

Cumberland Island National Seashore (CUIIS) Proposed Land Exchanges

Frequently Asked Questions from Initial Virtual Public Engagement on 9-2024

- **Why is the park not completing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process?**

Cumberland Island National Seashore is currently reaching out to the public prior to initiating the NEPA process. Many refer to this stage as "Pre-NEPA," which provides an opportunity for early civic engagement with the interested public. We understand that many of you are familiar with the NEPA process and are accustomed to reviewing Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Statements with alternatives clearly identified and impacts to the human environment thoroughly analyzed. The current stage precedes the NEPA process, but any future federal decision regarding these land exchanges will involve the NEPA process and NEPA documentation.

- **Can you provide the total ownership of the island?**

Cumberland Island is roughly 37,000 acres. Within that acreage there are several landowners, including the National Park Service.

Within park boundaries are eleven privately-owned properties totaling approximately 712 acres.

Little Cumberland is within the park's boundary and is a separate, not connected, smaller island.

- **Are all private lands currently being considered in the exchange?**

No, we are currently in negotiations only with interested private landowners.

- **Won't the properties become NPS land per agreements established years ago? Why go through an exchange if lands will eventually revert to park property?**

All parcels to be acquired by the land exchange are privately owned parcels and will not convert to NPS ownership without acquisition or exchange.

- **Are retained rights affected by the proposed land exchanges?**

In this proposed land exchange, the NPS would convey their remaining interest on the property subject to the life estate and retained rights currently used and enjoyed by the life estate tenants by virtue of the 1982 conveyance deed. This transaction does not shorten or terminate the life estate; the life estate will continue until it naturally ends. By agreement of all the parties, this transaction would include additional restrictions currently under negotiation and to be included in a conservation easement.

- **Why not just buy the land?**

The NPS considered this as an acquisition alternative; however, landowners were not interested in outright sale.

- **What is a conservation easement?**

There are many different ways a conservation easement can be structured. For these exchanges, they are agreements between the landowners and the NPS that will permanently restrict certain uses and activities in order to protect the conservation values associated with Cumberland Island National Seashore's natural resources and wildlife habitat. This will allow the landowners to continue to own and enjoy their land while creating restrictions on the use of the property to help protect natural resources. These easements will remain in place through all future changes in ownership. For more detailed information on conservation easements in general, consult with a real estate attorney.

- **Will zoning conflict or negate conservation easements?**

For these exchanges, zoning will not alter the conservation easements.

- **How many acres of wilderness will be gained?**

10 Acres.

- **Can the land currently in private ownership within proposed Wilderness be developed?**

The parcel in Exchange 1 is a privately owned parcel that predates the establishment of Wilderness on CUIS. The private ownership precludes it from Designated Wilderness and therefore it is classified as potential wilderness. Land may be developed subject to existing private rights of the landowner. If exchanged, the property in potential wilderness would automatically convert to wilderness once under NPS ownership.

- **Will wetlands suffer from potential developed on the lands transferred to private ownership on the west side of the island?**

There will not be development in the wetlands. Potential buildable land will be on the marsh side (west) instead of the ocean side (east).

- **Will the Stafford Slave Chimneys tract be impacted by the exchange?**

The Stafford Chimneys are currently held under a life/retained right and as such will convert to NPS ownership at some point in the future. Exchange 3 will allow for the increased protection of the cultural landscape and viewshed of the Stafford Chimneys by preventing private development of the adjacent lands.

- **Will the Park receive additional resources to support the new acquisitions?**

There are no additional resources identified at this time.

- **What is right of first refusal, and will the park have it?**

Simply put, Right of First Refusal is the right to purchase the land first if the owner decides/intends to sell. The NPS continues to negotiate terms of preliminary land exchange agreements; therefore, there is no guarantee at this stage of the process that the NPS will have right of first refusal.