

Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

November 2008

In 2000 Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate the potential to establish a unit of the national park system or a national heritage area that would commemorate one of the world's best known heroes of emancipation. The Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study Act (P.L. 106-516, signed November 13, 2000) directs the Secretary to evaluate seven Tubman-associated sites in Auburn, New York, and Dorchester County, Maryland, plus other relevant areas that the study might reveal. A previous special resource study of the Underground Railroad had recommended in 1996 that two sites associated with Harriet Tubman, one each in New York and Maryland, be evaluated further to determine their appropriateness for potential inclusion in the national park system.

The study law requested information on the sites and resources associated with Harriet Tubman, alternatives for the management, administration, and protection of those sites and resources, evaluation of their appropriateness for inclusion in the national park system, and cost estimates for land protection, development, maintenance, and operation. This report includes an Environmental Assessment required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assess the effects of potential federal government action on the human environment.

Harriet Tubman was born enslaved in 1822 in Dorchester County on Maryland's Eastern Shore, grew up, and worked there until 1849. At age 27 she emancipated herself and fled north. She achieved fame in her lifetime as the "Moses of Her People" by stealthily returning many times to the familiar Maryland landscape to lead family members and friends out of slavery. She was never caught and she became one of the most prominent "conductors" on the Underground Railroad. For a brief time she made her base in the safety of Canada while the Fugitive Slave laws were being enforced, but soon settled in Auburn, New York, where she purchased farm property and established a home for her family and others, which anchored her life over her last four decades. In old age, she formally established the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged, which institutionalized a pattern of her life – caring for African Americans in need. Her death in 1913, reported in the *New York Times*, was followed a year later by a grand commemoration of her life featuring, among other notables, Booker T. Washington. Her gravesite and her home in Auburn became places of pilgrimage for devotees to honor this humble woman who became a legendary figure in American history and culture.

The major areas of focus in Tubman's life are: (1) the lands of her birth, youth and young adult life in the Choptank River region of Maryland; and, (2) her home in remaining years in Auburn, New York. The Choptank River region contains extensive and evocative landscapes that have experienced relatively minor changes since the mid 19th century. These Tubman-associated landscapes are in Dorchester County and include the northern portion of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and adjacent areas. In Caroline County to the north the associated landscape includes the compellingly scenic site of Poplar Neck on the Choptank

River. Resources in Auburn, New York, include her home, the home for the aged she founded, her church and church rectory, and her final resting place.

Chapter 1 introduces Harriet Tubman, describes the purpose and need for this study, explains the process by which it was conducted, identifies the study area, and summarizes the extensive public involvement during its course. The congressionally required criteria for evaluating the potential designation of new units of the national park system are noted here.

Chapter 2 describes Harriet Tubman's importance in American history and culture, and the primary sites and historic resources with which she is associated. It includes the context in which Tubman lived, a narrative of her life, and descriptions of the primary places associated with her life and work.

Chapter 3 presents analyses required by Congress for evaluation of new areas that may be candidates for potential designation as units of the national park system. The criteria require determinations of national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management. In addition, following the directive of the Tubman special resource study law, there is an evaluation of the feasibility of a national heritage area.

Chapter 4 contains management alternatives required if a resource is found eligible for potential inclusion in the national park system. It describes two management alternatives which involve action by the National Park Service to commemorate Harriet Tubman on a national level. It also spells out a "no-action" alternative required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Each alternative includes estimates of cost and possible roles of partners. The chapter concludes with a discussion of interpretive themes that could potentially be used to provide for increased public understanding of Harriet Tubman's life and contributions to American history.

Chapter 5 includes the affected environment, environmental consequences, and consultation and coordination sections of the Environmental Assessment.

The study concludes that resources associated with Harriet Tubman in Dorchester, Caroline, and Talbot counties, Maryland, meet the national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management criteria for eligibility for potential inclusion in the national park system. It further concludes that the resources associated with Harriet Tubman in Auburn, New York, meet the national significance, suitability, feasibility, and need for NPS management criteria for eligibility for potential inclusion in the national park system.

Alternative C, presented in Chapter 4, is the environmentally preferred alternative. It also represents the NPS "most effective and efficient" alternative. Alternative C offers the most effective and expeditious way to protect the larger nationally significant landscapes associated with Harriet Tubman in Maryland, landscapes that may otherwise be lost to development over time, through the use of grants to state and local governments and nonprofit organizations for the purchase of permanent protective easements. It also increases the potential for preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of extant Tubman-related structural resources and cultural landscapes in Auburn, New York.

Alternative C provides the most effective way to tell the entire story of Harriet Tubman through coordinated park general management and interpretive planning and through the use of NPS interpretive staff in both locations. The Harriet Tubman and Underground Railroad stories are and will continue to be journeys of research and discovery. The

partnership nature of this alternative with state and local governments, nonprofits, and academic institutions maximizes the opportunities for on-going and collaborative research.

While more costly, Alternative C is the most efficient due its ability to increase the leveraging potential of federal financial resources that will be matched by other state, local government, and private financial sources for wider resource protection objectives. Alternative C sustains the desired land use in the Choptank region of Maryland while leaving the land in private ownership, on the tax roles, and without any continuing NPS land management costs. In Auburn, New York, a partnership with the Harriet Tubman Home, Inc., promotes efficiencies through a financial and interpretive relationship that ensures resource protection and sustains the AME Zion Church's century old stewardship of Harriet Tubman's Home for the Aged and other more recent additions to the National Historic Landmark properties at that location.

The juxtaposition of Harriet Tubman related resources and the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge provides the opportunity for the NPS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to share in the protection of these resources in a cooperative manner compatible with the missions of both agencies. Alternative C eliminates unnecessary overlap and the park planning effort would maximize both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the NPS in fulfilling its protection and interpretive responsibilities.

The study team acknowledges the many individuals who assisted with the study of resources associated with Harriet Tubman, provided understanding of Tubman history and culture, and facilitated outreach to many groups and individuals. Their contributions were critical to the successful completion of the study.

This report is available for public review for a period of 30 days. During the review period, the National Park Service is accepting comments from interested parties electronically, at public meetings, and by 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 for the report, a public response document will be prepared and NPS will determine if a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is warranted. If a FONSI is approved, the report will then be prepared for transmittal to the Secretary of the Interior who, in turn, will transmit it to Congress.

The full report is available for to read or download and comments may be made electronically. Comments may also be made by mail by December 19, 2008.

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