National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of Communications
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National Park Service News Release

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Contact: Southeast Regional Communications, National Park Service

National Park Service announces study of American Beach for possible National Historic Landmark designation

ATLANTA – The National Park Service (NPS) today opened a 45-day public comment period that will inform a study of American Beach, a historic African American resort community on the Atlantic coast in north Florida, which is being evaluated for possible National Historic Landmark (NHL) designation.

"American Beach was the most prominent of Florida's segregated beaches and played a significant role in providing travel and leisure opportunities to African Americans traveling to the region during the mid-twentieth century," said **Alesha Cerny, regional historian with the NPS National Historic Landmarks program**. "While the community has been impacted by social changes, the coastal environment, and local development and economic pressures, there still remains a rich cultural landscape with a concentration of notable buildings and landscape features."

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002, the American Beach Historic District is significant as a rare example of a segregated planned ocean beach resort established by Black professionals. Founded in 1935, its history and significance is also tied to the national rise of 20th century consumerism evident in the growing spending power of African Americans to create and support Black-owned businesses. Named as the first site of the Florida Black Heritage Trail, American Beach endures through a collection of buildings, structures, and landscape features which illustrate a segregated planned ocean beach resort located on Amelia Island.

Identified through the African American Outdoor Recreation NHL theme study, the NPS reviewed a letter of inquiry, the first step of the NHL nomination process, and concluded American Beach appears to meet the criteria for NHL designation. The study, which is currently under development, will enable the NPS, stewards, and the public to better understand the resources at American Beach and identify what nationally distinguishes the community from similar properties.

The NPS has commissioned The NDN Companies to draft the NHL nomination, documenting American Beach in narrative and graphic formats, and placing it into a

national context. The effort – expected to run through spring 2026 – involves research, a field survey, photographic documentation, Geographic Information Systems analysis and public engagement.

Opportunity for Public Comment

The NPS will host an in-person public meeting to discuss the American Beach study and answer questions about the project. The public meeting will take place on Saturday, Nov. 16 at 10 a.m. until noon at the A.L. Lewis Museum/American Beach Community Center, 1600 Julia Street, American Beach, Florida.

The NPS welcomes public comments and encourages the public to share any historical documents, such as historic photographs, newspaper clippings or other items with the project team. The public may submit written comments over the following questions for consideration in the study:

1. What buildings, structures, sites or features in American Beach hold special value to you?
2. How long have you been coming to American Beach?
3. What is your favorite memory of American Beach?
4. What do you consider the timeframe of history in American Beach? Does it start before the founding by the Afro-American Life Insurance Company in 1935?
5. How do you see the natural landscape and environment as contributing to the history of American Beach (or not)?
6. Do you have specific stories about historic locations in American Beach that you would like to share?
7. What do you hope to learn about the NHL process?
8. How do you see the NHL process helping American Beach (or not)?
9. Do you have any historical documents that you would like to share with the project team (e.g., photos, newspaper clippings, etc.)? If so, please describe your documents.
10. Please record any other comments you have on this project.

Online (the preferred method)

Visit https://parkplanning.nps.gov/AmericanBeach

Select “Open for Comment” on the left menu bar, open the “2024 Public Meeting” folder and click on the green “Comment Now” button to access the online commenting form; or

By Postal Mail, send comments to:

Alesha Cerny
Attn: American Beach Study
National Park Service
100 Alabama Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Written comments on the draft study must be submitted online or be postmarked by Dec. 20, 2024, to be considered.

For more information about the American Beach study, including public meeting details, visit the planning website at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/AmericanBeach.

National Historic Landmark are national significant historic places that have exceptional abilities to illustrate and interpret American cultural heritage. The National Historic Landmarks Program, established in 1935, is administered by the National Park Service on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior and is responsible for helping to preserve and protect the almost 2,600 NHLs in the United States. The agency works with preservation officials, private property owners, and other partners interested in nominating properties for National Historic Landmark designation. The program provides states and local communities with technical assistance, recognition, and funding to help preserve our nation's shared history and create close-to-home recreation opportunities.

Nana Dune at American Beach
NPS Photo

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