

# FORT SUMTER AND FORT MOULTRIE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

## VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT PLAN PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY REPORT

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PHOTO: NICOLE BOYD, INTERIOR OF FORT SUMTER, AUGUST 2022

# CONTENTS

Background .....	2
Correspondence Analysis .....	2
Definition of Terms .....	2
Comment Summary.....	3
Topic Question 1: What issues most interfere with your ability to access and experience the park? Are there issues that have not been identified that the planning team should address in this plan? .....	3
Topic Question 2: How would a change in the number of departure points impact your visit to Fort Sumter? .....	4
Topic Question 3: How would these ideas (changes in year-round access, location of departure points, change in services offered, etc.) influence your visit to Fort Sumter? .....	4
Topic Question 4: Are there other strategies not already presented that you would like the park to consider in order to address the identified issues? .....	4
Other Comments .....	6

## BACKGROUND

From January 16 through February 15, 2024, the National Park Service (NPS) held a public comment period to receive feedback to better understand issues and opportunities to improve the visitor experience at Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie National Historical Park.

To inform the public of the opportunity to comment, the National Park Service published a newsletter and held virtual public meetings describing key issues, draft strategies, and instructions for providing feedback. The newsletter was made available on the project website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/FortSumterVUM>) and was sent to interested parties by email. Copies of the newsletter were made available in the visitor centers. Stakeholders were emailed with information about the public comment period, the dates of the virtual meetings, and the public meeting recording. The National Park Service shared the newsletter with affiliated Tribal Nations. The virtual public meetings were held on February 1, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. eastern standard time.

## CORRESPONDENCE ANALYSIS

During the public comment period, the National Park Service received 14 correspondences, including one from the Town of Sullivan’s Island, one from The Coalition to Protect America's National Parks, and 12 from unaffiliated individuals. The National Park Service collected public comments on this early phase of the planning effort to understand public perspectives on key issues and draft strategies for visitor use management at Fort Sumter, Liberty Square, the Fort Moultrie Military Reservation, and the US Coast Guard Historic District. Comments were received from 5 states and the District of Columbia. The following table shows the geographic distribution of public comments that were submitted.

**Table 1. Distribution of Public Comments by State**

State	Number of Correspondences
District of Columbia	1
Indiana	1
North Carolina	1
South Carolina	9
Utah	1
Wisconsin	1

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions are used for the associated terms in this document.

**Correspondence.** A correspondence is the entire document received from a commenter. It can be in the form of a letter, written comment form, note card, or other written communication on the plan to the park.

**Comment.** A comment is a portion of the text in a correspondence that addresses a single subject or issue. It could include such information as an expression of support or opposition to the use of draft strategy, a suggestion for a potential management strategy, or additional data regarding existing conditions or key issues.

**Comment Summary.** A description of a group of comments that are focused on a common subject. Comment summaries combine similar comments.

## **COMMENT SUMMARY**

The National Park Service sought feedback on the development of the visitor use management plan by asking the public to answer the following four questions:

- What issues most interfere with your ability to access and experience the park? Are there issues that have not been identified that the planning team should address in this plan?
- How would a change in the number of departure points impact your visit to Fort Sumter?
- How would these ideas (changes in year-round access, location of departure points, change in services offered, etc.) influence your visit to Fort Sumter?
- Are there other strategies not already presented that you would like the park to consider in order to address the identified issues?

Other comments and suggestions on the proposed Visitor Use Management Plan that did not fall into the four topic questions are summarized after in the section called Other Comments.

Within the comment summary that follows, major concepts and unique perspectives are represented from the comments received during the public engagement period.

### **Topic Question 1: What issues most interfere with your ability to access and experience the park? Are there issues that have not been identified that the planning team should address in this plan?**

One commenter mentioned the lack of shade as a major concern, especially during the summer. A few mentioned the wheelchair lift is not working, and the dock ramp is too steep and not wide enough to be accessible. Several commenters also mentioned that the restrooms need repair. Another commenter said the public address system's volume is inconsistent at different areas of the ferry.

Commenters noted that visitors have trouble getting to Fort Sumter and end up at Fort Moultrie because the address on Google Maps directs them to park headquarters at Fort Moultrie. One commenter also noted that the informational materials provided have an ample history of Fort Sumter but lack detailed visualizations to help orient visitors to the park. A few commenters mentioned that the length of time before the ferry leaves Fort Sumter, under an hour, is not enough to take in the full experience.

Commenters noted that the visitors departing from Patriots Point miss the visitor center experience that Liberty Square offers. Commentors mentioned that the video monitors at Patriots Point show old and uninteresting information, so many visitors do not pay attention to them. They also noted that lines for the ferry form outside of the video monitor area. Another commenter mentioned that each departure point should offer the same experience to all visitors.

A few commenters mentioned that the concession fee for boat transportation is an economic barrier. Another problem is that some visitors may arrive at the park without reservations or awareness of the fee. A commentor noted that including the Charles Pinckney National Historic Site as a fee site would also be a barrier to visitation.

### **Topic Question 2: How would a change in the number of departure points impact your visit to Fort Sumter?**

A few commenters were happy with the current departure points. Others said changes in the number of departure points would not change anything for them. Others pointed out that having multiple departures makes it easier for people visiting or staying on either side of the bridge to access Fort Sumter. A commenter suggested that NPS staff should be stationed at departure points.

A couple of commenters suggested a departure point from Fort Moultrie's intracoastal waterway dock, which could help increase visits to Fort Moultrie.

### **Topic Question 3: How would these ideas (changes in year-round access, location of departure points, change in services offered, etc.) influence your visit to Fort Sumter?**

Two commenters noted that changes would not influence their visit to Fort Sumter. One commenter noted that more frequent ferries would make the park more available for visitors' schedules. A commenter mentioned they would go more often with these changes, while another said that they would go more often if there was an evening excursion during the spring, summer, and fall months.

Lastly, one commenter mentioned that the most important consideration for them would be the impact on the rangers. Summer heat and humidity, combined with increased visitor traffic, is physically challenging, and the rangers have little downtime to recover before the next boat arrival.

### **Topic Question 4: Are there other strategies not already presented that you would like the park to consider in order to address the identified issues?**

#### **Lighthouse**

A few commenters want the plan to clearly describe the conditions of the lighthouse, elevator, and needed restoration. A commenter suggested considering restoring the lighthouse to its original configuration.

## **Ferries**

The preboarding arrangement for the ferries was mentioned by two commenters. Some suggested that video monitors with accurate information would help visitors better navigate the parks. Commenters suggested using a public address system for boarding calls and emergency announcements and providing hearing impaired audio devices.

A few commenters suggested identifying carrying capacity, desired conditions, and visitor use monitoring for Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie. Some commenters wondered if Liberty Square would have enough parking availability to accommodate all ferries departing from this location. Commenters also suggested providing dedicated staff and volunteer parking. Commenters noted that consolidating ferry operations to Liberty Square might require additional visitor services such as additional restrooms.

Some commenters mentioned that there is limited time to explore Fort Sumter and to visit the gift shop. Commenters suggested the gift shop be moved so that visitors can have enough time to see Fort Sumter without feeling rushed.

One commenter suggested that visitors should be able to book more time at Fort Sumter by scheduling a different return ferry at the point of sale. Another suggestion was to have interpretive talks on all the ferries, which would then give visitors more time for exploration at Fort Sumter.

Another commenter suggested considering older visitors when building boat schedules and time at Fort Sumter. The commentor also mentioned that the plan should take into account mechanical issues with the boats and how these issues could affect visitors' access and time at the Fort Sumter.

## **Staff**

One commenter mentioned a need to increase staff presence so visitors can ask questions and get the information they need. Another commenter mentioned that staffing needs to be at a level that can handle an increase in visitation.

## **Sites on Sullivan's Island**

One commenter noted an opportunity to connect visitors from Fort Moultrie to the US Coast Guard Historic District, perhaps by a shuttle. The commenter acknowledged that since there is no on-site parking at the Coast Guard Station, the arrival of a substantial number of visitors and their cars might not be welcome by the residents of that area. The commenter suggested that a better connection between the two sites might make the \$10 park entrance fee more reasonable.

## **Fishing and Water Quality**

A commenter suggested incorporating water quality monitoring and education since the water quality surrounding the park sites has been poor historically. The commenter suggested visitor education to address the risks of people eating their catch and interpretive signs about fishing line entanglements and the danger to wildlife, the use of nonlead fishing gear only, and other human health risks.

## **Climate Change**

A commenter suggested analyzing the potential impact on natural and historic resources due to rising sea levels to determine what policies can be put into place to mitigate the effects of shoreline change. They suggested that an assessment of possible impacts include adaptation strategies, modeled vulnerability, and mitigation actions.

## **Other Comments**

### **Interpretation**

A commenter recommended that more information regarding the original purpose of the fort, the design goals and implementation, and the details of the fort be covered in a more complete manner.

Another commenter mentioned there are many international visitors to Fort Sumter and suggested telling the Fort Sumter story in a way that recognizes those who do not have a US citizen's base knowledge.

A commenter suggested explaining further the reasoning behind removing museum resources.

### **Fort Moultrie**

One commenter was concerned about the use and positioning of Fort Moultrie. They said that the plan is very Fort Sumter focused, and they noted the need to raise the visitor profile for Fort Moultrie. The commenter agreed, but noted that Fort Moultrie will always be a secondary stop if the park unit is positioned as a "Civil War Fort" or even as an "example of the evolution of coastline defense" over the years. The commenter said an opportunity exists to reposition Fort Moultrie as the site of the first significant battle of the Revolution, where both the British Navy and Army were defeated in June 1776. They recommended that a replica of the palmetto log fort (which was constructed as an interpretive tool in 1976 but was destroyed by Hurricane Hugo in 1989) be reinstalled. The commenter said the log fort could aid in the interpretation of the site.