have long-lasting beneficial impacts on the cultural landscape by improving the views, setting/feeling, and site protection.

Long-term adverse impacts under the selected alternative include vehicles continuing to pass through the cultural landscape and installing non-historic features such as a post-and-cable fence to separate vehicles along Palmetto Avenue from pedestrian traffic along a new unpaved trail. Installing new trails and rerouting trails will introduce nonhistoric elements into the viewshed. Finally, installing a new parking lot, a vault toilet, a split-rail fence to delineate the African Burial Ground, crushed coquina features, and new interpretive and wayfinding signage will introduce nonhistoric features into the cultural landscape. Though this is an adverse impact to the resource, the National Park Service has determined that retaining current vehicular access and adding nonhistoric features into the cultural landscape does not cause a significant impact to the cultural landscape because many nonhistoric features will also be removed under the selected alternative, and the viewshed and overall setting will be improved beyond current conditions. To further mitigate impacts and minimize their effect, new additions will be compatibly designed with the cultural landscape and historic district.

### *Archeological Resources*

As discussed in chapter 4 of the environmental assessment, pages 50 and 51, the selected alternative could have long-term adverse impacts to archeological resources from ground disturbance associated with expanding a portion of L'Engle Avenue by about 7,000 square feet (expanding the roadway width by 10 feet). Further ground-disturbing activities associated with burying utility lines; installing new waysides, trails, and fencing; and removing or adding vegetation could also have long-term adverse impacts on archeological resources because ground disturbance could directly damage or destroy them. The construction of a new parking area near the Army Navy Lodge may impact archeological resources, but its proposed location within the footprint of the previously disturbed maintenance area makes it less likely. Finally, marking the individual graves in the African Burial Ground may make the site more susceptible to vandalism or looting.

The selected alternative will have long-term adverse impacts on the archeological resources of Kingsley Plantation, but the National Park Service has determined that the impacts will not be significant because mitigation measures developed in consultation with the Florida State Historic Preservation Office require a survey before any ground disturbing work begins. Archeological data



recovery projects will further minimize the overall impact to currently unknown archeological resources. Data recovery will also provide for resource understanding and interpretation to the public.

### *Historic Structures*

As discussed in chapter 4 of the environmental assessment, pages 51 and 52, under the selected alternative, historic structures will be maintained per existing management guidance, providing a beneficial impact to the structures. The addition of an Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards-compliant chair lift for the Planter's House will have a negative impact on the historic structure by adding nonhistoric features and altering elements of a historic structure. Opening the house to visitors may increase the opportunity for the introduction of humidity, mold, rot, animal and water infiltration, and detritus in the house. Additionally, opening the house for unsupervised visitor access may have a negative impact on the historic structure due to stress and wear and tear on the original floors and historic fabrics and finishes and due to vandalism. Given that these types of impacts will be gradual and could be minimized with continued resource monitoring, impacts on the historic structures will not be significant. To further minimize impacts from opening the house to unsupervised visitors, carpet runners will be placed in visitor-accessed areas (to protect original historic flooring), and plexiglass partitions will be utilized in doorways to limit physical access to some portions of the house while still permitting viewing.

### *Vegetation and Soils*

As discussed in chapter 4 of the environmental assessment, pages 53 to 55, under the selected alternative, the total amount of forested vegetation that will be removed is about 0.75 acres, which is about 1.25% of the entire Kingsley Plantation historic site. The new parking lot will encompass a footprint of about 0.62 acres. This area has been historically used as a barn area and more recently as a maintenance area. It is therefore sparsely vegetated with already-compacted soil resources. Moving staff parking from the previous undesignated grassy area behind the Army Navy Lodge to the new parking area will allow the grassy area (approximately 0.16 acres) to restore to more natural conditions and will provide a more sustainable area for staff to use. The park will continue to remove damaged and hazard trees in the cultural landscape and maintain an open understory to allow the viewshed between the slave cabins and the Planter's House to be preserved. These actions will have beneficial impact to vegetation, as damaged or hazard trees that are removed will also remove potential disease and pest vectors from the area.

Under the selected alternative, burying about 1,500 feet of power lines and phone lines along Palmetto Avenue and L'Engle Avenue will involve trenching methods that will temporarily impact soils and vegetation. These trenched areas will be developed alongside and within the access road right-of-way and will restore to more natural conditions within a few months. The addition of a crushed coquina threshold for access to two of the slave cabins and a crushed coquina (or similar material) path for the sugar mill will have beneficial impacts to minimize soil compaction and long-term trampling impacts by keeping visitors on a hardened surface.

Through coordination with the City of Jacksonville's Waterways Commission, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Florida Department of Natural Resources, the park will seek the designation of a no-wake zone in the Fort George River north of the plantation as part of the selected alternative. These efforts could provide benefits to vegetation and soils along shorelines, as plants will be better able to root and stabilize these areas more effectively without the added stress of boat wake and erosion.

Overall, new development at Kingsley Plantation will not cause significant impacts to soil and vegetative resources because the loss of vegetation will be relatively small compared to the 60-acre project site and nearly imperceptible when compared to Fort George Island and the preserve as a whole. Under the selected alternative, no unique or sensitive vegetative communities, soils, or wildlife habitat will be impacted.

### *Visitor Use and Experience*

As discussed in chapter 4 of the environmental assessment, pages 55 to 59, the desired conditions, indicators, thresholds, and visitor capacities established in the selected alternative will provide a new framework for evaluating and managing visitor use while protecting important resources and experiences. The suite of potential management strategies included as part of the indicators, thresholds, and visitor capacities will generally have beneficial impacts to visitor use and experience, though some management strategies will likely have adverse impacts to visitor use and experience.

Under the selected alternative, the visitor capacities for day-to-day use and special events will be established above current use levels. Implementing visitor capacities for the site helps ensure that desired conditions are achieved and will have a beneficial impact on visitor use and experience, with the exception that if visitation nears or reaches capacity, there could be adverse impact on a subset of visitors who will not be able to visit on their desired day or may be temporarily displaced from the park to a different day.

Under the selected alternative, the Palmetto Avenue entrance will be retained as the primary vehicular entrance road into Kingsley Plantation. A pedestrian path will be added parallel to Palmetto Avenue with post-and-cable fencing to separate vehicles from people. The traffic control fencing will improve visitor safety and reduce use conflict from current conditions, though visitors could still walk on the road. Retaining Palmetto Avenue as the park entrance route will ensure that all visitors to the site have the opportunity to directly access and connect with the history of enslavement at the plantation. However, a desired condition for the site states: “Once away from higher densities of visitors and visitor facilities ... visitors are able to experience Kingsley Plantation as a place of reflection, healing, and resilience.” The noise and dust from vehicles regularly driving by the slave cabins and African Burial Ground will have the potential to detract from the solemnity of the area. Therefore, this component of the selected alternative will not contribute to a contemplative setting that supports the achievement of the desired condition. Considered together, retaining Palmetto Avenue as a vehicular entrance and adding a pedestrian path will have both beneficial and adverse impacts on visitor use and experience.

The new parking lot will improve circulation and congestion by providing an appropriately sized and designed area for visitor parking. It would also provide visitors immediate access to key amenities, including bathrooms. Visitors will be able to orient themselves to the site by entering the nearby visitor contact station, where park personnel and information would be available to provide clear direction on where to go and what to do next. The larger visitor contact station, additional restroom, and a new thirty-person picnic shelter will better accommodate higher levels of visitation than existing facilities. Removal, relocation, or screening of maintenance structures, utilities, and noncontributing features on the landscape will improve the historic viewshed and overall setting by better aligning with the plantation’s cultural landscape. New or updated wayfinding signage will allow visitors to more easily navigate the grounds, as some of the existing signage is worn and difficult to read. Improving or adding interpretive signage and exhibits, publicly interpreting the African Burial Ground, and providing additional access to the Planter’s House by offering self-

guided tours and installing an accessible platform lift would all provide additional or enhanced opportunities for visitors to learn about and understand the site. The plexiglass partitions that would limit physical access to some portions of the Planter's House could be an adverse impact on some visitors who want to tour the entire building.

Under the selected alternative, the park will provide accessible routes and features throughout the site. This will improve the ability for all visitors to access the site, especially those with limited mobility, and make navigation more intuitive and safer, as visitors could reach the slave cabins and African Burial Ground via paths that allow them to avoid passing moving vehicles.

Closing the shoreline in front of the plantation to public access could have an adverse impact on some visitors, including anglers, who want to access the Fort George River. But with more than 925 miles of shoreline in Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve alone, visitors will still have ample opportunity to seek out water-based activities nearby. Some visitors may view fishing as incompatible with the reflective experience they are seeking at the site, so closing the shoreline will have a positive impact on their visitor experience.

Lastly, the construction or installation of the proposed parking area, facilities, signage, and paths will impact the experience of some visitors to Kingsley Plantation. The park will implement mitigation measures that will diminish the impacts of the selected alternative, though they will not eliminate the impacts entirely. These adverse impacts to visitor use and experience, however, would be temporary and only last the duration of the construction period.

Ultimately, the selected alternative will contribute long-lasting and broad beneficial impacts to visitor use and experience because of comprehensive improvements to the built environment, interpretive offerings, and visitor use management direction, which affect all visitors. Most adverse impacts to visitor use and experience, on the other hand, will only affect a portion of visitors for a portion of their visit. Overall, the environmental assessment did not identify significant adverse impacts on visitor use and experience.

#### *Degree to Which the Proposed Action Affects Public Health and Safety*

The selected alternative will improve public health through the installation of an additional toilet on site. Visitor safety will be enhanced through improvements to vehicular and visitor circulation throughout the site; traffic control (post-and-rail fencing) will be installed along Palmetto Avenue to separate vehicles from immediately adjacent pedestrian trails, and pedestrian crossings will be added.

#### *Effects That Would Violate Federal, State, Tribal, or Local Law Protecting the Environment*

The selected alternative does not threaten or violate applicable federal, state, or local environmental laws or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

## **PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

The National Park Service provided two public review opportunities during the planning process. Between September 12 and October 14, 2022, public input was solicited through civic engagement to seek feedback on initial alternative concepts. The park held three public meetings—one virtual and two in person—and met directly with Gullah Geechee and Kingsley descent communities.

From June 30 to July 30, 2023, the National Park Service conducted a 30-day public comment period under NEPA on the plan/environmental assessment. A news release was made available to the public

describing the purpose and contents of the plan/environmental assessment. The news release also informed readers how to submit comments via the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website.

During the public comment period, the National Park Service received two individual correspondences directly on the PEPC website. The comments were from Utah and Florida. No changes were made to the selected alternative based on correspondences received. The comments did not result in any changes to the assessment of impacts or increase in the level of adverse impacts acknowledged in the environmental assessment. NPS responses to public comments are included in attachment A.

The National Park Service sent a letter to the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer on September 1, 2022, to initiate formal consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. On June 7, 2023, park staff at Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve provided a tour of Kingsley Plantation to staff from the State Historic Preservation Office and discussed the selected alternative and consulted on future efforts that could lessen any adverse impacts to historic properties during implementation of the development concept plan. The National Park Service sent another letter on July 10, 2023, describing the preferred alternative's effects on cultural landscapes, archeological resources, and historic structures and the proposed mitigation measures to lessen adverse effects on these cultural resources. The National Park Service requested a phased compliance approach that would address each individual proposed undertaking outlined in the plan. On September 27, 2023, the Florida State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the National Park Service's proposal for future phased compliance.

The National Park Service sent letters to the Chairman of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, the Chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Principal Chief of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and the Principal Chief of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma on September 1, 2022, to initiate formal consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. On July 6, 2023, the National Park Service sent additional letters to the Chairman of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, the Chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the Principal Chief of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and the Principal Chief of the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma for formal consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The National Park Service requested the tribes'/nations' review and concurrence related to the phased compliance approach for addressing potential adverse effects to historic properties. No responses were received to any of the park's correspondence with tribes. The park will continue to consult with tribes/nations as elements of the development concept plan are implemented.

Under the Endangered Species Act, the National Park Service conducted informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In consultation it was determined the selected alternative would either have no effect on or be unlikely to adversely affect threatened or endangered species, proposed listed species, designated critical habitat, candidate species, or migratory birds. The National Park Service sent a letter to the US Fish and Wildlife Service notifying them of this determination on July 21, 2023, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service indicated their concurrence with the determination on September 25, 2023.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on the information contained in the environmental assessment, the National Park Service has determined that the selected alternative does not constitute a major federal action having a

significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be required.

This finding is based on consideration of Council on Environmental Quality criteria for significance (40 CFR 1501.3 [b]) regarding the potentially affected environment and degrees of effects of the impacts described in the environmental assessment.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

**A: Public Comment Summary**

**B: Errata Indicating Text Changes to the Environmental Assessment**

**C: Non-Impairment Determination**

## **ATTACHMENT A: PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY**

Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve released the Development Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment for Kingsley Plantation to the public during a 30-day period from June 30 through July 30, 2023.

The National Park Service received two correspondences, which were documented on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website from individuals within the states of Florida and Utah.

The comments received on the development concept plan/environmental assessment were not substantive. Substantive comments are those that:

- question, with reasonable basis, the accuracy of the information in the NEPA document;
- question, with reasonable basis, the adequacy of the environmental analysis;
- present reasonable alternatives other than those presented in the NEPA document; or
- cause changes or revisions in the proposal.

The two comments received indicated support for action alternatives presented in the development concept plan/environmental assessment, as well as support for the interpretation of the African Burial Ground and support for the documented consideration of climate change impacts and endangered species protection presented in the environmental assessment.

## ATTACHMENT B: ERRATA INDICATING TEXT CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This errata contains corrections and minor revisions to the environmental assessment. Page numbers and section/sentence locations referenced pertain to the public review draft environmental assessment from June through July 2023. The edits and corrections in this errata do not result in any substantial modification being incorporated into the selected action, and it has been determined that the revisions do not require additional environmental analysis. The errata, combined with the environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact, comprises the only amendments deemed necessary for the purposes of completing compliance and documentation for the project. Existing text to remain in the environmental assessment is found in *italics*, additions to the text are underlined, and deleted text is shown in ~~strikeout~~. These amendments to the text are detailed in this errata and will be incorporated into the environmental assessment and posted to the public website with the decision document.

**Chapter 1, Federally Listed Species (page 9):** *Proposed activities in the Kingsley Plantation project area would have no effect on or would be unlikely to adversely affect these species or their habitat per Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Desired Conditions (page 18):** *This alternative would refine and provide ~~refines and provides~~ additional detail to the desired conditions described in the general management plan.*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Zoning (page 21):** *The historic zone ~~will~~ would be managed to preserve, protect, and interpret cultural resources and their settings as defined by historic structure reports, historic resource studies, and cultural landscape reports (NPS 1996).*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Zoning (page 22):** *This zone ~~will~~ would be managed for the provision and maintenance of park development to serve the needs of management and visitors. Thus, this zone ~~will~~ would include lands and waters where nonhistoric park development and intensive use substantially alter the natural environment (NPS 1996).*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Visitor Circulation and Wayfinding (page 24):** *Crushed coquina is a groundcover made of ground coquina, a sedimentary rock composed of assorted fragments of shells. Similar natural materials equally sympathetic to the appearance of the cultural landscape could be substituted for it where it is referenced in this document.*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Cultural Resources (page 25):** *The bound rubber mulch pathways would be replaced with crushed coquina, except at building approaches where rubber mulch or similar material ~~will~~ would be used to reduce tracking of dust into historic structures. The historic structures and cultural landscape ~~will~~ would continue to be maintained and preserved within existing management guidance, including regular resource monitoring, and in response to changing climate situations.*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Visitor Use Management, Indicators and Thresholds (page 26):** *The impacts of these strategies and actions are analyzed in chapter 3 ~~4~~.*

**Chapter 2, Alternative 2, Visitor Use Management, Visitor Capacity (page 26):** *The impacts of implementing the visitor capacity and potential management strategies are analyzed in chapter 3 ~~4~~.*



**Chapter 2, Mitigation Measures Common to Alternatives 2 and 3, Cultural Landscape (page 32):** *The park ~~will~~ would complete an update to the park's long range interpretive plan to help visitors' understanding of the historic Kingsley Plantation and more modern changes.*

**Chapter 2, Mitigation Measures Common to Alternatives 2 and 3, Historic Structures (page 33):** The park would continue to monitor historic structures to assess trends or issues from environmental conditions and visitation.

**Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences of the Alternatives, Historic Structures, Alternative 2 (page 51):** *However, these types of impacts would be gradual and could be minimized with continued resource monitoring and by placing carpet runners in visitor accessed areas (to protect original historic flooring) and plexiglass partitions in doorways to limit physical access to some portions of the house, while still permitting viewing.*

**Chapter 4, Environmental Consequences of the Alternatives, Vegetation and Soils, Alternative 2 (page 54):** *The area proposed for the parking lot had been historically used as a barn area and more recently as a maintenance area ~~and is sparsely vegetated.~~ It is sparsely vegetated with already compacted soil resources. Moving staff parking from the previous undesignated grassy area behind the Army Navy Lodge to the new parking area would allow the grassy area (approximately 0.16 acres) to restore to more natural conditions and provide a more sustainable area for staff to use.*

**Appendix A: Kingsley Plantation Indicators, Thresholds, and Visitor Capacity (page 78):** *One or more of the following management strategies could also be considered for controlling special event size (compliance will be conducted if needed), if other described management strategies are not effective and there is evidence that conditions are trending away from desired conditions:*

## ATTACHMENT C: NON-IMPAIRMENT DETERMINATION

The Organic Act of 1916 directs the National Park Service to “conserve the scenery, natural, and historic objects, and wildlife in the System units and to provide for the enjoyment of the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wildlife in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (54 USC 100101). NPS *Management Policies* 2006, section 1.4.4, explains the prohibition on impairment of park resources and values:

*While Congress has given the Service the management discretion to allow impacts within parks, that discretion is limited by the statutory requirement (generally enforceable by the federal courts) that the Park Service must leave park resources and values unimpaired unless a particular law directly and specifically provides otherwise. This, the cornerstone of the Organic Act, establishes the primary responsibility of the National Park Service. It ensures that park resources and values will continue to exist in a condition that will allow the American people to have present and future opportunities for enjoyment of them.*

An action constitutes impairment when its impacts “harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise will be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values” (NPS 2006, section 1.4.5). To determine impairment, the National Park Service must evaluate the “particular resources and values that will be affected; the severity, duration, and timing of the impact; the direct and indirect effects of the impact; and the cumulative effects of the impact in question and other impacts. An impact on any park resource or value may constitute impairment, but an impact would be more likely to constitute an impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is:

- necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park;
- key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or
- identified in the park’s general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance” (NPS 2006, section 1.4.5).

Resources that were carried forward for detailed analysis in the environmental assessment, and for which a no-impairment determination has been made, include cultural landscapes, archeological resources, historic structures, and vegetation and soils. A no-impairment determination is not necessary for visitor use and experience because this impact topic is not generally considered a park resource or value subject to the no-impairment standard (see NPS 2006, section 1.4.6).

### CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The Kingsley Plantation site, a cultural landscape, is considered a fundamental resource and value of Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. The selected alternative will include vehicles continuing to pass through the cultural landscape and installation of nonhistoric features. Though these are minor adverse impacts to the resource, the National Park Service has determined that retaining current vehicular access and adding nonhistoric features into the cultural landscape does not cause a significant impact to the cultural landscape because many nonhistoric features will also be removed under the selected alternative, and the viewshed and overall setting will be improved from current conditions. To mitigate impacts and minimize their effect on the cultural landscape, new additions to

the cultural landscape will be compatibly designed to protect vistas across and into the cultural landscape and maintain the historic setting and feeling of the Kingsley Plantation. For these reasons, the National Park Service has determined the selected alternative will not result in impairment of the cultural landscape.

## **ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

Archeological resources are considered a fundamental resource and value of Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. The selected alternative could have long-term adverse impacts to a small fraction of the archeological resources at Kingsley Plantation from ground disturbance associated with construction activities. Mitigation measures to lessen the impacts to archeological resources include the National Park Service undertaking archeological survey and monitoring for actions requiring ground disturbance. Data recovery projects will occur as necessary, and documentation and analysis of archeological sites would be an appropriate mitigation for damage or loss of resources. The selected alternative will not result in impairment of this park resource because archeological data would be preserved, and anticipated ground disturbance will occur in relatively small areas.

## **HISTORIC STRUCTURES**

Historic structures are integral to the significance of the Kingsley Plantation site, which is considered a fundamental resource and value of the park. Under the selected alternative, historic structures will be altered and visitors will have increased access to them. To lessen the impacts to historic structures, the National Park Service will install carpet runners and plexiglass barriers to protect the historic floors and areas of the Planter's House where visitors are not allowed to enter. For installing an Architectural Barriers Act-compliant accessible chair lift, the National Park Service will consult with the Florida State Historic Preservation Office to determine the best location, materials, and design to lessen the impact of placing a nonhistoric feature adjacent to the Planter's House. For these reasons, the National Park Service has determined the selected alternative will not result in impairment of historic structures because steps will be taken to ensure character-defining features of the planter's house are protected, and changes needed to accommodate access will be established in a manner that compliments the historic character of the structure.

## **VEGETATION AND SOILS**

Healthy, diverse, and productive vegetation and soils are fundamental to the park's purpose because they contribute to the protection of its natural ecology. Under the selected alternative, vegetation will be removed, and soil will be disturbed and compacted. The loss of vegetation will be minimal—1.25% of the 60-acre project site—and negligible when compared to Fort George Island and the preserve as a whole. No unique or sensitive vegetative communities, soils, or wildlife habitat will be impacted. Therefore, the selected alternative will not result in impairment of this park resource.

## **SUMMARY**

The National Park Service has determined that the implementation of the selected alternative will not constitute impairment of the resources of the park. This conclusion is based on consideration of the park's purpose and significance, a thorough analysis of the environmental impacts described in the environmental assessment, comments provided by the public and others, and the professional judgment of the decision maker guided by the direction in *NPS Management Policies 2006*.