



Scoping Newsletter

Environmental Assessment for the Proposed Emergency Stabilization/ Erosion Control of Cane River Lake at Oakland Plantation

History and Background

Cane River Creole National Historical Park (NHP) was established in November 1994 to commemorate the long and complex history of the early European exploration and settlement of the Red River Valley in northwestern Louisiana during the early 18th century. It was also established to recognize the interactions among the French, Spanish, African, and Indian peoples and the subsequent development and evolution of Creole culture and plantation life along Cane River up to the mid 20th century.

The first European settlement in the region occurred in 1713-1714, when St. Denis, a French explorer, established Fort St. Jean Baptiste in what is now the city of Natchitoches, making it the oldest permanent European settlement in Louisiana. The area flourished. Commercial agriculture centered around indigo and some tobacco production replaced the early frontier trading economy. It was during this time that farmers adopted the plantation system, relying heavily on slavery as a means for expansion and growth. Gradually transitioning into a cotton economy, the plantations prospered throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and well into the 20th century.

Oakland Plantation is one of two plantations within the National Park. It provides a center for the interpretation of both its own story and the history of the Cane River region. Oakland Plantation was owned and operated by the French Creole Prud'homme family for nine generations. The park property includes the core of a French Creole plantation started by Jean Pierre Emanuel Prud'homme and his family. The vernacular structures, most of which were built by enslaved workers, include the main house (1818-1821), an overseer's house, quarters occupied by enslaved workers and later sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and outbuildings including barns and grain



The Main House at Oakland Plantation was home to the Prud'homme family for over two centuries.

storage buildings, a cotton seed house, chicken houses, a plantation store, wash house and a wagon shed. Many of these Creole buildings have roots in African and medieval French building traditions that have been adapted to climate, and locally available building materials and technologies.

Oakland Plantation, originally known as Bermuda Plantation, was a large-scale cotton plantation, and like similar sizeable plantations it garnered wealth through an agricultural system based on slavery. By 1840 nearly 150 enslaved workers lived their lives on the plantation as did the families of the owner and overseers. All were affected by the Civil War when both Union and Confederate forces ravaged the Cane River countryside during the Red River Campaign. Life changed for all of Oakland's residents following the war

when the value of cotton dwindled and a freed labor force changed the way in which plantations operated.

Despite these changes, the plantation continued to evolve both as an agricultural operation and a community. By 1874, the plantation store became the center of plantation social and economic life. By agreement, sharecroppers and tenant farmers working Oakland Plantation land were required to do business with the plantation store, which extended them credit, bought their crops, and sold them seed, agricultural implements and other needed supplies. The plantation community persisted through low cotton prices, boll weevil infestations, and even the Great Depression. However, the increasing application of mechanized farming brought an end to the plantation after nearly two centuries.

Project Background

In October 2007, two severe storms, producing upwards of seventeen inches of rain in thirty-six hours, resulted in a major washout and several other smaller washouts along the Cane River Lake bank and roadside swale. The eroded bank runs parallel with a thin strip of land owned by the Cane River Creole NHP. Located between State Highway LA 494/119 and the Cane River Lake, the land is east of the Oakland Plantation Main House. Despite some remedial maintenance effort by park staff, the erosion still persists. If the erosion continues without treatment, it will threaten existing utilities, trees, vegetation, and the adjacent State Highway.



Damage caused by the storms in 2007.



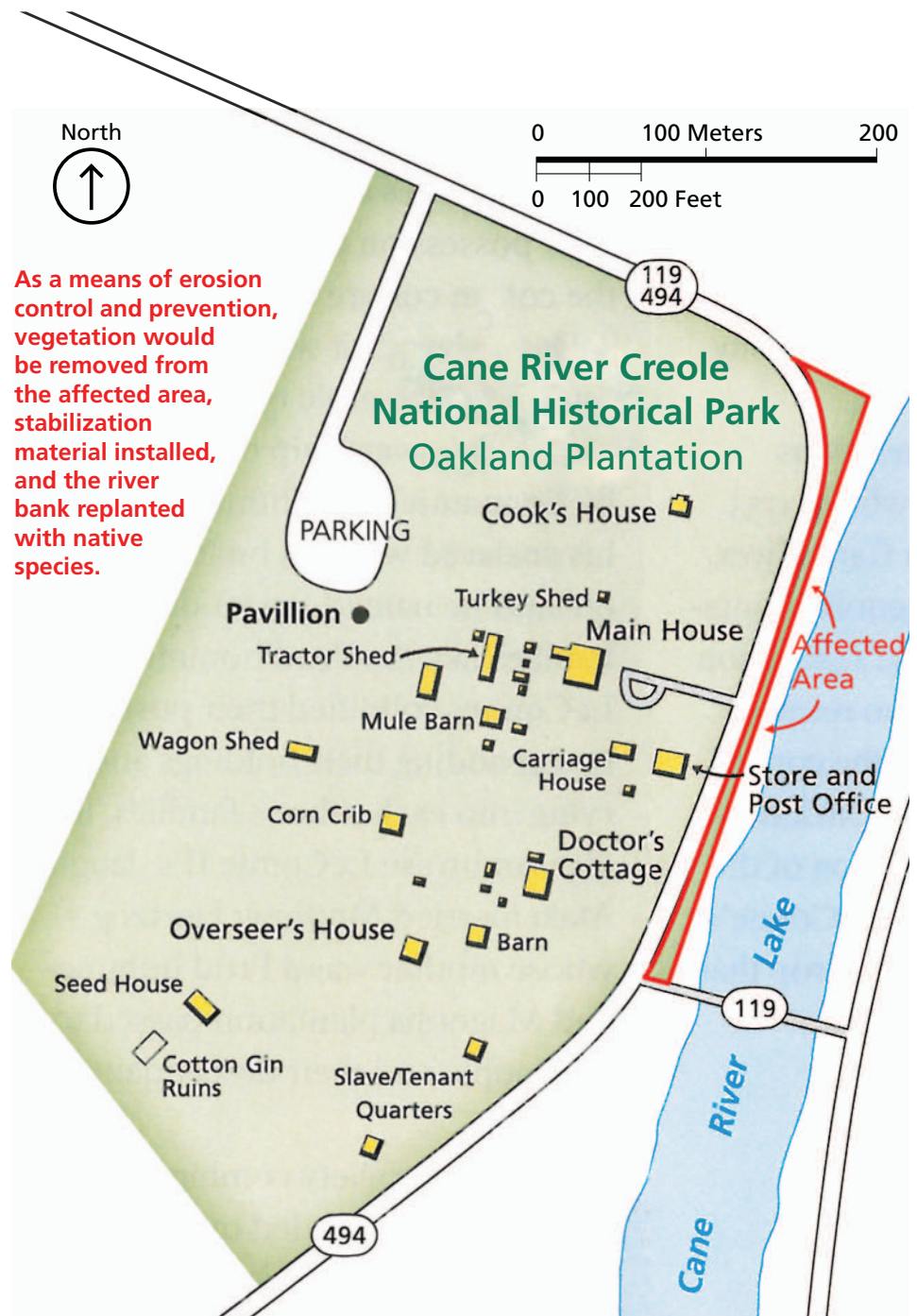
Old Bermuda bridge crossing Cane River Lake.



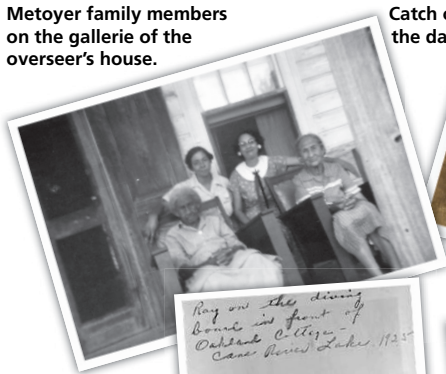
Erosion along the affected area.

Proposed Action

The NPS is proposing to reconstruct and stabilize the eroded shoreline. A site assessment of the affected area was performed in September 2009. A total of four conceptual design alternatives are being proposed for the stabilization of the shoreline and will be analyzed in an Environmental Assessment. The design alternatives proposed would stop the erosion from progressing beyond its current state; would stabilize the remaining lake side bank and toe; and would restore the natural visual characteristics of the existing lake bank and preserve the cultural landscape. Each alternative involves the removal of vegetation currently existing along the lake bank (most of which is non-native), restoration of the bank slope, and installation of a stabilization material along the toe of the bank. All of the alternatives would require some minor earthwork activities within the State Highway LA 494/119 right-of-way and construction of a drainage outfall chute. A construction staging area would be located on the Oakwood Plantation. Following construction, the NPS would restore the natural look and native vegetation of the area by replanting with native shrubs, grasses, and small trees.



Metoyer family members on the galerie of the overseer's house.



Catch of the day.



Prud'homme's store, Oakland Plantation

Historic photographs from Oakland Plantation courtesy of the Prud'homme and Metoyer families.

A man sits on a diving board overhanging the Cane River Lake.



A skiff floating along the banks of Cane River Lake.



Cleaning fish after a day of fishing.



NEPA Process

The NPS must follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 to ensure consideration of important environmental issues. The construction of an emergency stabilization and erosion control mechanism along the bank of the Cane River Lake adjacent to the Cane River Creole NHP will be analyzed during the NEPA process.

The environmental effects resulting from the proposed shoreline stabilization will be evaluated in an Environmental Assessment. The analysis will consider impacts to topics such as wildlife habitat, vegetation, special status species, water resources, air quality, socioeconomics, cultural resources, soils, park visitor use and experience, and public health and safety.

The document will analyze both short-term and long-term, as well as, cumulative effects of the proposed shoreline stabilization (action alternatives), along with the "no action alternative." By comparing the proposed action alternatives with the no action alternative, and identifying mitigation measures that would minimize adverse effects, the Environmental Assessment will assist stakeholders in the decision-making process.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Cane River Creole National Historical Park preserves the resources and cultural landscapes of the Cane River region and enhances the understanding of its peoples and traditions.

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American People so that all may experience our heritage.

Public Scoping Period

As part of the NEPA process, the proposed project will be evaluated in an Environmental Assessment, which will analyze the potential environmental effects of the proposed alternatives. At this time, the Superintendent is announcing a 30-day public scoping period to solicit public comments on the proposed shoreline stabilization project. During this period, the public is invited to identify any issues or concerns they might have with the proposed project so that the NPS can appropriately consider them in the Environmental Assessment. You may submit your comments electronically at the NPS's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>). If you are unable to access this website, please submit written comments to:

Superintendent
Cane River Creole National Historical Park
400 Rapides Drive
Natchitoches, LA 71457

Please submit comments by July 14, 2010. Once the Environmental Assessment is developed, it will be made available for public review for a 30-day period. If you wish to be added to the park's mailing list, please be sure to indicate that in your response.

It is NPS practice to make all comments, including names and addresses of respondents who provide that information, available for public review. Individuals may request that the NPS withhold their name and/or address from public disclosure. If you wish to do this, correspondents using the website can make such a request by checking the box "keep my contact information private". If submitting written comments please state this request at the beginning of your comment. The NPS will honor such requests to the extent allowable by law.

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Fall fog on Oakland Plantation.