

SOME CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF GULLAH GEECHEE CULTURAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR  
FY 2020

Documentation, Interpretation and Preservation

1. South Carolina: We are partnered with Charles Pinckney National Historic Site to develop new exhibits for Charles Pinckney National Historic Site's historic Snee Farmhouse and museum. This project will replace the current 900 square feet of exhibits with approximately 1,750 square feet of exhibits designed to engage and appeal to younger and more diverse audiences through inclusive content with immersive and interactive components, including a space where changing exhibits, demonstrations, and audience centered experiences can be presented. The exhibits will incorporate universal design principles to create barrier free access. More than 35,000 visitors per year will benefit from this project.
2. South Carolina: We are serving as consultants on a project initiated by Edisto Island Historic Preservation Society to create new exhibits for the Edisto Island Museum focused on the Gullah culture of the Sea Island. Project planning is being funded by the SC Humanities Council and Mary Elliott, Curator, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, is the lead humanities scholar on the grant.
3. Georgia: We are partnered with Cumberland Island National Seashore Park and primary investigators from the University of South Carolina on the project titled, "Researching Black History of Cumberland Island, GA." The purpose of this project is to help the interpretive team at Cumberland Island National Seashore to generate rigorously researched and documented answers to the many questions surrounding the history and culture of the Gullah Geechee people who once lived on the island. In particular, little is known of their history from the 1750's to the 1860's. A period which coincided with pivotal events in Georgia and U.S. history including the adoption of slavery in Georgia, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War and Reconstruction. However, we lack a robust record of how the Gullah Geechee residents on Cumberland Island experienced these events, their cultural practices or the organization of their communities. We also know little about the fate of these individuals as they began to migrate to the mainland and subsequently began to influence the culture and lifeways of Camden County and other communities within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The NPS is also interested in applying this research to determining the best way to honor the contributions and memory of these individuals in the park.
4. Georgia: We are serving as stakeholder and consulting party at the request of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on two infrastructure projects: (1) SAS 2011-00953/PI 0006700: Construct Effingham Parkway, SR 30 to Blue Jay Road, Chatham & Effingham Co, HP-190313-009 and (2) SAS 2010-00170/PI 0006328: Construct Brampton Road Connector, Chatham Co, HP-170510-006.

5. Florida: We are collaborating with Julington Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida and the International African American museum to document the historic connection between Edisto, Florida and Edisto, Island South Carolina.

## Heritage Tourism

1. We launched a new website [visitgullahgeechee.com](http://visitgullahgeechee.com) and we are currently engaged in a year-long, strategic planning project to develop a Corridor-wide, strategic heritage tourism marketing plan. This work is being privately funded by the Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation with a target completion date of summer 2020. The consultants on the project are Mandala Research who are market leaders in analyzing African American heritage tourism and travel.

2. We received an additional grant from the Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation to build out infrastructure to better support communities that manage local, Gullah Geechee heritage festivals.



We are also directly involved in the planning for the Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival and make a robust, educational tent about Gullah Geechee heritage available to other festivals. Heritage festivals are important drivers for preservation and needed economic, development in rural communities. This work also includes partnering with the Eastcoast Greenways Alliance to promote cycling as a sustainable form of heritage tourism including festival attendance.

## Public Education and Awareness Programs

1. Regional: We conduct public education programs, year-round to provide platforms for Gullah Geechee community members and others to share Gullah Geechee history and culture. You can link to a listing of [upcoming programs here](#).



Some of the programs are stand-alone but we also produce series. In 2019, this included program series that explored the role of Gullah Geechee people in the successful cultivation of indigo in colonial South Carolina and another that introduced people to the records of the U.S.C.T and the Freedmen's Bureau to help people understand their families' experiences during Reconstruction.

All programs are used to direct people to heritage and historic sites in the Corridor where they can learn more.

2. Regional: We are partnered with community members in Savannah and Darien, Georgia to mount an annual, outdoor public memorial to The Weeping Time. This is a commemoration of the largest, single slave sale in U.S. history and it involved the sale of over 400 Gullah Geechee men, women, and children from the Butler plantations on St. Simons and Butler Islands. The event is focused on an empty chair memorial held at the site of the sale in Savannah and a sunset memorial service on Butler Island.
3. Regional: We annually initiate efforts to raise awareness about the Watch Night & Emancipation Proclamation tradition in the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. This culminates in a daytime Watch Night service in Charleston. Last year's service at Morris Brown A.M.E. drew hundreds including the Mayor of Charleston, South Carolina.



4. National: We collaborated with Coastal Carolina University to launch the International Gullah Geechee and African Diaspora conference to help generate new research to inform our education, interpretation and preservation activities. Last year's conference drew 400

scholars, activists and community members. This year's conference has been expanded to include a Gullah Geechee community day in downtown Conway, South Carolina. Subsequent to the conference, we've arranged for scholars who presented new work at the conference to



give community presentations to share their work locally and at the grass-roots level. Participating scholars who agreed to do community sessions included Dr. Edda Fields-Black ("Combee: Freedom Seekers of the Combahee River Raid"), Dr. Melissa Cooper ("Making Gullah: A History of Sapelo Islanders, Race, and the American Imagination"), and Dr. Anne Bailey ("The Weeping Time: Memory and the Largest Slave Auction in American History").

### Land Ownership Preservation

We're currently engaged in a year-long, strategic planning session around how to become better advocates for Gullah Geechee landowners. This work is being privately funded by the Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation with a target completion date of summer 2020.

### Commission Meetings



The Commission continues to hold quarterly, annual meetings to hear about local projects and programs relating to Gullah Geechee heritage. Attendance is robust and the meetings continue to serve as an important platform for managing the working of the Corridor.