

UPDATE:

Trail Improvements at Barataria Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve
Louisiana



The Barataria Preserve of Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve

The Barataria Preserve is comprised of over 26,000 acres of Louisiana wetlands, that include bottomland hardwood forest, cypress swamp, freshwater and intermediate (between freshwater and brackish) marshes, bayous, and canals. The network of boardwalks and walking trails allows visitors to access the wild places of Barataria Preserve to observe alligators, snakes, native plants, and over 200 species of birds.

In 2009, Public Law 111-11 added new lands to the Barataria Preserve, including a portion of Lafitte’s Wetland Trace Bayou Levee Trail.

The Barataria Preserve Visitor Center will be relocated to the Education Center to enhance the visitor’s experience. As a result, the trail formerly known as the Education Center trail will be upgraded, renamed, and made accessible to the public. The current Visitor Center building will be repurposed to meet other critical park needs.

What is the Project?

The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to improve the trail system in the Barataria Preserve as funding allows by:

- Repairing hurricane-related damage to specific boardwalks and trails.
- Rebuilding damaged boardwalks at a higher elevation with rails with sustainable construction materials for greater resilience to flooding, sea level rise, and land subsidence.
- Removing trail segments that are often flooded, allowing these to naturally revegetate and return to a natural state.

What is the Purpose and Need for the Project?

The trails and boardwalks of the NPS’ Barataria Preserve were extensively damaged by Hurricane Ida, which made landfall on August 29, 2021, as a Category 4 storm with maximum sustained winds of 150 mph and storm surge.

Replacement of the damaged boardwalks with more resilient materials would allow the trails to be able to withstand and rapidly recover from disruption from future hurricane and storm impacts, subsidence, and sea level rise, while allowing for their continued use.

Why not rebuild all the boardwalks?

No final decisions have been made regarding what trails will be rebuilt. Given the enormous challenges from increasing storm frequencies and intensities and rising sea levels to maintain the existing boardwalks, the park would like to have a smaller proportion of the trail system on boardwalks and, over time, transition to more of the trails being located on the higher grounds of the natural levees.

Boardwalk Construction and Materials

Boardwalks will be rebuilt in accordance with both Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) requirements and Outdoor Recreation Trail Guidelines, with railings where appropriate.

Boardwalks will be elevated approximately 1–2 feet higher than the existing elevation. This height is determined by 50-year sea-level rise and land subsidence projections.

Typical materials used for these boardwalks include thermally treated wooden handrails with wood posts and cable guardrails; 5-foot wide composite flow thru decking; preservative-treated wood substructure; and 25-foot pilings of either preservative-treated wood, or PVC vinyl composite.

When would the Project occur?

The Architectural and Engineering Design phase of the project has begun. Construction is expected to start in May 2024, and will be phased, meaning that not all boardwalks will be closed to the public at the same time. As an update to our previous newsletter, the rebuild of Ring Levee Trail and Christmas Road is almost complete, with reopening expected in Fall 2023.

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Preliminary Alternative A (NO ACTION)

- Under preliminary alternative A (no action), the NPS would maintain the existing conditions at the Barataria Preserve trail system.
- No change to existing alignment, elevation, or materials of boardwalks or trails, with flooded segments closed for visitor safety as needed. Periodic maintenance and cyclic repairs.
- The trail alignment stays the same as depicted in the 2015 trail brochure.
- This preliminary no action alternative is used as a basis to compare and evaluate the other preliminary alternatives.

Preliminary Alternative B (Rebuild and Use As-Is)

- Rebuild three boardwalks
 - Education Center Trail (will become the New Visitor Center Trail) (Figure 1)
 - Marsh Overlook (Figure 2)
 - Bayou Coquille Trail (Figure 2)
- Use AS IS for their natural life with constant repairs and expect frequent closures due to trails being flooded and damaged. These boardwalks are often under water and flooded.
 - Visitor Center Trail (will become the Old Visitor Center Trail) (Figure 3a)
 - Palmetto Trail (Figure 3a)
- Includes potential for new connector trails
 - Reuse of construction access routes to Plantation Trail and New Visitor Center Trail
 - New connector between East and West legs of Old Barataria Trail
 - New connector between Plantation Trail and Bayou Coquille Trail
 - New connector between Ring Levee and Wood Duck Trails
- Includes periodic maintenance and cyclic repairs to all other trails, with flooded segments closed for visitor safety as needed.
- Includes update to trail brochure.
- Includes existing trails at Lafitte's Wetland Trace (Figure 4)
- As funding allows.

Preliminary Alternative C (Rebuild and Relocate)

- Rebuild three boardwalks.
 - Education Center Trail (New Visitor Center Trail) (Figure 1)
 - Marsh Overlook (Figure 2)
 - Bayou Coquille Trail (Figure 2)
- Relocate as primitive trails on the highest natural levees and current locations restored to natural conditions. These boardwalks are often under water and flooded.
 - Visitor Center Trail (Old Visitor Center Trail) (Figure 3b)
 - Palmetto Trail (Figure 43b)
- Includes potential for new connector trails
 - Reuse of construction access routes to Plantation Trail and New Visitor Center Trail
 - New connector between East and West legs of Old Barataria Trail
 - New connector between Plantation Trail and Bayou Coquille Trail
 - New connector between Ring Levee and Wood Duck Trails
- Includes periodic maintenance and cyclic repairs to all other trails, with flooded segments closed for visitor safety as needed.
- Includes update to trail brochure.
- Includes existing trails at Lafitte's Wetland Trace (Figure 4)
- As funding allows.

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Education Center Trail/ New Visitor Center Trail

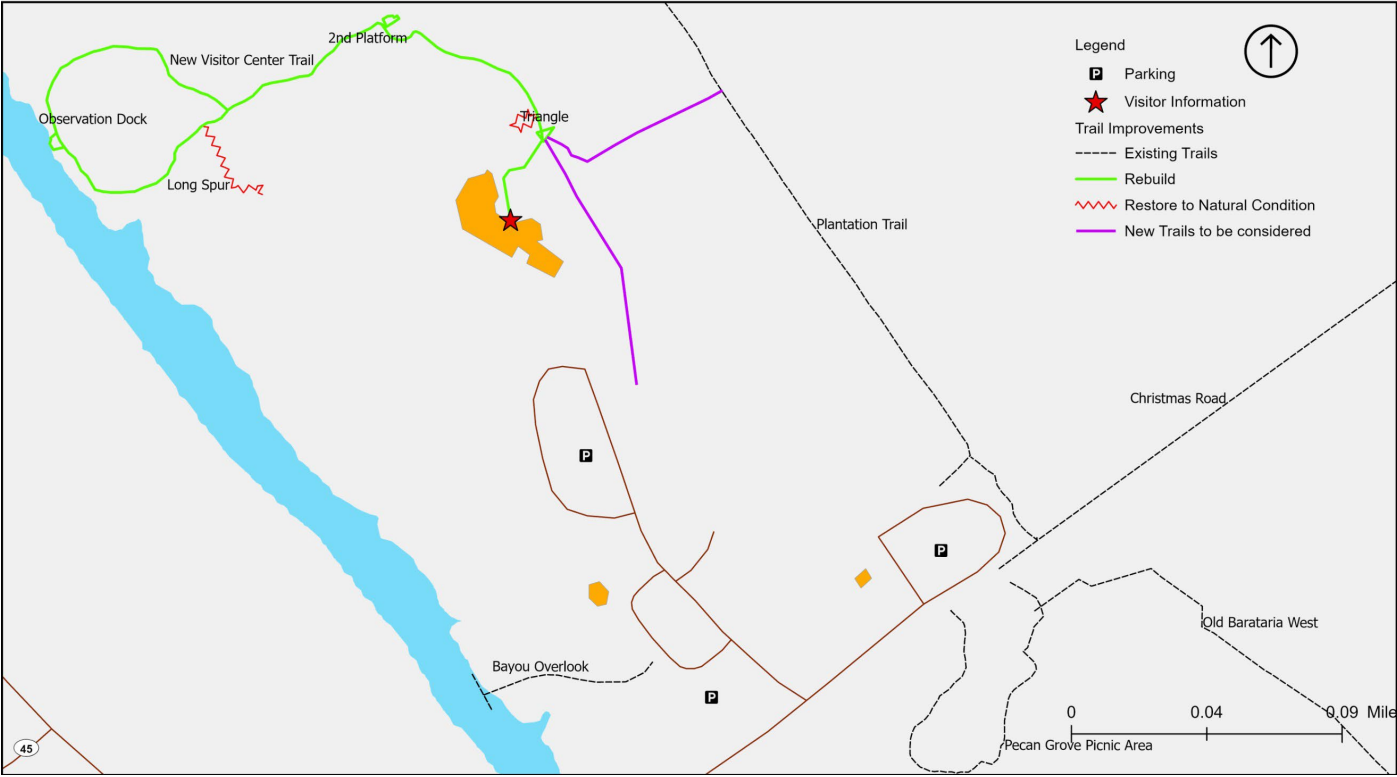


Figure 1: Detail of Education Center Trail (New Visitor Center Trail) and relocated Visitor Center.

The Barataria Preserve Visitor Center will be relocated to the Education Center to enhance the visitor’s experience. As a result, the trail formerly known as the Education Center trail will be upgraded, renamed, and made accessible to the public.

- Rebuild and elevate boardwalks 1-2 feet higher within the existing trail footprint.
- Rebuild main trail to width 5 feet wide.
- Rebuild and expand Observation Dock and 2nd Platform.
- Remove and restore Long Spur turnout.
- Expand and add new interpretive platform at Triangle
- Possible reuse of construction access routes as trails after construction is completed

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Bayou Coquille and Marsh Overlook Trails



Figure 2: Detail Bayou Coquille Trail and Marsh Overlook Trail:

- Rebuild and elevate boardwalks 1-2 feet higher within the existing trail footprint.
- Add new benches and waysides at bumpouts and turnouts.
- Rebuild main trail to width 5 feet wide.

Bayou Coquille Trail:

- Remove and restore current trail entrance
- Convert service entrance to new trail entrance
- Remove and restore turnouts Abundance of Life and Spell of the Swamp and Midden
- Rebuild turnouts Monarch of the Forest and Flooded Forest
- Improve hardened surfaces between ramps

Marsh Overlook Trail:

- Rebuild decking and substructure of Kenta Canal Pedestrian Bridge to improve load bearing and accessibility
- Remove and restore turnouts Kenta Overlook, Sinkers, South Overlook, East Overlook
- Minimal repairs to Marsh Overlook Platform and Marsh Overlook Bridge
- Add new Rest Area bump out with bench and wayside
- Rebuild and expand Liquid Land turnout

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Old Visitor Center and Palmetto Trails

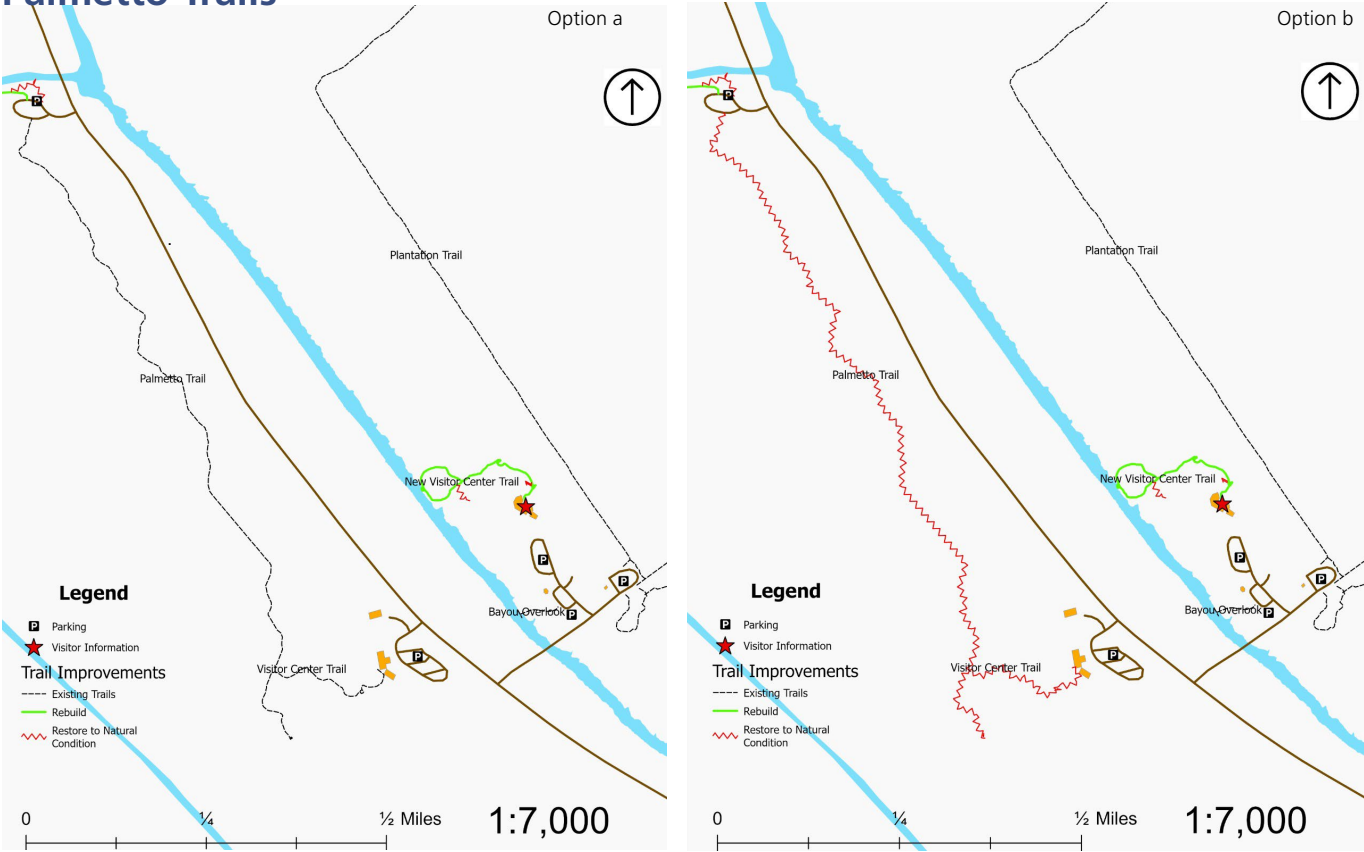


Figure 3: Detail of Visitor Center Trail and Palmetto Trail:

The Barataria Preserve Visitor Center will be relocated to the Education Center to enhance the visitor’s experience. The current Visitor Center building will be repurposed to meet other critical park needs.

As a result, there are two options for the futures of the Visitor Center Trail and Palmetto Trail:

- a) The Visitor Center and Palmetto Boardwalks would be used AS IS for their natural life with constant repairs and expect frequent closures due to trails being flooded and damaged. These boardwalks are often under water and flooded.
- b) Visitor Center and Palmetto boardwalks would be relocated as primitive trails on the highest natural levees and current locations restored to natural conditions.

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Figure 4: Detail of Existing trail at Fleming Plantation Area – Bayou Levee Trail

In 2009, Public Law 111-11 added new lands to the Barataria Preserve, including a portion of Lafitte’s Wetland Trace Bayou Levee Trail. Access along this existing trail provides a glimpse of the newest addition to the park’s Barataria Preserve.

Per the website <https://townofjeanlafitte.com/trails/>, “Behind Lafitte’s Barataria Museum lies the Wetland Trace, a boardwalk trail through a cypress swamp leading to a bayou, rookery and marsh area. Part of a 41- acre nature preserve, the mysterious terrain is home to swamp wildlife. Trails include covered pavilions, benches and scenic overlooks. The boardwalk gives visitors excellent access to wildlife, including alligators, snakes, spiders, turtles and birds. Near the end of the boardwalk lies an egret rookery, tucked away high in the swaying cypress moss. This is also a great place for viewing Louisiana flora, such as the native Louisiana Iris, water lilies and orchids.”

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How to Comment

Your participation will help shape this project. We welcome your ideas, concerns, and suggestions.
Please comment using one of the following methods.

You may submit comments via the NPS planning website:

https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BARA_trails



View from Marsh Overlook Bridge, looking south.

You may also submit written comments by mail to:

Superintendent
Attn: Barataria Trails
419 Decatur Street
New Orleans, LA 70130

Please note that your entire comment, including your personal information, may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can request that we withhold your personal identifying information from public view, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

More information will be included eventually at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/BARA_trails

Thank You!