



For Immediate Release

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As U.S. Mint issues commemorative Cumberland Island coin, environmental groups defend the island against threats of new development

Kingsland, GA – August 27, 2018 - While the U.S. Mint marks the release of a commemorative coin celebrating the Cumberland Island National Seashore, environmental groups issue a call for the strict enforcement of laws protecting the barrier island renowned for its ecological diversity and the preservation of one of the largest maritime forests remaining in the U.S.

The U.S. Mint will host a ceremony in Kingsland, Georgia on August 30 launching the Cumberland Island National Seashore quarter. The coin is the 44th in the Mint's "America the Beautiful Quarters" program and comes at a time when the National Park Service is considering allowing new private development on the island that could allow the construction of up to 25 houses.

In a letter to Cumberland Island National Seashore Superintendent, Gary Ingram, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, Center for a Sustainable Coast, and Wild Cumberland, cited the National Seashore's enabling legislation that both empowers and obligates the superintendent to prevent new development on the island.

Congress explicitly stated in the 1972 legislation establishing Cumberland Island National Seashore that "the seashore shall be permanently preserved in its primitive state," creating an obligation on the part of the Park Service to preserve the island in its natural state.

"We believe that strictly enforcing the requirements of federal law preserving the natural resources of Cumberland Island is essential to the public interest. We must not allow the private motives of a few individuals to undermine the unique and highly valued qualities of primitive maritime forests, dunes and marshlands of the National Seashore," said David Kyler of the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

Carol Ruckdeschel, Vice-President of Wild Cumberland pointed out that "Cumberland Island National Seashore was created 46 years ago, with the vision the island would be protected and permanently preserved in its primitive state. To that end, the National Park Service acquired the vast majority of the island through eminent domain or threat of condemnation. Only some lands owned by the Carnegie Family and a tract proposed by a few Candler's for a housing

development remain in private ownership. The promise of the National Seashore will continue to be threatened by development of these private lands. The National Park Service must assume its responsibility for protection of the integrity of the Seashore.”

Historic Background

Approximately 1,000 acres of land within the boundaries of the National Seashore remain in private ownership. During the 1970s and 80s, the Park Service purchased most of the island from private owners willing to sell or through eminent domain but could not afford to buy the few remaining properties with limited funds appropriated by Congress. In 1982, the Candler family sold their 2,200 acre High Point Estate on the north end of the island to the Park Service for \$9.6 million in exchange for retained rights for the 38 acre portion where the family compound is located. The retained rights will expire with the death of the last heir covered by the agreement.

Lumar LLC, a company formed by members of the Candler family, purchased an 88 acre tract on the south end of the island owned by Georgia Rockefeller Rose for \$3 million in 1998. The Lumar Tract is near the Park Service Ranger Station and adjacent to the Seashore’s largest and most accessible campground and beach access, Sea Camp. The lawyer representing the family assured readers of the Savannah Morning News that they had no intention of developing the property.

Lumar applied for and received a hardship variance in 2016 that would have allowed it to subdivide the tract into ten lots in order to build houses. Environmental groups appealed the granting of the variance, and the Camden County Commission then began discussions to rezone the entire 1,000 privately-owned acres to allow new development, resulting in a public outcry and thousands of comments opposed to any rezoning.

In June 2017, the Park Service asked the Camden County Board of Commissioners to delay its decision for one year to allow the Park Service to negotiate with the landowners. The Brunswick News reported in January 2018 that the Park Service is close to reaching an agreement with the landowners which will allow up to 25 new homes to be built.

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