

November 25, 2023

Dear National Park Service,

I am writing to you today to make a compelling case for the Black River's designation as a National Natural Landmark. Nestled in the heart of southeastern North Carolina, the Black River is an ecological masterpiece: a sanctuary of ancient forests, diverse wildlife, and pristine waters.

The Black River's most striking feature is its ancient bald cypress trees. These trees are not merely relics of our past, they are vital archives of environmental resilience and adaptability. Some of these living trees surpass 2,600 years in age and they still thrive today, thanks to the ecosystems that surround them. This ancient forest provides invaluable data about the region's past climate patterns, and scientists like Dr. David Stahle have uncovered evidence that paints a vivid picture of the region's climatic history, including data that has afforded us insight into historic mysteries.

The Black River is far more than just a forest of important ancient trees; it is a vibrant ecosystem teeming with life, a sanctuary for a diverse array of flora and fauna. Its swampy floodplain and meandering channels provide a haven for a multitude of species, creating a complex, biodiverse, and intricate web of life.

The Black River's ecological significance extends far beyond its aesthetic beauty and its role as a habitat. The river's floodplain acts as a natural filter, cleansing pollutants from the surrounding landscape, and has a crucial role in maintaining water quality. Its wetlands absorb floodwaters, mitigating the impact of storms and helping to protect downstream communities from the devastating consequences of flooding. The Black River can also help us determine future trends and help us prepare for the impacts of climate change. The Black River and its ecosystems play a vital role in carbon sequestration, helping to combat climate change, an issue of urgent importance in our modern world.

Moreover, the Black River holds deep historical and cultural significance. Not only is it situated near Moore's Creek Battlefield, a significant National Battlefield, since time immemorial Indigenous peoples have stewarded, revered, and utilized the Black River's resources, relying on its bounty for sustenance, medicine, and spiritual guidance. The river's waterways provided vital transportation routes, connected communities, and facilitated trade. The Black River is inextricably intertwined with the lives of Native people and their rich history, and it remains an integral part of their identity and heritage today.

The Black River also forms a crucial segment of the Gullah Geechee National Heritage Corridor, a remarkable landscape that spans the southeastern United States and preserves the cultural heritage and natural history of the Gullah Geechee people. The Gullah Geechee are descendants of enslaved Africans who, through forced and unpaid labor, built much of the wealth of our nation. They developed a unique culture, language, and way of life deeply rooted in the region's

coastal ecosystems that lives today. The Black River is at the northernmost point of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.

The designation of the Black River as a National Natural Landmark would not only recognize its exceptional natural and historical value but also serve as a beacon of conservation, inspiring generations to cherish and protect this irreplaceable, living treasure. By designating the Black River as a National Natural Landmark, the National Park Service would be sending a powerful message that we value our natural heritage, and that we recognize the intrinsic worth of preserving these delicate ecosystems.

Furthermore, this designation would honor the Black River's deep significance to Native American peoples and the Gullah Geechee community, ensuring that their cultural heritage and connection to this rare landscape are honored, celebrated, and preserved.

I urge the National Park Service to seriously consider the Black River's designation as a National Natural Landmark. This designation would be a fitting tribute to this extraordinary ecosystem, ensuring its preservation for future generations to enjoy and study.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Virginia Holman

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area, obscuring the name and any handwritten notes or dates.