



# Shared Legacies in Cane River National Heritage Area: Linking People, Traditions, and Landscapes

*A Technical Assistance Report for the  
Cane River National Heritage Area Commission*

Report Summary



This report is the fifteenth in the Conservation and Stewardship Publication Series produced by the Conservation Study Institute. This series includes a variety of publications designed to provide information on conservation history and current practice for professionals and the public. The series editor is Nora J. Mitchell, director of the Institute. This volume was prepared in cooperation with the Quebec-Labrador Foundation (QLF)/Atlantic Center for the Environment.

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Courtesy of the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Above: From the 1930s until her death in 1988, Clementine Hunter documented life on Cane River in her vibrant memory paintings. The grandchild of slaves, she worked at Melrose Plantation as a field hand and a cook before becoming an artist later in life.

Cover: Hunter's African House murals tell the story of life along Cane River in the first half of the twentieth century. This panel depicts her view of ancestors of the Cane River Creole community and people who lived and worked at Melrose, including visiting artists. Credit: James Rosenthal, National Park Service, HABS/HAER/HALS.

# **Shared Legacies in Cane River National Heritage Area: Linking People, Traditions, and Landscapes**

Evaluation and Visioning Project  
Report Summary

*A Technical Assistance Report for the  
Cane River National Heritage Area Commission*

**Prepared by the  
National Park Service Conservation Study Institute  
in cooperation with  
QLF/Atlantic Center for the Environment**

**CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP PUBLICATION NO. 15**  
Jacquelyn L. Tuxill, Philip B. Huffman, Daniel N. Laven, and Nora J. Mitchell  
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Jack Boucher, National Park Service, HABS/HAER/HALS

The Prud'homme family occupied the main house at Oakland Plantation from its construction in 1821 until 1998, when the National Park Service acquired the working core of the plantation. Today, Oakland's 44 historic structures and associated landscapes make up one unit of Cane River Creole National Historical Park. The park and the heritage area work closely together to conserve the landscapes and traditions of the region, and to share its nationally important stories with the public.

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- 5 Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site
- 6 Grand Ecore Visitor Center U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
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- 8 Oaklawn Plantation
- 9 Cherokee Plantation
- 10 Beau Fort Plantation
- 11 St. Charles Chapel
- 12 Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Oakland Unit (NHL)
- 13 Melrose Plantation (NHL)
- 14 Badin-Roque House
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- 16 Magnolia Plantation Home (NHL)
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# I. Background and Context for the Cane River National Heritage Area Evaluation and Visioning Project

Located in northwestern Louisiana along the former main channel of the Red River, Cane River National Heritage Area conserves and interprets the rich multicultural legacy and landscapes of the region. A vibrant cultural crossroads in the 1700s and a base for early trade and settlement by France and Spain, the Cane River region eventually came under the control of the United States through its 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France. Cane River National Heritage Area embodies the diverse cultural traditions and stories of the people who have lived in this region down through the centuries—American Indian, French, Spanish, African American, and Creole peoples. The heritage area includes parts of the city of Natchitoches—the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase—and 116,000 acres along both sides of the Cane River south of the city.

Congress established the Cane River National Heritage Area in 1994 in recognition of the national significance of the region and its

cultural resources.<sup>1</sup> In 2001, the Louisiana legislature passed a resolution declaring Cane River its second state heritage area. The federal authorization also established Cane River Creole National Historical Park within the heritage area, and charged the two to work together to carry out a shared preservation and education mission. This establishment of a national park and national heritage area in the same enabling legislation is unique. The legislation also established the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission to assist in implementing the purposes of the heritage area. A broadly representative body, the commission works with community interests, nonprofit organizations, private landowners, and local, state, and federal authorities to carry out its duties. The commission's authority and federal funding are due to expire in 2010; however, the national heritage area designation is permanent.

In 2006, the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission initiated the "Cane River National Heritage Area Evaluation and Visioning Project"

## National Significance of the Cane River Region

In establishing Cane River National Heritage Area and Cane River Creole National Historical Park, Congress affirmed the national significance of the heritage area. The Cane River area served as the focal point for early settlement of the region and as a transportation route by which commerce and communication reached all parts of Louisiana. This area is also the locale where Cane River Creole culture developed as a result of early eighteenth-century French and Spanish interactions with people of American Indian and African descent. Although Creole architecture exists elsewhere in Louisiana and beyond, the Cane River region holds the most intact Creole plantations in the U.S., complete with their original outbuilding complexes. The heritage area includes a great variety of historical features with original elements in both rural and urban settings, and a cultural landscape that exhibits aspects of the different cultures that have lived there since European settlement—particularly French, Spanish, African American, and Creole. These assets provide the foundation for developing an understanding of the region's history.<sup>2</sup>

The heritage area includes the 33-block Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District, which contains more than 100 historic homes and buildings, several of which date to the eighteenth century. It also encompasses seven national historic landmarks, three state historic sites, and more than two dozen properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>1</sup> Public Law 103-49.

<sup>2</sup> Derived from Public Law 103-49, section 302.



Jack Boucher, National Park Service, HABSH/HAER/HALS

St. Augustine Catholic Church is the heart of the Cane River Creole community. The congregation formed in 1803, the first Roman Catholic church in the U.S. established by and for people of color.

to evaluate its accomplishments and help inform its decisions about the heritage area's future. The commission asked the National Park Service Conservation Study Institute to provide technical assistance in implementing the project, and identified four points to be addressed:

- Evaluate progress toward achieving the purposes of the heritage area's authorizing legislation and the implementation strategies set forth in the Cane River National Heritage Area Management Plan of 2003.
- Identify additional actions needed to protect, enhance, and interpret the heritage area and its nationally significant resources.
- Analyze National Park Service (NPS) investments to determine their impacts.
- Examine models, options, and opportunities to enhance state and local partnerships, including consideration of a new management framework to support the work of the heritage area.

In response, the study team investigated three aspects of the heritage area's partnership efforts: (1) accomplishments and investments

(to document progress toward heritage area goals), (2) the structure and operations of the current management framework, and (3) the perspectives of partners on how the heritage area initiative has worked.<sup>3</sup> The team gathered information from various written sources (e.g., management plan, annual reports, project documents) and used participatory techniques (e.g., confidential interviews, meetings, informal conversations, visioning sessions) to engage and gather insights from key individuals. These individuals included commissioners, commission staff, heritage area partners, and people with expertise in heritage areas.

This report summary reviews heritage area accomplishments and investments (section II), discusses the strengths of the heritage area and the challenges it faces in the near future (section III), and presents critical ingredients for sustaining success in the future (section IV). These sections are followed by discussions of two sets of options, the first (section V) relating to the overall heritage area framework, and the second (section VI) on other options and opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

### National Context for the Cane River Evaluation and Visioning Project

Heritage areas are an important direction in conservation, as demonstrated by the growing interest in this model across the U.S. There are currently 37 national heritage areas, 10 of which were authorized in 2006, and as of January 2008 legislation has been introduced in Congress to designate 14 additional areas. In 2004, the director of the National Park Service asked the National Park System Advisory Board to examine the future of national heritage areas and their relationship to the NPS. The board, composed of 13 citizens with diverse expertise and a commitment to the NPS mission, has the statutory responsibility to advise the NPS director and the secretary of the interior on policy and program matters. In 2006, the advisory board reported its findings and recommendations. It proposed, among other things, that a legislative foundation for a system of national heritage areas be established within the NPS, and that a study be required for individual heritage areas three years prior to the end of their federal funding authorization to make recommendations regarding future NPS involvement.<sup>5</sup> Studies conducted by the Conservation Study Institute at the request of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission (2005) and the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Commission (2006), as well as this Cane River Evaluation and Visioning Project, may inform future evaluations at other national heritage areas.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Heritage area initiative" refers to the collective body of activities and projects undertaken to implement the management plan, and the people and organizations that carry them out.

<sup>4</sup> The full project report can be obtained from the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission ([http://www.caneriverheritage.org/main\\_file.php/info.php](http://www.caneriverheritage.org/main_file.php/info.php)).

<sup>5</sup> The advisory board's report, *Charting a Future for the National Heritage Areas*, can be found at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/nhareport.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Reports on the Blackstone study (*Reflecting on the Past, Looking to the Future*) and the Delaware & Lehigh study (*Connecting Stories, Landscapes, and People: Exploring the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor Partnership*) are available at [http://www.nps.gov/csi/pub\\_resources/pub.htm](http://www.nps.gov/csi/pub_resources/pub.htm).



## II. Cane River National Heritage Area: Accomplishments and Investments

Although Cane River National Heritage Area was designated in 1994, Congress appropriated no funding for the heritage area until 2000. In the intervening years, the NPS conducted several pre-planning studies and undertook management planning for both the national park and the heritage area, the latter at the request of the commission. Progress was slow in the absence of federal funds for heritage area operations. In 1998, however, the park provided funding to complete management planning for the heritage area. The final management plan was signed by the governor of Louisiana in 2002 and approved by the secretary of the interior in 2003. The management plan has three primary thrusts: (1) conservation, preservation, and research to help ensure the long-term integrity of heritage resources, including traditions, landscapes, and structures; (2) education and interpretation to foster public support and appreciation for the region's history and resources; and (3) support for marketing a full range of heritage tourism opportunities.

### A. Progress and accomplishments of the heritage area initiative

In 1999, with funding from the national park, the commission hired staff and launched its competitive grants program as a key strategy for engaging partners in the heritage area initiative. Since this early decision, the commission has invested the bulk of its funds through two separate but complementary tracks: the grants program and commission-initiated projects. Both have involved working with a wide range of partners, and together they have resulted in 177 projects being

undertaken between 1998 (beginning with the management plan) and 2007. Of these, 130 (73 percent) have been completed, 38 (21 percent) are still underway, and 9 (5 percent) are considered annual or ongoing.

Many of the projects address specific actions included in the management plan's implementation categories. Through historic preservation projects, 21 buildings have been restored or rehabilitated and numerous historic documents have been conserved. Fifty-eight research projects have produced information about the region's various cultural groups. Among these are oral histories (e.g., Caddo Indian, African American, Creole, civil rights), genealogical studies (e.g., Creole, African American, French), archeological studies, a database of Indian basketry, and a digital library of Adaesaño Spanish recordings.<sup>7</sup> Sixty interpretation and education projects have led to exhibits and documentaries, children's programs, online information, and books, brochures, and other publications. A signage system and a GIS database have been developed and implemented for the entire heritage area, a concept plan for a joint visitor center has been prepared for the heritage area and the national park, and map guides have been completed for walking and driving tours.

In reviewing heritage area accomplishments and investments, the study team analyzed projects by their relationships to geography and cultural groups and by their purposes. Figure 1 (page 8) shows how project investment has been distributed across the heritage area geographically, using the 177 projects undertaken between 1998 and 2007. Figure 2 (page 8) shows how project investment has been distributed across the primary cultural groups that have historic connections to the Cane River area. Projects were analyzed as to whether their focus was African American, American (i.e., referring to the settlers—and their cultural influences—who came to the region following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803), American Indian, Creole, French, Spanish, "mixed groups" (i.e., more than one cultural group but not encompassing all of them), or "all groups."<sup>8</sup> Both figures aggregate grants program projects, commission-initiated projects, and the funds leveraged by both.



Philip Gould

Cane River, once the main channel of the Red River, winds through the region's agricultural landscape.

<sup>7</sup> "Adaesaños" refers loosely to descendants of Los Adaes, the eighteenth-century Spanish mission and presidio (or fort), that served as a provincial capital in New Spain. Today the Los Adaes State Historic Site is one of the heritage area's "satellites."

<sup>8</sup> These categories were developed by the study team in consultation with heritage area staff.

**Total Project Investment by Geographic Area**  
\$6,509,755

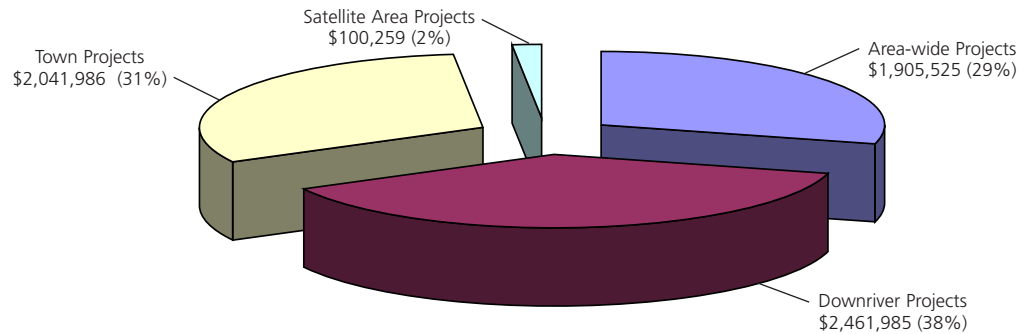


Figure 1. Total project investment by geographic area, fiscal years 1998 through 2007.

Based on its overall analysis of accomplishments and project investments, the study team made the following observations:

- On the whole, there has been a relatively even spread of the \$6.5-million total investment in relationship to both geography and cultural groups.
- Through its direct investments, the commission has emphasized projects that apply area-wide to all cultural groups and provide a broad foundation for future work and activities. Examples include heritage area brochures, the master interpretive plan, and creation of a logo and signage.
- The study team’s analysis reveals that projects addressing multiple purposes have increased over time. Of the 17 projects begun in 2001, 3 (18 percent) were multipurpose, while 16 of the 31 projects in 2006 (52 percent) were multipurpose. Research at other heritage areas suggests that increased integration of goals within individual projects reflects the continuing maturation of the heritage area.
- The commission’s early decision to establish a grants program to engage partners has helped build the involvement and capacity of collaborating organizations.
- The commission has increasingly demonstrated the ability to undertake and complete complex, large-scale projects.

**Total Project Investment by Cultural Group**  
\$6,509,755

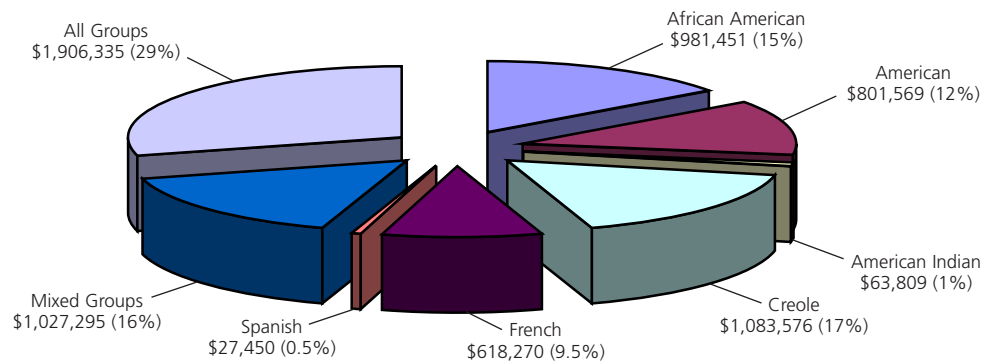


Figure 2. Total project investment by cultural group, fiscal years 1998 through 2007.

**B. Highlights of selected heritage area projects and programs**

To better understand how the commission conducts its work, the study team examined in depth two projects (interpretive planning for the heritage area and rehabilitation of the Texas and Pacific Railway Depot) and one program (competitive grants). The narratives that follow were developed with the assistance of commission staff and are meant to complement the analysis of investments and progress described in the previous section.

**1. Interpretive planning for Cane River National Heritage Area**

The methods used to develop the Cane River National Heritage Area Master Interpretive Plan demonstrate the commission’s inclusive approach to planning and to involving stakeholders in general. In 2000, the commission funded the development of a plan to refine and expand the interpretive themes identified during management planning and present a unified approach to telling the region’s stories. Twenty people representing diverse perspectives were invited to serve on an interpretive committee. They included

The “Landmarks in Time” exhibit, developed through an inclusive interpretive process, orients visitors to the region’s stories and places.



managers of historic sites, representatives of cultural organizations, community leaders, scholars, local historians, commissioners, and staff from the national park. Finalized in 2003, the master interpretive plan that resulted from the committee’s deliberations contained strategies applicable throughout the region as well as site-specific information and recommendations.

Of equal importance to the plan itself was the process by which it was developed. The interpretive committee brought together people of diverse cultural backgrounds who had never before sat at the same table to talk about their shared and often difficult past. For the first time, descendants of slaveholders and of slaves came together to discuss how their ancestors’ history was part of a national story and why it was important to share that history. Slavery was but one of several complex historical and cultural issues discussed by the committee. “Jim Crow” segregation, the definition of “Creole,” the romanticism of the Old South, local legend versus historical accuracy, and the question of which sites and cultural groups “owned” certain stories are other examples of topics with widely divergent perspectives.

At one point during the meetings, an older African American participant pointed out the difficulty of having such discussions, stating that in Natchitoches people had always gotten along

because they didn’t talk about the differences of the past. By creating a safe environment in which people felt they could open up, the interpretive planning process helped to establish trust and respect between the cultural groups, the historic site partners, the national park, and the commission. This trust and respect have carried over into many other aspects of the commission’s work, and this inclusive process has become standard practice for all commission projects.

## *2. The Texas and Pacific Railway Depot rehabilitation project*

The Texas and Pacific Railway Depot, a passenger and freight facility built in 1927, is a landmark Natchitoches structure. One of the city’s finest buildings, its Spanish Revival–Italian Renaissance design is quite different from that of the other few surviving urban train depots in Louisiana. Located in the heart of a predominantly African American residential section of the city, the depot saw its passenger heyday when trains were the primary transportation mode for soldiers serving in World War II and laborers leaving plantations during the “Great Migration.”<sup>9</sup> By the late 1960s, service had dwindled to freight only; Union-Pacific closed the depot and gave the building to the city of Natchitoches in the 1980s. An early effort to raise restoration funds failed because the city did not own the land, but in the mid-1990s Union-Pacific donated the land to the city, sparking renewed interest in preserving the building.

Today, a major partnership project seeks to rehabilitate the depot as an African American heritage center and multimodal transportation hub. The building is close to the downtown Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District and could potentially provide parking and easy access to transportation, both of which are otherwise problems in the district. The idea of a heritage center evolved in part from the importance of rail travel to African Americans at a time when the mechanization of agriculture was increasing and they were leaving in search of jobs and greater economic opportunity elsewhere. Furthermore, the depot holds cultural significance as one of the few Natchitoches buildings in which the “Jim Crow” policy of racial segregation is apparent in its architectural design. Separate “white” and “colored” entrances, ticket windows, waiting rooms, and restrooms remain as a testament to this practice. Through the rehabilitation project, the depot will become the primary location where the African American experience in

<sup>9</sup> When applied to African Americans, “Great Migration” refers to the movement of seven million people between 1916 and 1970 from the rural South to urban areas in the North, upper Midwest, and West, with the largest population shift (about five million people) taking place between 1940 and 1970.

The Texas and Pacific Railway Depot rehabilitation project is a community effort. Residents, the city of Natchitoches, the heritage area, and the park are working together to give the building new life.



Cammie G. Henry, Research Center, Northwestern State University



Philip B. Huffman

the region is interpreted, thus complementing and connecting with the interpretation of African American history at other sites in the heritage area.

Since 2000, the commission has worked collaboratively on depot restoration with the city of Natchitoches, the Ben D. Johnson Educational Foundation (a local nonprofit organization working in the African American community), and the National Park Service. Between 2000 and 2007, the commission invested considerable staff time in community outreach and fundraising, and committed \$66,000 in direct funding for stabilization, architectural documentation, and preservation planning. The commission has also pledged \$100,000 to match federal transportation enhancement funding.<sup>10</sup> Grants received include \$15,000 from the Great American Station Foundation in 2001 (matched by \$3,000 from the city); a \$24,500 Louisiana Historic Preservation Emergency Rescue Grant, also in 2001; \$5,000 from the Louisiana Main Street Program in 2003; and, in 2006, \$274,000 for preservation planning from federal transportation enhancement funds provided by the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. In 2007 the city of Natchitoches requested \$1 million in capital outlay funding from the state of Louisiana

and \$282,000 in transportation enhancement funding for construction. In January 2008 the city received the first \$100,000 (for planning) from its capital outlay request.

Although at times the project appeared stalled due to lack of funds and the daunting rehabilitation task, momentum has been building in recent years. In 2006, the Louisiana Preservation Alliance designated the depot one of the “Ten Most Endangered Historic Sites in Louisiana.” In 2007, grassroots involvement increased rapidly as a result of preservation planning, which invited significant community input. As this planning proceeded, community members formed a committee to spearhead development of the heritage center within the structure. The process also sparked interest in developing an African American historic district for potential listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which would allow residents of the district to seek tax credits for preservation and development.

The scale and complexity of the depot project have challenged the commission and its partners. Although periodic project delays due to lack of funding caused some distrust among depot-area residents, the commission’s work over the years has helped foster an environment where residents,

<sup>10</sup> States receive transportation enhancement funding as a percentage of their annual Surface Transportation Program appropriation from the Federal Highway Administration, then reappropriate these funds to eligible local projects. See <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/index.htm> for more information.

the city, and nonprofit organizations can work together to create something greater than any of these groups could have done alone.

### **3. Cane River National Heritage Area competitive grants program**

Competitive grants, the commission's longest running program, has strengthened partner capacity, advanced heritage area purposes, provided an important source of leverage, and raised public awareness about the heritage area. Program objectives include (1) conserving, interpreting, and promoting Cane River resources, cultural landscapes, and history; (2) interpreting and promoting understanding of the region's cultures; (3) increasing visitation and public participation through programs and events; (4) providing opportunities for residents to assist in preservation and education; and (5) promoting local partnerships with organizations, educational institutions, businesses, and individuals.

In 1998 frustrations were high on the part of commission members as the heritage area had received no federal appropriations since its establishment in 1994. Funding provided by the park to the heritage area late that year through an interagency agreement enabled the commission to begin its grants program, thus helping to alleviate these frustrations. In 1999 the commission awarded grants to four highly visible historic preservation projects managed by four local nonprofit organizations. Two of the projects were in Natchitoches and two were downriver, and together they encompassed the region's major cultural groups.

During the program's early years, the application process remained simple—a committee of commissioners reviewed the one-page applications and recommended grant awards to the full commission. In late 2001, the commission hired a grants manager to develop a formal application process, manage the existing grants, and promote the program. As a result, program goals and guidelines were developed and applications became more rigorous. The application form was revamped to better ensure that projects would further heritage area goals and that applicants were capable of carrying out their plans.

As the program evolved, formal criteria were adopted and the grants committee was expanded to include non-commissioners with pertinent expertise. Applicants were required to show leverage, either financial or nonfinancial, and later to quantify the nonfinancial match. Perhaps most importantly, the grants manager improved the services available to applicants, providing

assistance throughout the grant process. This technical assistance has been significant, as many potential applicants are unfamiliar with the process of preparing grant proposals and carrying out projects. The grants manager not only raised the standards of the program, but also helped build capacity so that individuals and organizations could meet those standards.

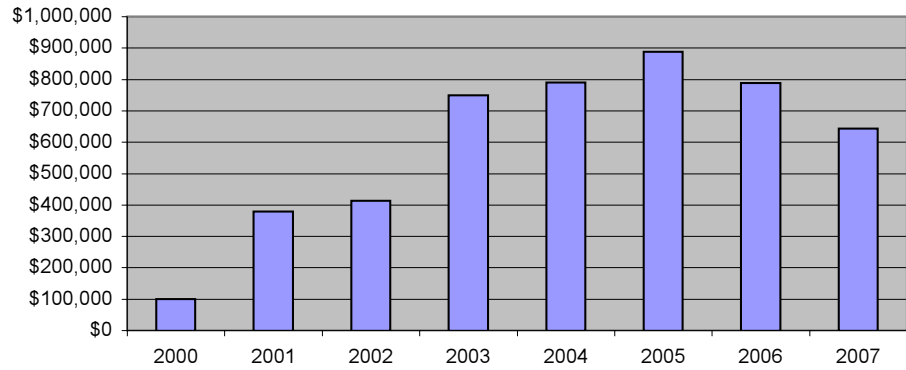
The grants program has especially benefited cultural stewardship in the region by providing funding for cultural groups and organizations to conduct projects on topics they identify as important (while also helping the commission to accomplish its mandates). The politics of cultural identity and stewardship are complex, and allowing the control of grant projects to remain with the grantees is significant for these groups. The projects reflect the breadth of partners' priorities and interests, and partners have gained important knowledge through the process of applying for funds and implementing projects. Completed grant projects have made major contributions to accomplishing the heritage area's mission of preserving and promoting the resources of the Cane River region.

On an annual basis, grant projects often produce the largest portion of leveraged support. Overall, the grants program has provided nearly \$1 million in funding to 89 projects, leveraging more than \$1.3 million in cash from partners as well as in-kind support valued at \$632,000. This is a significant investment by partners given the small scale of most grants and the relatively poor, rural setting of the heritage area.

### **C. Funding and other public investments in the heritage area**

The legislation establishing the heritage area did not require that federal funds appropriated by Congress be matched by other funding sources, nor did it specify an authorization ceiling for federal funds. Most national heritage areas receive federal appropriations through the NPS Heritage Partnership Programs (HPP) budget. While this has been the case in recent years for Cane River, its funding through HPP did not begin until fiscal year 2001, seven years after designation. What is unusual at Cane River is the funding and other support provided by Cane River Creole National Historical Park in the years prior to the beginning of direct federal appropriations. In 1998, the park allocated \$400,000 to the NPS Denver Service Center for professional assistance on the heritage area's management plan. In addition, a 1998 interagency agreement between the park and the heritage

**Figure 3. Total federal funding appropriated to Cane River National Heritage Area, fiscal years 2000 through 2007 (through the budget of Cane River Creole National Historical Park in 2000 and through NPS Heritage Partnership Programs thereafter).**



area allowed the park to transfer \$300,000 to the heritage area—\$100,000 for operations and \$200,000 for projects in 1999 and 2000. This funding enabled the commission to hire staff and begin its work.

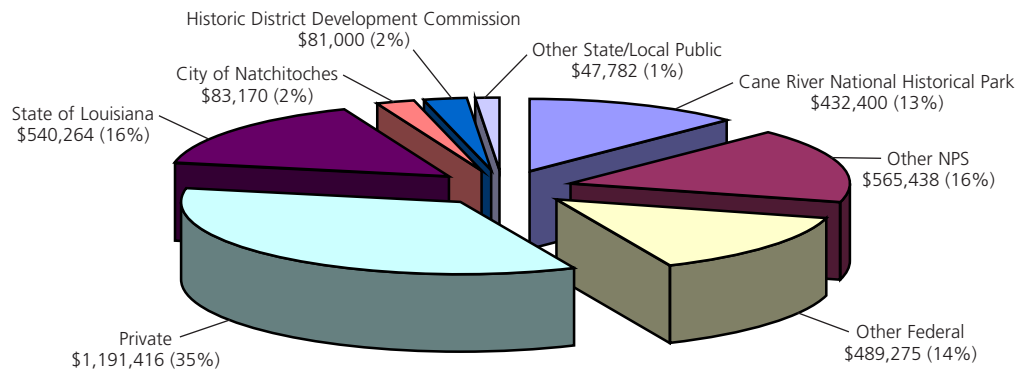
The first federal appropriation (of \$100,000) specifically designated for the heritage area was included in the park’s budget in 2000. From 2001 through 2007, annual federal appropriations to Cane River through HPP ranged from \$379,050 to \$888,000. Federal funds directed by Congress to Cane River National Heritage Area during these years totaled \$4.75 million (see figure 3).<sup>11</sup>

The commission has invested nearly \$3.08 million in projects on the ground (just under \$1 million through the grants program and \$2.1 million in commission-initiated projects). This investment has leveraged \$3.4 million in cash (\$1.3 million through the grants program and \$2.1 million from commission projects). The leveraged funds have come from diverse sources, as shown in figure 4. At nearly \$1.2 million, private sector funding has been the single largest source of leveraged funds (91 percent of which has come through historic preservation projects). Cane River Creole National Historical Park has been

an important funding partner, which is one important dimension among many of the park–heritage area relationship. Beyond NPS grants, the commission has recently obtained several large federal awards, most notably the \$274,000 in 2006 federal transportation enhancement funds for the depot project, and a \$197,000 grant in 2007 from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Program. Efforts to engage the state of Louisiana as a funding partner have begun to bear fruit recently, as shown by the legislature’s 2008 budget approval of \$110,000 for the heritage area and the \$100,000 provided in January 2008 in response to the city’s \$1 million capital outlay funding request for the depot project (neither is included in figure 4).

In addition to financial leverage, the commission has collected information on nonfinancial partner support, at first anecdotally and more recently with associated dollar values. Of the 177 projects undertaken by the commission and its partners, 158 (89 percent) show some type of nonfinancial support, with a total reported value of more than \$1.4 million. This figure is undoubtedly low, however, due to sporadic reporting prior to 2003.

**Total Sources of Leveraged Funds  
\$3,430,745**



**Figure 4. Sources of leveraged funds, fiscal years 1998 through 2007.**

<sup>11</sup> In fiscal year 2002, the heritage area’s budget included a congressionally-designated pass-through of \$250,000 for the Creole Heritage Center (CHC) at Northwestern State University of Louisiana. These funds were transferred to CHC and do not appear in the figures cited here.

### III. Strengths and Challenges of the Cane River Partnership System

The strengths of the Cane River partnership system<sup>12</sup> from the perspectives of heritage area management (the commission and its staff) and partners are presented separately below. Those observations are followed by an integrated discussion of challenges that reflects both perspectives. The management perspective is drawn from meetings and conversations with commissioners, staff, and individuals knowledgeable about the commission, and from two commission visioning sessions. The partner perspective is drawn from confidential interviews conducted with 30 partners.<sup>13</sup>



Children at Main Street's summer camp learn about history and architecture at Melrose Plantation. A heritage area grant supported the program.

#### A. Strengths of the current system: the management perspective

A fundamental strength of the current partnership system, according to study participants, lies in the breadth of the Cane River vision (i.e., preserving historic sites, conserving cultural landscapes and traditions, providing economic benefits, enhancing quality of life). A broad, integrated vision provides an important foundation for ongoing work and a tool for engaging diverse audiences.

The heritage area's relatively small size is also seen as a strength. Many of the key players have long, well-established relationships, and the core stories are encompassed by the heritage area's geographic boundary, which benefits interpretation and education. In addition, coordination and logistics are more manageable, limited resources can have a greater effect, and it is easier to reach a higher percentage of the population than in similar initiatives involving larger areas.

Study participants saw the commission and its staff as a strong feature of the partnership system. The commission transcends the agendas and interests of individual commissioners and the organizations they represent, and fulfills a wide range of roles that no one else plays in the region. It is able to partner effectively with diverse interests; it is not allied with any one organization or interest; and it is not viewed as a competitor for funding. The commission's federal status brings a number of key attributes, including clout, credibility, respect, and leveraging ability. Participants

observed that the commission fills a unique and critical niche, and that no other existing entity could be as effective in leading the work of the heritage area: no other organization has an equally broad mandate or the ability to bring different interests together. Also, the commission's staff is highly regarded by local, regional, and national partners. Staff members are seen as capable, dedicated, professional, and culturally sensitive, and they understand how to work effectively through partnerships.

One of the heritage area's greatest strengths is its relationship with Cane River Creole National Historical Park. With interwoven missions established by their shared authorizing legislation, the heritage area and the park have created a strong, mutually beneficial partnership that enables them to achieve more together than either could accomplish alone. The park provides a variety of support to the Commission and heritage area partners, including technical and interpretive assistance, legal guidance, administrative services, and funding for projects. The NPS National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) based at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches also works closely with the park and the heritage area. Although NCPTT provides services nationwide, its expertise, capacity, and resources have benefited local projects as well. The remarkable complementarity and synergy that have existed in recent years among the staff leaders of the heritage area and the park, and also with NCPTT, are widely seen by study participants as vital to their collective accomplishments.

Partnerships with other key governmental bodies and private sector interests have also been essential to the accomplishments of the heritage area. In particular, the commission has developed a strong, mutually beneficial relationship with the city of Natchitoches. There is good alignment of goals and priorities; the city has provided crucial capacity, leadership, and leveraging ability; and the two staffs have had close, productive working relationships. Some arms of Louisiana's state government have played important partnership roles; these include nearby state park units, the Divisions of Historic Preservation and

<sup>12</sup> "Cane River partnership system" refers to the overall array of components, participants, and processes that interact as a system within the heritage area. See section IV for more details.

<sup>13</sup> Throughout the remainder of this report, the term "study participants" is used to denote the people who participated in these meetings, conversations, and interviews.



Historic Preservation organizations are important partners in the heritage area initiative. The Kate Chopin House (top), home of the feminist author of *The Awakening*, is owned by the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches. The Roque House (bottom), built by a freed slave, is owned by the Natchitoches Historic Foundation.

Archeology, the Department of Transportation and Development, Northwestern State University, and the Louisiana School of Math, Science, and the Arts. From the private sector, area nonprofit organizations, businesses, and other groups have provided valuable leadership, capacity, leverage, political clout, and grassroots connections.

Substantial contributions of funding and other forms of support from diverse public and private partners have been essential to the heritage area's success to date. Core NPS Heritage Partnership Programs funding for the heritage area has been particularly important in supporting operations and in leveraging additional investments.

## B. Strengths of the current system: the partner perspective

Cane River's heritage resources and the stories connected with those resources link people to place and to each other, and also link different cultural groups to the same place. Study participants expressed a strong sense of pride in the region's heritage resources. Many partners have a direct, personal connection with these resources that derive from long-standing family ties to the land. The power in these linkages is one of the heritage area's greatest strengths, because it provides a foundation for the work of the Cane River initiative and a context for engaging different cultural groups. Study participants described how working with heritage area programs and staff has helped foster dialogue among different cultural groups on some difficult issues, which has led to greater understanding of each others' stories. Such dialogue and enhanced understanding in turn strengthen the shared sense of place and can lead to partnerships between groups that traditionally may not have worked together.

The ability of the commission and its staff to play a wide range of roles has empowered heritage area partners, encouraged them to think more broadly about heritage conservation, and enhanced opportunities for collaboration. Study participants cited such key roles as "sounding board," "critical friend," "facilitator," "connector," and "convener."<sup>14</sup> By fulfilling different needs when interacting with partners, passing along new ideas, and demonstrating best practices or new ways of working, the commission and its staff have helped partners operate collaboratively toward a common agenda. This is evidence that having an entity dedicated to partnership building and applying a regional, integrated approach can help build robust collaborations.

The strength and effectiveness of the partner network depend on the stability of individual partner groups and their ability to deliver results. Study participants reported that the commission and its staff have strengthened partners' ability to manage cultural and natural resources, enhanced their organizational management and operations, and improved their partnering skills. Interview data suggest that the commission and staff serve as the primary entity that communicates, coordinates, guides, and encourages network activity. Nearly every study participant indicated that at the present time no other organization in the region is capable of replacing the commission and its staff as "system facilitator."

In addition, study participants noted the vision and leadership provided by heritage area staff in programs and projects, as well as their commitment to "professionalism." In some instances, this occurs in working with partner organizations during the formative stages of specific projects. Staff feedback improves project outcomes, builds trust, and reinforces the importance of community-based efforts in fulfilling the heritage area's regional, multicultural mission. In other instances, heritage area staff help navigate a complex sea of history, stories, and values, acting as "an essential go-between." Study findings like these indicate that working successfully through multidimensional partnerships requires a certain organizational culture and leadership philosophy.

As with the management perspective, partners acknowledged the benefits of the NPS relationship, observing that the park and the heritage area complement and reinforce each other on many levels. Study data also suggest that the national heritage area designation adds value to the region. It validates the history and experience of the different cultural communities, provides a "branding" effect that is important to heritage-based tourism and other economic development, and communicates the credibility of heritage area programs, activities, and objectives.

## C. Challenges facing the current system

There are important challenges facing Cane River National Heritage Area that affect the ability of the commission and its partners to achieve the initiative's broad, integrated mission. Some of these challenges concern the commission's internal operations, while others relate to external matters.

<sup>14</sup> Study participants used 31 different terms to describe the roles that the commission and its staff play in interacting with partners.





Philip B. Huffman

Increasing residential development along Cane River poses a threat to the integrity of the region's cultural landscape.

### ***1. Ensuring the integrity of the cultural landscape***

Many study participants identified issues associated with land use planning and development as a significant threat, particularly along the river corridor where development has increased rapidly over the last five years. Cane River's authorizing legislation mentions landscape integrity as an element contributing to the national significance of the region. Maintaining the character and integrity of the cultural landscape is essential to the heritage area's purpose: without the cultural landscape, the region's core stories will lose their context.

### ***2. Improving management entity effectiveness***

Study participants noted a number of challenges and limitations that affect the commission's functioning and effectiveness. Many discussed the commission's composition, pointing out that there has been little turnover among members, that some commissioners do not serve as effective liaisons between the commission and the organizations they represent, and that certain member organizations may not be as vibrant as they were when the commission was established in 1994. Related to these issues is the perceived need to attract and cultivate new leaders. There have also been frustrations, inefficiencies, and operational hurdles associated with the federal appointments process, as well as limitations on the commission's ability as a federal body to access funding from certain sources (such as private contributions and earned income generation).

### ***3. Enhancing key partner relationships***

Many study participants highlighted the need for the commission to better engage the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury<sup>15</sup> and encourage it to be a more active participant in the partner network. The police jury has the authority to address land use planning and growth management, which is particularly important given the concerns about landscape conservation. Study participants also pointed to the need to strengthen the partnership with the state of Louisiana, which does not appear to have been as broadly or consistently involved in the heritage area in the past as might be desirable. There has been no clearly identified lead state agency to advance partnership efforts with the commission, and no dedicated seat(s) on the commission for key state agencies. Many study participants suggested that the Cane River heritage area deserves more state support given the significance of its history, the connections between local stories and those of other parts of Louisiana, and its potential to complement

heritage development activities statewide. Finally, although the commission's partnerships with the city of Natchitoches and the NPS are generally strong, there is an ongoing challenge to sustain and enhance these key relationships over time, especially in light of leadership transitions, changing priorities, budget pressures, and political dynamics.

### ***4. Ensuring the effectiveness of the partner network***

Study data suggest three important challenges related to the Cane River partner network. These are the need to (1) build partner capacity, (2) develop the next generation of community leaders, and (3) continually balance the distribution of costs and benefits throughout the network (i.e., ensure that the risks and rewards related to the heritage area's work are shared by all partners). The Cane River partner network is highly dynamic. As organizations evolve, new opportunities and challenges arise, and other social, political, and economic forces change, addressing these three key needs could help ensure the long-term resilience of the partner network.

### ***5. Maintaining relevancy to a broad public***

Some study participants suggested that there are still many residents who know little about the heritage area, and that the heritage area initiative needs to increase its visibility. This is part of a broader need to maintain relevancy and ensure that the heritage area is "interfacing" with the public in ways that demonstrate its benefits to the region. Raising the public profile of the heritage area can also attract more partners to the network.

### ***6. Securing stable funding from diverse sources***

Nearly every study participant identified funding as a pressing issue. The reliance on federal funds for core operations has made the heritage area vulnerable to the unpredictability of the federal appropriations process. The lack of a predictable funding base affects the ongoing ability of Cane River management to plan and carry out programs and has implications for staffing.

The discussions in sections V and VI beginning on page 18 offer options and identify opportunities for addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the identified strengths.

<sup>15</sup> In Louisiana, a parish corresponds to a county and the police jury is its governing body.

## IV. Critical Ingredients for Sustaining the Cane River Partnership System

Through its analysis, the study team identified an array of complementary components and processes that are needed over time to sustain and enhance the effectiveness of the Cane River partnership system. Many of these ingredients are already in place and have been essential to the heritage area's accomplishments to date, but not all are fully realized. The critical ingredients are organized into four categories—structuring, guiding, and cultivating the partnership system, and the role of time in the system.

### Structuring the partnership system

The structural ingredients provide much of the collaborative framework for implementation of the heritage area initiative. They include:

- A **management entity** that:
  - represents in a balanced way the diversity of key interests associated with the heritage area;
  - actively “stewards” the mission;
  - transcends organizational and political interests;
  - inspires respect in its dealings with heritage area partners, the general public, and those who comprise its authorizing environment;
  - has credibility and clout;
  - plays a unique and necessary role as the hub in a complex, multidimensional network.
- **Strong governmental partners** who help to “anchor” and thereby provide stability to the partnership system, including:
  - the city of Natchitoches (partnership generally well developed);
  - Natchitoches Parish (partnership not well developed, but desirable);
  - the state of Louisiana (partnership partially developed);
  - Cane River Creole National Historical Park (partnership very well developed) and other arms of the National Park Service (partnership generally well developed).
- A **robust network of partners** who help to carry out projects, advance the purposes and vision, and provide a “seedbed” of future leaders.
- **Community energy and a sense of local ownership** of the heritage area initiative, both of which help to maintain the vibrancy of the partnership system.

- **Secure, stable funding from diverse sources**, which buffers the uncertainties of the annual federal appropriations process and provides stability in planning and carrying out projects.
- The **ability to leverage funds and resources**, essential for building a diverse funding base and strengthening partner involvement.
- A **thematic** (rather than political or administrative) **boundary** that encompasses the core stories and significant resources of the heritage area.

### Guiding the partnership system

The guiding ingredients work together to provide direction and inspiration to heritage area participants and projects, and help to ensure that projects and programs focus on achieving heritage area purposes. They include:

- **Purposes, a vision, and a mission** that reflect the significance of the region's heritage assets; are realistic regarding community resources, needs, and constraints; and provide a guiding direction for the partnership system.
- A **vision** that is broad, integrates the various goals, and embraces the diverse cultures present in the region.
- A **compelling story** that is authentic, encompasses the history of the different cultures, connects with local resources, inspires pride, and is relevant to people's experiences today.
- A **sense of shared heritage** that provides a base for community engagement and partner initiatives and an organizing concept for collaboration.
- **Leadership** from the management entity that fosters a partnership culture and includes vision, integrity, a sense of entrepreneurialism, a willingness to take risks, and the ability to think creatively.
- A **capacity to leverage ideas** that encourages big-picture thinking, contributes to synergy, links partners in ways that strengthen the partner network, and helps to maintain the vibrancy of the partnership system.

Front Street, Natchitoches' historic commercial quarter, lies within the Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District. A shared history and economy keep the city of Natchitoches strongly connected to the rural land downriver.



- A **commitment to sustaining cultural and natural resources**, reinforced by the understanding that these resources provide an essential context for the stories and are integral to the heritage area's national significance.
- An emphasis on **building and enhancing partner capacity and leadership** so that each partner is effective and contributes leadership to the initiative.
- An ongoing **commitment to learning and adaptive management** that continually improves operations and programs and sustains the effectiveness of the partnership system.

**Cultivating the partnership system**

In concert with the guiding ingredients listed above, certain processes help to build collaboration and an effective partner network. They include:

- **Collaborative leadership** that engenders:
  - an open, inclusive, participatory approach;
  - trusting partner relationships;
  - transparent, flexible, adaptive operations;
  - a sense of common purpose and ownership of the heritage area initiative.
- An ongoing **commitment to meaningful community engagement** that helps to sustain the vitality of the partner network.
- **Responsiveness to local needs** that builds and sustains strong community relationships and ensures that the heritage area initiative remains relevant over time.
- Attention to **leveraging the full potential of the partnership system**, including every player and every component.

**The role of time in development of the partnership system**

It takes time to build the necessary social infrastructure to effectively implement a partnership system as complex as a national heritage area initiative—time for partnership building to bear fruit; time to build a strong, robust partner network; time to integrate diverse objectives at a regional or landscape scale; and time for the partnership system to evolve and mature.

Based on its analysis of strengths and challenges and the critical ingredients for sustained success, the study team identified options and opportunities for the commission to consider for the future. These are discussed in the next two sections, with options related to the heritage area framework discussed first, followed by other options and opportunities.

## V. National Heritage Area Framework Options and Opportunities



More than 20 partners participated in the design and implementation of the comprehensive signage system, which visually connects the heritage area's resources.

This section presents a series of options for the five components of the heritage area framework: (1) purposes, vision, and mission; (2) geographic scope/boundary; (3) management entity; (4) key governmental partnerships; and (5) funding and other forms of support (see figure 5). Many of the options are interrelated and, while some are mutually exclusive, many could be undertaken simultaneously. Some options would require legislative action by one level of government or another, while others could be pursued administratively by the commission and heritage area partners. The study team is not recommending any specific option or combination of options; instead, the options are provided for consideration by the commission and its partners in making decisions for the future. All of the options are discussed in greater depth in the full study report.

### A. Purposes, vision, and mission

Cane River's legislated purposes and vision and mission statements provide the guiding direction for what the initiative is designed to achieve.<sup>16</sup> Several options were identified for refining this guiding direction as well as the commission's associated authorities.<sup>17</sup>

*Option A.1. Add new dimensions to the purposes, vision, and mission.* Two possible additions emerged during the study: conserving natural resources and enhancing recreational opportunities. Both are related to the heritage area's current priorities and activities, but neither is explicitly included in the guiding direction and it does not appear that any other entity is providing strong leadership on either across the Cane River region.

*Option A.2. Align the heritage area's legislated purposes with its vision and mission statements.* Two concepts were identified as possible additions to the purposes: fostering compatible economic development based on the region's heritage assets and enhancing quality of life for local residents. Both are important elements of the heritage area's current vision and mission, but neither is addressed specifically in Cane River's authorizing legislation.

*Option A.3. Align the management entity's authorities with the purposes, vision, and mission.* Some of the commission's legislated authorities are defined somewhat narrowly relative to the breadth of the purposes, vision, and mission. Specific authorities that could be broadened include those related to cooperative agreements, grant making, and the types of assistance the commission can provide. Broadening these authorities could help to ensure that the commission or any successor management entity has the flexibility it needs to optimize progress toward the heritage area's purposes, vision, and mission.

### B. Geographic scope/boundary

The heritage area's existing boundary is closely related to the region's core stories and generally appears to have been workable for the heritage area's first phase. However, study participants identified a number of possible adjustments, including extending the boundary farther north and/or west, including more areas within the city limits of Natchitoches, encompassing the entire Cane River watershed, and eliminating Fort Jesup as a satellite site. Within this context, the study team identified two options that could be pursued sequentially, or the second one could be pursued alone. In deciding whether to undertake either of these options, perhaps the primary question to consider is this: Does the boundary as it is currently configured appropriately reflect and encompass Cane River's core stories, themes, and significant heritage resources?

*Option B.1. Conduct a boundary study.* A more thorough study of possible adjustments to the boundary could be initiated, either as part of a federal reauthorization package or administratively by the commission.

*Option B.2. Pursue boundary changes legislatively through federal reauthorization, without further study.* As an alternative to investing the additional time, money, and energy required for a formal boundary study, the commission and its partners could identify desired changes through a less involved but still open and public process, then seek to have those changes enacted directly as part of federal reauthorizing legislation.

<sup>16</sup> The heritage area's purposes are stated in the authorizing legislation; the vision and mission statements are articulated in the management plan and in subsequent refinements by the commission.

<sup>17</sup> The commission's authorities (or powers) are defined in the heritage area's enabling legislation.

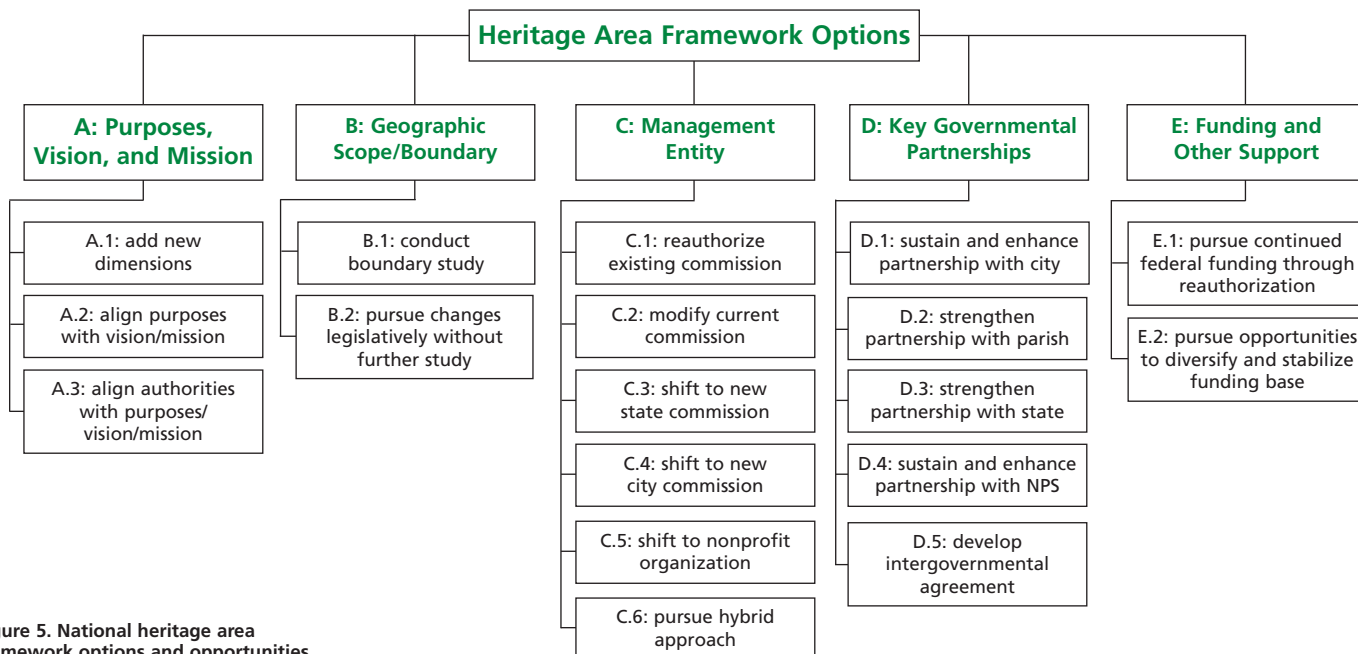


Figure 5. National heritage area framework options and opportunities

### C. Management entity

As the commission approaches the sunset of its federal authorization in 2010, one of the most important questions is whether it or some other organization will serve as management entity for the heritage area’s next phase. Indeed, the authorizing legislation explicitly requires the commission to “identify appropriate entities, such as a nonprofit corporation, that could be established to assume the responsibilities of the commission following its termination.”

The study team identified key factors to keep in mind in considering management entity options:

- the entity’s ability to embody the essential characteristics described in section IV (critical ingredients)
- the importance of seeking and retaining a diverse mix of skills, backgrounds, and expertise among members of the entity’s governing body
- the challenge of achieving the right balance of interests and the right mix of qualifications among members of the governing body
- the need for flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances
- the ability and readiness to effectively fulfill the responsibilities of the management entity in 2010

The study team identified six potential management entity options (listed below). The strengths and challenges inherent in each of these options are discussed in the full project report. The selected organization would need to be

authorized by Congress as the management entity in order to receive funding through NPS Heritage Partnership Programs; this could be specified in the federal reauthorizing legislation.

**Option C.1. Reauthorize the existing commission.** Under this option, the commission would continue as management entity with its current composition for a specified duration (perhaps an additional five, ten, or twenty years).

**Option C.2. Modify the composition of the current federal commission.** This option would involve reauthorizing the commission for a specified duration but with changes to enhance its effectiveness as a body representing the heritage area’s full range of interests. Possible adjustments that respond to concerns or needs identified by study participants include additional representation of African Americans; Creoles; the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism; the Natchitoches Parish Tourist Commission and/or the Natchitoches Area Convention and Visitors Bureau; and at-large interests.

**Option C.3. Shift to a new state-authorized commission.** As an alternative to the existing federal commission, the Louisiana legislature could establish a state-level commission with similar representation of interests. Two examples of state-authorized commissions that currently work with the heritage area initiative are the Natchitoches Historic District Development Commission and the Cane River Waterway Commission. While both were established through state legislation, each has a strong local orientation and does not have day-to-day involvement with state government.



Philip Gould

Lair LaCour, known on Cane River as "Mama Lair," holds portraits of her parents. Cane River Creole culture is anchored by a strong sense of family.

**Option C.4. Shift to a new city-authorized commission.** Similarly, the Natchitoches City Council could establish a new representative commission through a municipal ordinance. The Natchitoches Historic District Commission is a well-established example of a representative body set up in this way. It would be essential for the authorizing ordinance to ensure balanced representation among interests throughout the heritage area, and for city and other in-town interests to engage those downriver to ensure that the heritage area initiative remains focused on the broad regional agenda and relevant to all of its diverse constituents.

**Option C.5. Shift to a nonprofit organization.** Cane River's authorizing legislation specifically mentions the possibility of a nonprofit as an alternative to the commission, and nonprofits serve as management entities for many national heritage areas around the country. However, at the moment no nonprofit organization in the Cane River region appears to be positioned or prepared to take on the role of the heritage area's management entity. None of the well-established nonprofits has a mission and scope of comparable breadth to that of the heritage area, and study participants suggested that none could bring all of the diverse interests and perspectives together in the integrative, transcendent way that the federal commission has. It is possible that the fledgling Friends of Cane River could be nurtured to fill this role; alternatively, a new nonprofit organization could be created.

**Option C.6. Pursue a hybrid approach that combines features of other management entity options.**

- **Option C.6.a. Continue with the federal commission for Cane River's next phase, and cultivate and position another entity to take over at the commission's next sunset.** Heritage area partners could seek reauthorization of the commission for perhaps five or ten years (through option C.1 or C.2). During that period, the commission and its partners would identify the most desirable alternate management entity (e.g., options C.3 through C.5), and move assertively to get that entity in place, initially as an operating partner and then as successor to the commission. This process would need to be carefully planned and implemented to ensure an orderly, effective transfer of institutional knowledge and capacity from one entity to the other.<sup>18</sup>

- **Option C.6.b. Develop a nonprofit organization to complement the management entity and serve as a core operating partner in advancing the Cane River initiative.** Alternatively, a nonprofit could be cultivated to play a leadership role alongside the management entity but without the explicit intent that it would become the management entity itself. This scenario could be pursued in conjunction with any of options C.1 through C.4. Careful forethought would be needed to carve out complementary niches for the nonprofit and the management entity, and close, ongoing communication between them would be essential.

## D. Key governmental partnerships

Partnerships with a rich mix of public and private organizations lie at the heart of Cane River National Heritage Area's strategy. Of the many partners involved, several key governmental partners play particularly important roles in Cane River's framework and have a significant bearing on the initiative's effectiveness. Some of these governmental relationships are well developed and serve as strong, mutually beneficial connections, while others are not yet as firmly established. Because of their importance, the study team worked with commissioners, staff, and partners to identify options for building and enhancing these relationships in the future.

**Option D.1. Sustain and enhance the commission's strong partnership with the city of Natchitoches.** This option would build on existing strengths and sustain the present synergy between the city and the heritage area in the face of ever-changing circumstances. Key elements include maintaining strong staff ties over time and seeking further opportunities to institutionalize the relationship (for instance, through an intergovernmental agreement as described in option D.5 below).

**Option D.2. Strengthen the commission's partnership with Natchitoches Parish.** The commission has not yet been able to build a strong, mutually beneficial partnership with the parish like the one it shares with the city. With the parish's key role in land use planning and other matters of importance to the heritage area's future, it is clearly desirable—if not imperative—to establish a stronger, more effective relationship. The commission could move in that direction with strategic engagement that

<sup>18</sup> The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor in Pennsylvania has pursued this approach successfully over the past several years, with a gradual, carefully executed transition from a federal commission to a nonprofit management entity. Further information on the D&L's transition is available at [http://www.delawareandlehigh.org/images/library/final\\_nps\\_csi\\_report.pdf](http://www.delawareandlehigh.org/images/library/final_nps_csi_report.pdf).

Fort St. Jean Baptiste State Historic Site helps to bring colonial history alive for visitors. The site is a replica of the region's early eighteenth-century French outpost.



(1) creates a tighter connection and liaison through the police jury's representative on the commission, (2) seeks a closer relationship and regular communication with the police juror whose district encompasses the heritage area, (3) initiates a regular commission presence at police jury and Natchitoches Parish Planning and Zoning Commission meetings, (4) actively engages both of those boards in discussing matters of joint interest, (5) pursues project opportunities of mutual benefit, and (6) leverages funding to address mutual needs. An intergovernmental agreement (see option D.5) could also serve as a mechanism for building a stronger partnership.

***Option D.3. Strengthen the heritage area's partnership with the state of Louisiana.***

Evidence from other national heritage areas suggests that a strong, "anchoring" connection with a lead state agency can be invaluable in advancing an integrated vision for heritage conservation and development. Because of complementary objectives and programs, it appears that the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism (CRT) would be the most logical choice to serve as designated lead state agency in the heritage area partner network. Other possible actions to strengthen the partnership with the state include creating a designated seat for CRT on the commission (or its successor), seeking opportunities to pursue "need-based" collaboration with CRT and other state agencies, pursuing the creation of a state-level heritage area program within CRT,

building closer relationships with the governor and the legislature, and establishing an intergovernmental agreement (see option D.5).

***Option D.4. Sustain and enhance the heritage area's strong partnership with the National Park Service.***

Anchored by its close, local tie with Cane River Creole National Historical Park, the heritage area's partnership with the NPS is well developed in many respects and serves as a strong, mutually beneficial connection. Perhaps the largest challenge for the NPS relationship will be to sustain the synergy of the past several years, given that changes in personnel, priorities, and resources are inevitable on both sides over time. Overcoming that challenge undoubtedly will hinge in large part on the individuals involved, but there may be other ways that the NPS's vital involvement in and support for the heritage area could be further strengthened and solidified.

One approach would be to seek additional staff capacity to enable the national park to provide broader assistance to the community and to heritage area partners. This could include additional staff and funding support for interpretive and educational programs, hands-on technical assistance, and/or operational assistance. A second approach would be to solidify the heritage area's relationship with and support from NPS's Southeast Region and Washington offices. Study participants suggested this might be achieved through (1) greater dialogue between heritage area and NPS leaders; (2) additional technical

The quarters at Magnolia Plantation housed workers from 1853 through the 1960s. The national park shares the stories of all the families who lived on the plantation during colonial times, in the eras of slavery and sharecropping, and up to the mid-twentieth century.



assistance through relevant NPS programs, such as the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program; (3) occasional staff exchanges; and (4) additional NPS regional- and national-level staff support for Cane River and other national heritage areas in the Southeast Region (e.g., establishment of a full-time national heritage area coordinator position for the Southeast Region comparable to the existing position in the Northeast Region). In addition, NPS could proactively plan for future transitions in park leadership and management (see section VI, option C.2).

**Option D.5. Develop an intergovernmental partnership agreement.** To further strengthen relationships with its key governmental partners, the commission could initiate a written partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding that would bind those partners (and potentially others) together more formally. The purpose of such an agreement would be to help solidify relationships and institutionalize the commitment of key governmental partners to participate in the heritage area initiative. It could also identify the roles and responsibilities of the participating entities in helping to support the initiative.

## E. Funding and other forms of support

Aside from the future management entity, the other major question raised by the approaching sunset of federal authorization relates to future funding and whether federal appropriations for Cane River operations and programming will continue. Working with study participants, the project team identified two primary options

**Option E.1. Pursue continued federal funding through reauthorizing legislation.** This option would enable continued annual appropriations to the heritage area through the NPS Heritage Partnership Programs budget. As has been the case since Cane River began receiving federal appropriations in 2000, this funding would likely provide core support for ongoing operations and programming at least in the short term, since other sources of comparable funding have not yet been secured.

**Option E.2. Continue pursuing support from a broad mix of other sources, and look for new opportunities to diversify and stabilize the heritage area's funding base.** This option recognizes the need to reduce reliance on federal appropriations and increase the support contributed by core partners and others. This option would enhance the initiative's ability and capacity to achieve its mission and would increase resiliency and durability over time. Potential opportunities for further support include (1) funding and other assistance from federal and state agencies for relevant projects and activities; (2) an annual appropriation from the state legislature; (3) existing and/or new local revenue streams;<sup>19</sup> and (4) private sector support (e.g., support from corporations, foundations, and individuals, and revenue generation through a nonprofit operating partner or friends group). Each of these is described in more detail in the full project report.

<sup>19</sup> Options for tapping existing local revenue streams could include the addition of a small increment to the area's hotel/motel tax or allocation of a small percentage of the property tax. Options for a new local revenue stream could include a new fee on developments or on property transfers within the heritage area.



## VI. Other Options and Opportunities

In addition to the framework options, the study team identified other options and opportunities for enhancing and sustaining the Cane River partnership system. Grouped by (1) investment in programs, (2) investment in outreach and enhancing partnerships, and (3) investment in operations, these options emerged from the study team’s data collection and its considerations of the challenges (section III) and the critical ingredients (section IV). As with the framework options in section V, the study team is not making specific recommendations; instead, it is presenting an array of ideas for consideration. See the full report for a more in-depth discussion of these options.

### A. Investment in programs

#### *Option A.1. Develop a long-term strategy and tools for cultural landscape stewardship.*

Study participants repeatedly identified the need to conserve the character of Cane River’s nationally significant landscapes as the largest challenge facing the commission and its partners in the near future. The rural communities and agricultural landscapes on both sides of the river provide an important visual and historical context for the heritage area’s stories and for the historic buildings that have benefited from considerable financial investment by the commission and its partners. Possible steps that the commission and its partners could take to address this land use challenge include:

- Partner with an existing land trust from outside the region to conserve important landscapes in the short term, and establish local land trust capacity over the long term.
- Offer workshops for landowners on conservation options.
- Identify a supportive landowner with a high-priority parcel who will participate in a pilot conservation easement project.
- Work with the parish and/or the city to preserve parks, open space, and public access downriver. Possible sources of funding for such an effort include the state, especially federally funded programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (<http://www.crt.state.la.us/parks/ioutdoorrec.aspx>) that are administered by the Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism.<sup>20</sup> Technical assistance may be available through the NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

(<http://www.nps.gov/ncrc/programs/rtca/>).

- Partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to expand interests of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge in the heritage area.
- Cultivate broader understanding and appreciation of the significance of the region’s resources among developers.
- Better integrate “bricks and mortar” historic preservation with broader conservation and stewardship of Cane River cultural landscapes.

*Option A.2. Explore tools and approaches to guide and manage growth.* It is important that planning and zoning policies reflect the vision of the community at large and conserve key attributes of the region. “Smart growth” is an increasingly popular approach to development that balances community needs with economic, environmental, and health concerns. The commission could take steps toward guiding growth to protect landscape character:

- Provide heritage area funding, and seek matching support, for the Natchitoches Parish Planning and Zoning Commission to conduct a heritage-area-wide land use study.
- Pursue an “adjacent lands” study for Cane River Creole National Historical Park through the NPS.
- Seek direct assistance from professional organizations with relevant expertise such as the Center for Planning Excellence ([www.planningexcellence.org/program/louisiana-community-planning.html](http://www.planningexcellence.org/program/louisiana-community-planning.html)), the American Institute of Architects’ competitive design assessment program ([www.aia.org/liv\\_dat](http://www.aia.org/liv_dat)), and the Southern Rural Development Center’s program on smart growth and rural agricultural areas (<http://srdc.msstate.edu/>).
- Gather information on effective planning and growth management from sources such as the Smart Growth Network ([www.smartgrowth.org/sgn](http://www.smartgrowth.org/sgn)), Smart Growth Vermont ([www.smartgrowthvermont.org](http://www.smartgrowthvermont.org)), the American Planning Association ([www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org)) and its Louisiana chapter ([www.louisiana-apa.org](http://www.louisiana-apa.org)), and the American Society of Landscape Architects ([www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org)).
- Pursue participation by a Cane River team in the national program “Balancing Nature and Commerce in Communities That Neighbor Public Lands” (<http://conservationfund.org/node/458>).

<sup>20</sup> See also <http://www.crt.state.la.us/documentarchive/grants/grantprogramsolg-dcrt20071204.pdf> and <http://www.crt.state.la.us/legislativeinitiatives/pdf/2007federal/smartgrowthopenspace.pdf>.



Split cane and split oak baskets are traditional products of American Indians in this area. The Caddo Nation of Oklahoma traces ancestry to this region, and tribal leaders work with local partners to share Caddo stories and traditions.

**Option A.3. Examine models and tools to strengthen existing businesses and foster new, compatible economic development.** Economic strategies are available that could help to sustain the communities and cultural landscapes downriver:

- Develop a Cane River “brand” that creates an identity for local products that are associated with the Cane River area, recognized for their socially and environmentally responsible production, and related to the heritage area mission.<sup>21</sup>
- Foster compatible and sustainable agricultural efforts that support the local resource economy, such as community supported agriculture and farmers’ markets.<sup>22</sup>
- Support local, value-added products that are high-quality, produced in a manner that is consistent with conservation goals, and associated with place.<sup>23</sup>

**Option A.4. Seek a multiple-property listing on the National Register of Historic Places for historic resources downriver.** Pursuing this option, which would include cultural landscapes, archeological resources (prehistoric through historic), and historic properties, could help to convey the integrated nature of the heritage assets.

**Option A.5. Support implementation of design guidelines for the Waterwell Road corridor.** The commission and the city partnered to develop these guidelines two years ago following the annexation of the interchange and corridor by the city of Natchitoches.

**Option A.6. Capitalize on interpretive and marketing opportunities to connect Cane River stories more broadly.** Pursuing this option could enhance tourism, increase heritage area visibility, broaden partnerships, and attract new audiences. Possible opportunities include connecting with Atchafalaya National Heritage Area; linking with Creole initiatives elsewhere in Louisiana and beyond; connecting with initiatives related to the El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail and the African American Heritage Trail in Louisiana, and the development of French Colonial heritage in Missouri; and highlighting the Cane River region’s Civil War and World War II heritage.

**Option A.7. Participate in the establishment of a regional collections conservation center.** This option would involve collaborating with Cane River Creole National Historical Park, the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, and Northwestern State University to establish a facility that would care for the extensive historical collections from the Oakland and Magnolia Plantations, managed by the NPS, and the university’s Williamson Museum collection.

## **B. Investment in outreach and enhancing partnerships**

**Option B.1. Develop a strategy for building and sustaining relationships with key stakeholders who are not yet fully engaged.** This could include preparing materials targeted to different interests that would make a case for enhanced collaboration. It would explain the value the heritage area brings to the region and identify common objectives, mutual benefits to collaboration, and specific ideas for advancing shared concerns. Key stakeholders not yet fully engaged in the heritage area include the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury and Natchitoches Parish Planning and Zoning Commission, the African American community (recent progress provides a foundation for enhancing relationships with this important partner group), and the business community and others involved with community and economic development.

**Option B.2. Develop a strategy for strengthening leadership skills and capacity in partner organizations.** This option would build depth and resiliency in the partner network and help to cultivate the next generation of leaders. Seeking opportunities to enhance citizens’ abilities to lead within their communities and organizations would complement the commission’s project-related capacity building through the competitive grants program. Some national heritage areas have developed their own leadership training programs.<sup>24</sup> Partnering with the newly designated Atchafalaya National Heritage Area might provide an opportunity to develop specialized training because of the increased number of potential participants. There may also be opportunities to develop a specific heritage track within the following existing leadership development programs:

<sup>21</sup> For information on national park areas that have developed associated products to help preserve traditional land uses and cultural landscapes, see *Stewardship Begins with People: An Atlas of Places, People, and Handmade Products*, available from the Conservation Study Institute by emailing [stewardship@nps.gov](mailto:stewardship@nps.gov).

<sup>22</sup> For an explanation of community supported agriculture, see <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csadef.shtml>.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of existing local products associated with place include cards and books displaying the artwork of Clementine Hunter (sold at Melrose Plantation), Cane River basketry, and Cane River pecans.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Leadership Blackstone Valley at [www.blackstonevalley.org/leadership](http://www.blackstonevalley.org/leadership).



Sonny Carter

Fishing along Cane River is one of many popular outdoor activities in the area's rivers, lakes, and forests.

- Community Development Works, offered through the Rapides Foundation ([www.communitydevelopmentworks.org](http://www.communitydevelopmentworks.org));
- Leadership Louisiana, a one-year leadership development program offered by the Council for a Better Louisiana ([www.cabl.org/leadership.aspx](http://www.cabl.org/leadership.aspx));
- Southern Rural Development Center's community leadership training programs offered through state land grant universities in conjunction with the Pew Partnership for Civic Change's LeadershipPlenty® Institute (<http://srdc.msstate.edu/focusareas/civic/civic.htm>; [www.pew-partnership.org/lpinstitute.html](http://www.pew-partnership.org/lpinstitute.html));
- Heritage Development Institute's training programs for people working in heritage development, coordinated through the Alliance of National Heritage Areas and the Heritage Development Partnership (<http://www.heritagedevelopmentinstitute.org/home>).

**Option B.3. Pursue a closer partnership with Atchafalaya National Heritage Area.** In addition to leadership training, numerous opportunities exist to work collaboratively with Atchafalaya, including efforts at both the state and federal levels that would benefit the two heritage areas (e.g., establishing a state program on heritage areas and coordinating efforts to enhance relationships with the NPS at the regional level and in Washington, D.C.). Closer to home, the two heritage areas could build peer relationships between their staffs, participate informally in each other's commission meetings and public events, arrange reciprocal site visits, and pursue joint programming opportunities in overlapping subject areas.

**Option B.4. Further capitalize on the substantial federal presence in the Cane River region.** Although the regional managers of the area's federal agencies meet periodically, there may be additional unrealized opportunities that could provide (1) combined clout, resources, and expertise to address pressing challenges (e.g., landscape conservation), (2) closer coordination of services (with the heritage area serving as an umbrella for better integration), and (3) further opportunities to weave stories together at exhibits and in public materials.

**Option B.5. Provide additional leadership for partnership opportunities related to recreational enhancements.** Potential enhancements such as a bike path, walking trails, a greenway along the river corridor, and water-based recreation represent unrealized potential for both residents and visitors. Developing recreational opportunities would broaden the community

development potential for services (e.g., food services downriver, bike and boat rental facilities, use of centralized transportation).

**Option B.6. Provide additional leadership for partnership opportunities and activities related to conservation of natural resources and prime agricultural land.** This option could involve collaborating with local, state, and federal agencies and the private sector on initiatives related to these important resources. One possible joint initiative could be to conduct a natural heritage inventory within Cane River's boundary to identify the types, locations, and significance of natural communities and wildlife habitats.

**Option B.7. Publicize research opportunities nationally to the academic and research communities.** This option could be pursued jointly with Northwestern State University and the Creole Heritage Center. The research conducted to date involving Cane River's heritage assets has added considerably to understanding of the interaction of cultures and traditions over time, and no doubt much more can be learned.

**Option B.8. Seek opportunities to work with others to engage more broadly with the general public.** Participating in initiatives being led by others could provide wider visibility for the heritage area. Opportunities include the upcoming Natchitoches tricentenary in 2013–2014 and activities related to the development of the Louisiana State Museum, Natchitoches Events Center, Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame, and the new downtown hotel complex.

## C. Investment in operations

There are steps that the commission could take to improve heritage area operations and enhance its ability to govern effectively in a "networked" environment.

**Option C.1. Initiate measures to facilitate a common understanding of commission roles and responsibilities on the part of commissioners and the organizations they represent.** Study participants identified the need for commissioners to have close ties to the organizations they represent, to understand their roles and responsibilities as commissioners, and to participate actively in commission meetings and initiatives. Steps that could be taken to address these concerns include:

- Identify desired qualifications for potential commissioners and clarify expectations, roles, and responsibilities (including the need to



Philip Gould

Agricultural fields contribute to Cane River's special sense of place. Above, Donald Balthazar rides along straight rows of young cotton.

effectively represent the constituency on whose behalf they have been nominated, and to act as an effective communication link) and convey this information to nominating bodies.

- Prepare a primer for commissioners and the organizations they represent that provides a general overview of “governing by network” and outlines the expectations, roles, and responsibilities of the commissioners within this context.<sup>25</sup>
- Develop a strategy for ongoing education and engagement of all commissioners and proxies, which could include an orientation course; periodic refreshers on heritage area history, policies, and process; and annual visioning and work planning. This strategy should include a process for transferring the knowledge gained by commissioners to the organizations they represent.

**Option C.2. Develop a strategy for dealing effectively with transitions.** With inevitable transitions over time among partners, commissioners, and heritage area staff—and possibly a transition to a new management entity—it is critical to ensure both the smooth functioning of ongoing programs and partner relationships and the maintenance and transfer of institutional knowledge. Specific steps relevant to transitions in leadership of key actors are (1) to maintain network functionality and understand the essential roles the management entity must keep playing as primary network hub, (2) to model existing staff relationships that have been key to success, and (3) to convene meetings both internally and with partners to discuss each transition and how to minimize disruption to operations. It is important to agree on a transparent approach to planning for and managing the transition so that incoming leaders have ready access to knowledge of the current situation (including prior commitments and agreements), and an understanding of the key issues, priorities, and opportunities. This report, for example, could be of use in upcoming leadership shifts.

**Option C.3. Conduct periodic evaluation and visioning exercises to keep programs and operations fresh and relevant.** With the heritage area constantly evolving and maturing, it is essential to use adaptive management (i.e., applying lessons learned to improve the partnership system) to maintain and enhance effectiveness.

The commission could develop a process for periodically assessing programs and operations and deciding on actions based on how things have evolved. Such a process could include (1) periodic visioning sessions; (2) reviewing the management plan, highlighting accomplishments, and prioritizing needs and actions; and (3) developing a short-term strategic plan to capitalize on unanticipated opportunities.

**Option C.4. Develop a better system for tracking the impacts of the grants program and the leverage from grants and commission-initiated projects.** Although this option applies generally to commission investments, one specific example highlights this need: the funding provided by the commission to the Creole Heritage Center between 2003 and 2007. These funds, which were provided for CHC operations and programs, represent a significant investment and the primary means by which the commission has invested in Creole-related projects. Without a mechanism for documenting the use of these funds and the resulting impacts, it is difficult to estimate accurately the full extent of the commission’s accomplishments in the Creole community.

**Option C.5. Depending on funding, consider expansion of staff capacity to meet wide-ranging demands.** If funding is available, expanding capacity in the areas of development (i.e., fundraising) and communications would help to address the needs to expand and diversify funding sources and engage more broadly with the general public.

**Option C.6. Change the structure of commission leadership to chair and vice chair.** In order to ensure continued mobility in commission leadership, a number of study participants suggested that the co-chair arrangement be changed to chair and vice chair.

**Option C.7. Update the NPS “special resource study” that was done prior to establishment of the heritage area and the park in 1994.** This would provide an opportunity to evaluate the region’s heritage resources in light of both current circumstances and changes since the initial study was done. It could also allow for an assessment of broader theme-based linkages with Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, other NPS units, and other heritage-related initiatives.

<sup>25</sup> See Stephen Goldsmith and William D. Eggers, *Governing by Network: The New Shape of the Public Sector* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004). See also chapter 7 in the full study report.

## VII. Closing Thoughts

Oaklawn Plantation's oak allée is one of the longest in Louisiana. Live oaks such as these often mark the formal entrance to the main houses at plantations in the region.



Philip Gould

The growth and evolution of the Cane River National Heritage Area initiative are clearly visible in its accomplishments and the progress made toward achieving its established purposes. Much remains to be done, however, to achieve the vision laid out in the heritage area's management plan, and there are significant challenges. This study and the approaching sunset of federal authorization and funding create an opportunity for the commission to think strategically about moving forward into the heritage area's next phase. Key considerations for the commission and its partners will include deciding what management structure will best position the heritage area to be successful over the long term; what actions will sustain a strong, effective partner network; how to incorporate lessons learned into management practices and operations; how to secure sustainable funding; and what projects and programming will fully leverage the heritage area's partnership system.

There is much that can be learned from the experience and accomplishments of the Cane River initiative. The strong, vibrant relationship that has been established with Cane River Creole National Historical Park demonstrates the mutual value in having a close association between a national park and a national heritage area. The synergy that has resulted from the heritage area's partnerships with the park and the city of Natchitoches demonstrates that these relationships are models for public-private partnerships. The careful building of trust and respectful relationships across multicultural groups and the success in working together through difficult subject matter illustrate to a much broader audience the importance of addressing, not avoiding, such issues. Finally, the lessons learned at Cane River about what can be accomplished by approaching heritage conservation and development collaboratively are instructive not only to other national heritage areas but to those working in conservation and community-based initiatives across the nation and beyond.

## Cane River National Heritage Area Commission

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## The Cane River Evaluation and Visioning Project Team

The study process was a team activity: all members participated actively in study design, implementation, analysis, and report preparation. Within this overall approach, individual team members had lead responsibility for the following:

Philip B Huffman (cooperator): description and analysis of the existing heritage area framework and the framework options

Daniel N. Laven (management assistant, Conservation Study Institute): national context, evaluation of the partnership system from the partner perspective, and description of critical ingredients

Nora J. Mitchell (director, Conservation Study Institute, and member of the project management committee): project scope, regional coordination, financial management, and report review  
Jacquelyn L. Tuxill (director of partnership programs, Conservation Study Institute, and cooperator): project management; background and context; documentation of accomplishments, investments, and leverage; other options and opportunities; and report coordination

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Jack Boucher, National Park Service, HABS/HAER/HALS

The Cane River Gin processed cotton from the surrounding family farms and plantations in the mid-twentieth century. Abandoned cotton gins dot Cane River's landscape, reminders of the area's agricultural legacy.

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