



Foundation Document Overview

Fort Pulaski National Monument

Georgia



Contact Information

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Purpose



FORT PULASKI NATIONAL MONUMENT preserves and interprets the 19th century masonry fort and associated landscape that illustrate the evolution of civil engineering and military technology, a continuum of historic resources from colonial times to the present day, and approximately 5,000 acres of nearly pristine salt marsh on McQueens and Cockspur Islands in Savannah, Georgia.



Description

Fort Pulaski National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation on October 15, 1924, and was later transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. The monument, between Savannah and Tybee Island on the Georgia coast, encompasses 5,623 acres on Cockspur and McQueens Islands.

Strategically positioned on Cockspur Island, Fort Pulaski is a well-preserved, brick fortification considered invincible when it was completed in 1847. During the Civil War, Union batteries opened fire on Fort Pulaski, and within 30 hours the fort's walls were breached and the Confederate garrison surrendered. The Battle of Fort Pulaski transformed all the masonry forts built for U.S. coastal defense from impenetrable bastions to obsolete symbols of U.S. military defense.

McQueens Island primarily consists of a salt marsh that comprises the vast majority of the monument. The delicate environment of the tidal marsh is an essential life support system for shrimp, oysters, juvenile fish, and shellfish. McQueens Island retains its primeval character and human development on the island is mostly unnoticeable, making the majority of the salt marsh eligible for federal wilderness designation.

Visitors to Fort Pulaski National Monument enjoy both the recreational and educational opportunities offered by the monument. Most visitors participate in activities such as self-guided or guided tours of the fort, walking Cockspur Island trails, fishing, oyster harvesting, and boating in the Savannah River and Oyster Creek.



Significance

Significance statements express why Fort Pulaski National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The bombardment and subsequent breaching of the massive brick walls by Federal artillery during the Battle of Fort Pulaski in April 1862 demonstrated for the first time the tremendous battering power of rifled artillery, bringing to a close the era of impregnable masonry fortifications.
- Constructed between 1829 and 1847, Fort Pulaski is one of the best preserved examples of Third System masonry coastal fortifications built to protect U.S. harbors following the War of 1812.
- The complex network of dikes, ditches, and drainage systems that still function today made the construction of Fort Pulaski possible in 1829 and influenced the development that shaped Cockspur Island.
- Due to its strategic location where the Savannah River meets the Atlantic Ocean, Cockspur Island, its lighthouse, and its cultural landscape reflect maritime history and an evolution of coastal defense from colonial times to World War II.
- After the Battle of Fort Pulaski, the fort became a safe haven for freedom seekers from 1862 until the end of the American Civil War.
- Recognized as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's national system of Marine Protected Areas, and eligible for federal wilderness designation, Fort Pulaski National Monument preserves approximately 5,000 acres on Cockspur and McQueens Islands of virtually undisturbed salt marshes, a rich and diverse habitat that is critically important to the ecological health and economy of the Southeast Atlantic coastal region.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Fort Pulaski**
- **Cultural Landscape of Fort Pulaski Including the Dikes, Ditches, and Drainage System**
- **Museum Collection**
- **Cockspur Island Lighthouse**
- **McQueens Island Salt Marsh**

Fort Pulaski National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **John Wesley Memorial**
- **Quarantine Station Cottage**
- **World War II Bunker**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Technological innovations in rifled artillery unveiled at the Battle of Fort Pulaski rendered masonry forts obsolete and initiated a shift in national defense.
- For more than two centuries, Cockspur Island has provided a strategic location at the mouth of the Savannah River to protect the economic and political influence of the city.
- The harsh imprisonment of Confederate officers within the confines of Fort Pulaski challenged the conscience of their prison guards, illustrating the complicated legacy of the prisoner of war system during the Civil War.
- The fort's construction relied on a small village and bustling wharf that employed a variety of workers—skilled and unskilled, white and black, free and enslaved, northern and southern—and created a microcosm of early 19th century America.
- A marvel of 19th-century engineering, Fort Pulaski combined old-world military principles with state of the art technology and continues to impress visitors with its powerful and sophisticated design.
- The near-pristine salt marsh of McQueen's Island represents an outstanding example of one of the most vital ecosystems on the planet, providing key biogenic (self-reproducing) habitat for diverse species, and has been utilized by humans for thousands of years.
- During the social and economic recovery of the 1930s, several New Deal agencies helped transform Fort Pulaski into a national park. These activities typified the federal government's efforts to provide employment and promote civic investment for the future.
- The harsh environmental and intricate engineering challenges during the construction of Fort Pulaski helped shape the antebellum careers of Joseph K. F. Mansfield and Robert E. Lee, who met again as enemies at the Battle of Antietam.
- For years, the Cockspur Island Lighthouse stood watch over the Savannah River, welcoming vessels of commerce and prosperity and surviving storms, shipworms, and screaming shells of battle, and remains today a threatened treasure.
- By design, Fort Pulaski protected the thriving port of Savannah, but, after its surrender, the Union advancement of the Anaconda Plan tightened their blockade of the Confederate coastline.
- After the Battle at Fort Pulaski, Union-held Cockspur Island became a bastion of hope for enslaved people on the Georgia coast who risked their lives in search of freedom and opportunity.
- Fort Pulaski National Monument uses science to inform management regarding an array of resources and enable the park to adapt to a range of threats in the face of an uncertain and complex future.

