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www.wildcumberland.org

June 27, 2023

Mark Foust, Director
South-Atlantic Gulf Region
National Park Service
100 Alabama Street, SW
1924 Building
Atlanta, GA 30303

Dear Director Foust,

I am a lifelong Georgian, a mother of four, and very much an “accidental advocate” for Cumberland Island. As a very frequent visitor for the past 30 years, I have personally witnessed the effects management, policies, and even the public, can have on a place.

That’s why I am a part of Wild Cumberland — a nonprofit organization staffed entirely by unpaid volunteers. Put simply, we’re people who care a lot about a place: we’re physicians, artists, parents, and students. Others are gardeners, grandparents, scientists, humanitarians, and lawyers.

As individuals, we have seen Seashore volunteers, staff, and superintendents come and go; we’ve hauled off trash and debris and assisted in visitor emergencies; we’ve rescued endangered species and helped remove trees blocking roads. Through direct engagement and individual experience on Cumberland Island, we’ve each come to the same conclusion: its ecology needs protecting and preserving.

United by our common goal, we have advocated for Congressional support, legislative and administrative changes, and funding for the NPS. We have forged relationships within the island community; we spend the little money we have with local businesses who rely on tourism to keep their doors open. We work tirelessly to bring public awareness to the Seashore and to help the American public connect with Cumberland Island’s treasures – because Wilderness is for everyone.

Wild Cumberland understands that Cumberland Island National Seashore remains a crown jewel within our National Park System because of those who preceded us: this includes visionaries and leaders such as David Brower, Hans Neusenauer, and Stewart Udall. It includes the politically-savvy (and, frequently wealthy) individuals who were willing to sell or donate their property to the federal government. But it *also* includes the property owners who were displaced by threat of condemnation. It includes the scientists, legal experts, and individuals who have worked tirelessly for decades to ensure that our government fulfills its responsibility that Cumberland Island’s outstanding ecological resources and Wilderness are preserved for years to come.



Our supporters are humbled by their extraordinary efforts and feel an obligation to ensure the next generation of Wilderness stewardship. We remain committed to advocating for the best possible care and protection of Cumberland Island, utilizing new and existing mechanisms — including policies, public outreach, advocacy, community partnerships, and funding.

Wild Cumberland understands the ways Wilderness areas are managed and used can have significant impacts for our ecological well-being, but also on social equity and environmental justice. Our volunteers strive to promote critical civic engagement by increasing public awareness about the importance of Wilderness. We are committed to bringing diverse community stakeholders to the table to determine equitable access to, and protection of, Wilderness and our public lands.

Our volunteers produce a monthly email newsletter for nearly 2,000 supporters; you may find previous issues insightful as you determine how an organization like ours can assist the NPS in meeting its goals and obligations. I hope you, or your staff, will take a few minutes to review them here: www.wildcumberland.org/newsletter/.

I personally believe that you will find our volunteers and supporters to be reasonable, thoughtful, and committed to assisting the National Park Service in meeting its legal, management, and ethical responsibilities.

- We understand the complexities inherent in managing a site as controversial and dynamic as Cumberland Island. *That's exactly why our team of volunteers works so diligently to approach our work intentionally, thoughtfully, and inclusively — with an emphasis on public engagement, policy, and science.*
- We are cognizant that the funding to ensure the protection of our public lands is increasingly unpredictable, yet urgent.

As we are sure you know, a Wilderness Management Plan has never been approved for the Seashore in its 50-year history, and a 1984 General Management Plan remains its guiding document. Planning needs and priorities were subsequently identified and documented in the Seashore's [2014 Foundation Document](#). Many of these issues and needs are further detailed in the agency's [2018 Natural Resource Condition Assessment](#).

Over the last decade, the Seashore has been increasingly subjected to scrutiny and legal issued that reflect the agency's negligence in natural resource protection. And while we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Cumberland Island National Seashore, we simultaneously struggle with unprecedented anthropogenic change. This barrier island *does* offer incredible and unique visitor experiences, but we must remember that it also serves **critical global and local ecosystem functions**.

We urge you to prioritize candidates with natural resource management and community partnership experience.

We implore you to select a Superintendent for Cumberland Island National Seashore who not only understands the *relevance* of Wilderness, but embraces the idea that *all perspectives are relevant to consider*.



We trust that your office will employ as much transparency and public engagement in your hiring process as possible, both to ensure a successful leadership transition and the best possible outcome for long-term resource protection. We are excited to work with Deputy Superintendent Steve Theus until you have selected a professional that you believe capable of managing and protecting one of the most stunning, valuable, and *complex* Wilderness areas in the United States.

Finally, Wild Cumberland requests an opportunity to speak with you directly about new opportunities to partner in advocacy to protect and preserve Cumberland Island National Seashore, the National Wilderness Preservation System, and our future. To schedule this conversation, please contact me directly (email and phone provided below).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Edwards", written in a cursive style.

Jessica Howell-Edwards
Executive Director
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Atlanta, GA