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Executive Summary

In October 2006, the Secretary of the Interior was authorized by Congress through the “Delaware National Coastal Special Resources Study Act of 2006” (Public Law 109-338) to conduct a Special Resource Study of the coastal area of the state of Delaware. This report constitutes the results of the study undertaken by the Northeast Regional Office of the National Park Service (NPS).

The study, in accordance with legislation setting forth the criteria to be used in such analyses, and reflecting current NPS management policies, examines the national significance of sites within the state of Delaware, and their suitability and feasibility for designation as a potential unit of the national park system. It also examines the need for NPS management of those resources versus management by other agencies of government, or through private means. In the following chapters of this report is the explanation of how the criteria were applied to resources in the state, and what process the study team conducted to reach its conclusions.

The study legislation directed the Secretary of the Interior to consider eight themes when analyzing the resources for potential inclusion in the national park system. The study team carefully performed reconnaissance analyses on the many sites associated with the themes and determined that only two had related resources that could be determined to be nationally significant and suitable.

Thus, the “Early Settlement” theme focused on early settlement by the Dutch, Swedish and English, and the “Birth of a Nation” theme focused on the period leading up to when Delaware signed the U.S. Constitution and became the nation’s first state.

Because of Delaware’s long coastline that includes both the Delaware River and the Atlantic Ocean, and because of its strategic location as a Mid-Atlantic state, its history has been rich and varied. The history of early settlement in Delaware is unusual because it covers successive waves of Swedish, Dutch and English claims on the same landscapes. Both the Dutch and Swedish were interested in the economic advantages of developing outposts to obtain furs from the American Indians located along the Delaware. It was not until the English claimed the land in Delaware that the settlement process began in earnest.

The period in Delaware’s history before its rise to prominence as the “First State,” upon ratification of the U.S. Constitution, provides an important lens on the subject of how early colonial leaders struggled with the notion of breaking free from England. Delaware exemplifies the character of an entirely new nation as the result of that quest for freedom and independence.

Chapter 1 of the report describes the purpose and background of the study and explains the process by which it was conducted, identifies the study area, and summarizes the public involvement process. The congressionally required criteria for evaluating the potential designation of new units of the national park system are also noted here.

Chapter 2 discusses the history and resources of the state of Delaware as they relate to two themes: early Dutch, Swedish and English settlement, and the period leading up to the founding of the United States. The chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive historical account. Rather, it provides the basis for public understanding of the resources and information helpful in the determination of whether these resources meet criteria for potential designation as a unit of the national park system.

Chapter 3 presents the analyses of the resources and their relationships to the various criteria for potential designation of a unit of the national park system. It concludes that selected resources, representing the two themes, meet the criteria for potential unit designation.

Chapter 4 is an analysis of the different management alternatives when a resource is found eligible for potential inclusion in the national park system. It describes two action alternatives, (1) the potential establishment of a national historical park, or (2) a national historic site. A “no-action” alternative, as required by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), is also presented. Each alternative discusses resource protection, interpretation, visitor experience, management and operations, and includes estimates of costs and possible roles of the NPS and partners. There are also descriptions of two alternatives that were considered, but dismissed from further study.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide information concerning the environmental assessment including the affected environment and the environmental consequences of any proposed federal action.

Chapter 7 describes the consultation and coordination process with the public and state and federal agencies during the study. Public involvement is an essential element of every National Park Service study and is required under NEPA.

The study concludes that Alternative B, a National Historical Park, is the environmentally preferred alternative and by NEPA standards would best protect and interpret resources that were found to be nationally significant. Resources would be protected through partnerships with the state of Delaware, non-profit organizations and private property owners. At numerous locations, enhanced interpretive and educational

programs would increase public awareness of the need to protect the resources associated with early settlement in Delaware and those connected with important early leaders who helped to found the nation. By establishing an NPS presence in Delaware, through a cooperative preservation partnership in which resources could receive grants for preservation and interpretation, and NPS technical assistance, the significant resources will be better protected and visitors’ experiences of those resources will be enhanced. Alternative B also provides for NPS staffing to conduct programs common to a national park experience in the state of Delaware.

Alternative B also represents the NPS most effective and efficient alternative. Under this alternative, visitors would be provided an integrated resource-based experience in which individual sites would provide coordinated and integrated interpretive programming.

The report, in large part, results from a public involvement process which encouraged the participation of agencies of state and local governments, non-profit organizations and the citizens of Delaware. The study team appreciates the time that so many generously afforded to discuss the resources of Delaware, and how they may best be protected and understood in the future.

Public Comments

This report is available for public review for a period of 30 days. During this review period, the National Park Service is accepting comments from interested parties electronically, at public meetings, and by postal mail. At the end of the public comment period, the National Park Service will review all comments and determine whether any changes should be made to the report. Following the public comment period, the report will be transmitted to the Secretary of the Interior who, in turn, will transmit the report to the United States Congress.

Comments may be made electronically through the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>

Comments may also be submitted by e-mail to: peter_samuel@nps.gov

Or by mail to:

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SUMMARY