



# Jean Lafitte State of the Park 2011



**CHALMETTE  
BATTLEFIELD**



**BARATARIA  
PRESERVE**



**ACADIAN  
CULTURAL CENTER**



**FRENCH  
QUARTER**



**WETLANDS ACADIAN  
CULTURAL CENTER**



**PRAIRIE ACADIAN  
CULTURAL CENTER**



# Jean Lafitte 2011 by the Numbers

## *A note from the superintendent:*

It is my pleasure to present the 2011 State of the Park Reports for the two National Parks that I have the honor to oversee: Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve and New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. While the missions of these two parks may be somewhat different, the parks have blended to make the best use of shared staffing, resources, and facilities.

As the National Park Service (NPS) prepares for its second century of stewardship and engagement, both parks spent 2011 engaging park employees, partners, and stakeholders and committing to the “actions that advance the Service towards a shared vision for 2016” outlined in the NPS Call to Action. These State of the Park reports are organized to follow the themes of the Call to Action which may be found at [www.nps.gov/calltoaction/](http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/).

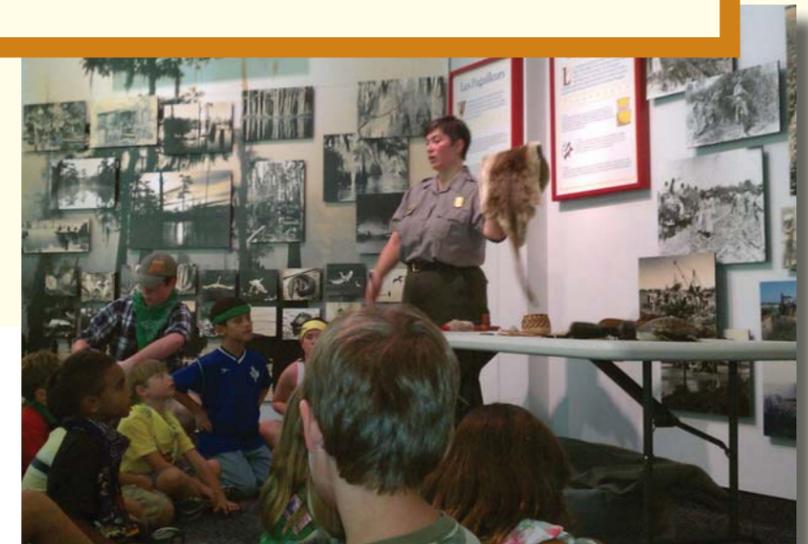
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve has its roots in August 1939, when Congress established Chalmette National Historical Park in Chalmette, Louisiana. Even before that, the Daughters of the War of 1812, the Colonial Dames of America in Louisiana, and others suggested that the site of the War of 1812's Battle of New Orleans become a national park.

In 1978, an act of Congress established Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, which incorporated Chalmette Battlefield and Chalmette National Cemetery, which was established in 1864 for the internment of Union soldiers killed in Louisiana during the Civil War. The act also developed the Barataria Preserve and a visitor center and administrative facilities in New Orleans' French Quarter as part of Jean Lafitte. The park was expanded in 1988 to include folklife centers in the Acadian regions of Thibodaux, Lafayette and Eunice. Congress thus set in place the park's mission to “preserve for the education, inspiration and benefit of present and future generations significant examples of natural and historical resources of the Mississippi Delta region and to provide for their interpretation in such a manner as to portray the development of cultural diversity in the region...”

As in all national parks, Jean Lafitte's managers continue to balance their responsibilities to preserve and protect natural and cultural resources while providing educational and recreational opportunities. The park regularly works with other agencies and organizations to improve visitor experiences. Park staffs are not immune from the personal and park stresses of the current economic situation; the park continues to struggle with the challenge of attracting and keeping those employees who are best qualified and prepared to take on the work of providing valuable services to the resources and to the public. We at Jean Lafitte take enormous pride in our employees who are on the ground meeting and greeting, fixing and building, educating and researching, seeking and challenging in order to fulfill the park's mission, continue to improve employee and visitor safety, and make the workforce more representative of the vast diversity and origins of the public that we serve.

*--- Carol A. Clark, Superintendent*

- 420,000 visitors to six park sites
- 286,000 visitors to site visitor centers
- 170,000 website visitors
- 97,000 visitors attended park programs
- 9,100 students participated in education programs
- 1,900 kids became Junior Rangers
- 1,500 volunteers worked for 17,000 hours
- economic impact: park visitors spent more than \$19 million and supported 260 jobs in communities surrounding the park's six sites in 2010 (last year for which figures are available)



Above: Volunteers plant baldcypress trees to restore natural habitat at the Barataria Preserve. Summer camp participants enjoy a ranger program. (Photos: NPS)

Left: Jean Lafitte's six sites stretch across southern Louisiana, capturing the region's history, cultures, and natural beauty. (Graphic: NPS)

# Jean Lafitte Connecting People to Parks

Connecting people to parks means touching their hearts, encouraging their interest, and intriguing them with new ideas.



Artist Joseph Lewis and a visitor discuss one of his photographs during Lewis's exhibit at the Acadian Cultural Center. (Photo: NPS)

**THROUGH ART** At the Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette, rangers discovered that if a picture is worth a thousand words, a carving is worth a dictionary full. In 2011, an African American History Month art exhibit by Lafayette native Joseph Lewis proved to be the key to encourage African American visitors to the site. Statistics show that the “average” visitor to an NPS site is white, middle-class, and middle-aged, so the center began hosting exhibits highlighting various cultural groups to encourage a wider audience and present new experiences to traditional audiences.

Like all good art, Lewis's work made connections with visitors from all backgrounds. Visitors were especially drawn to a large wood panel carved with scenes depicting African American history. The photographs, paintings, and carvings in the exhibit turned the theoretical into the real: one piece showed a rusty, locked chain wrapped around the ankle of a sculptured foot. Lewis explained it was inspired by the story of an enslaved man, chained to a tree, who cut off his own foot in a desperate bid for freedom. Lewis's exhibit so touched the hearts of its viewers that it was held over by popular demand.

**THROUGH ACTIVITIES** Rangers in Jean Lafitte's visitor and resource protection division---better known as law enforcement rangers---did their part to connect people to their parks too. As part of their outreach mission, they participated in G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistant Education And Training), a nationally-recognized program that brings together inner-city youth and law enforcement officers for mentoring, career explorations, and sports. The program's “no uniforms” policy means that young people get to know the rangers and other law enforcement officers as people, not as symbols of authority, making it easier to find common ground for friendship. G.R.E.A.T. in the New Orleans area reaches hundreds of at-risk young people each year, exposing them to new options for their futures.

As part of 2011's G.R.E.A.T. activities, Jean Lafitte rangers joined the US Marshals Service, the Louisiana State Police, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to play basketball, to go hiking, and to participate in a Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation Badges for Baseball camp that drew over 200 middle school students.



**THROUGH MUSIC** Jean Lafitte's Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in Eunice reached people through the magic of Louisiana music---even if they were listening at home. Every Saturday, the center featured music presented by local musicians and encouraged visitors to get out on the dance floor, where center volunteers were happy to teach two-steps and waltzes to novices. Those new skills came in handy on Saturday night, when the City of Eunice and the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center celebrated 24 years of joining forces to host *Rendez-vous des Cajuns* at the historic Liberty Theater. Few at the *Rendez-vous* could resist a turn around the dance floor, and thousands listening at home pushed back the sofa and joined in via *Rendez-vous* on the radio at KRVS-FM or KEUN-AM or by internet streaming at [www.krvs.org](http://www.krvs.org).

Corey Ledet and His Zydeco Band rock the house at a Saturday night *Rendez-vous des Cajuns* performance. (Photo: Jerry Devillier)

## THROUGH ADVENTURE

Reflecting its location on the banks of Bayou Lafourche, the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux worked with local organizations to bring back its popular bayou boat tour. The wind in your hair, the sun on your face, and a slow bayou meandering through Cajun country proved to be the ingredients for an unforgettable day on the bayou. Center staff teamed up with E.D. White Historic Site and Madewood Plantation Home as destinations, trained staff in boat operations, and got ready for a spring 2012 season of sharing local history on the area's original highways---its rivers and bayous.



A ranger-guided boat tour of Bayou Lafourche lets visitors experience Louisiana's wetlands from its waterways. (Photo: NPS)

# Jean Lafitte Advancing the National Park Service Education Mission

Learning happens every day and at every age at Jean Lafitte: a family works together to complete a Junior Ranger quiz, middle school students share their knowledge of wetlands plants with park visitors, military personnel discuss the tactics of the Battle of New Orleans.



Summer campers at the Barataria Preserve take a closer look at what lives under the visitor center deck. (Photo: NPS)

**FAMILIES** Families learned together during *Expanding Horizons* programs at the Barataria Preserve in Marrero. The monthly programs kicked off in fall 2011 to encourage kids and their families to explore nature through hands-on science activities, trail walks, and art projects. Kids of all ages came away with a smile and a new appreciation of Louisiana's wetlands, whether participants were a boy and his grandmother using the program as special bonding time or a homeschool group fulfilling science curriculum requirements.

**KIDS** Nearly 400 kids attended *summer camps* at Jean Lafitte sites in 2011. Five of the six sites---all three Acadian cultural centers, the Barataria Preserve, and the French Quarter Visitor Center---offered weeklong day camps. Each site provided a different focus, from wetlands adventures to New Orleans history to the cultures that created south Louisiana's distinctive mix. Kids used American Indian pottery techniques to make coiled clay pots, danced to Cajun and zydeco music, met frogs and alligators, rode steamboats, and learned to canoe.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

Learning and then sharing their new knowledge was the focus for *First Bloom* participants. Funded by the National Park Foundation, First Bloom connects kids to national parks. The Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux chose local middle school students for the program in collaboration with Circle of Hope, an area organization dedicated to educational enrichment for families striving to improve their lives.



Above: First Bloom participants take a break from a planting project. Below: High school students experience life 1815-style in the Recognizing Our Roots program. (Photos: NPS)

The First Bloom participants learned about native plants by visiting local nurseries, slogged through a swamp in hip boots, and landscaped a garden at the center. The students then became the teachers, preparing seed balls, instructions, and good advice on gardening to hand out at local events.



**HIGH SCHOOL** Based at Chalmette Battlefield in Chalmette, *Recognizing Our Roots* worked with Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps cadets from two local high schools, teaching them to portray troops who fought at the Battle of New Orleans.

The cadets dressed as members of the Tennessee volunteers, the free men of color battalions from New Orleans, and their camp followers. Field trips to museums and sites important to the New Orleans campaign, military drills, and hands-on practice in firing muskets, pitching 1815-style tents, and cooking over fires they built themselves laid the groundwork for the cadets to participate in living history events like the Battle of New Orleans anniversary.

**ADULTS** Because learning doesn't stop when you leave school, Jean Lafitte also provided educational opportunities for adults throughout the year. Senior groups enjoyed boat tours at the Acadian Cultural Center in Lafayette. Birdwatchers flocked to the Barataria Preserve in Marrero. Musicians signed up for free music

workshops at the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in Eunice. Officers from many military services participated in special programs known as staff rides at Chalmette Battlefield in Chalmette, where they discussed logistics, historical questions, and how to overcome the physical obstacles that any battle arena presents.

# Jean Lafitte Preserving America's Special Places

National parks are where history happened and natural beauty lives. To preserve these special places, Jean Lafitte works with volunteers, with community groups, with researchers and scientists, and with you.

**CONTROLLING** Non-native invasive species are a constant problem for Jean Lafitte's natural resource managers. One of the most difficult to manage is giant salvinia, an aquatic plant with round, bright green leaves that floats on waterways, reproduces quickly, competes with native plants, and cuts off light to the creatures in the water below. It provides a floating habitat for other non-native species and frustrates boaters and fishers with its thick, nearly impenetrable mats.

A tiny aquatic insect may be part of the solution to the giant salvinia invasion. Extensive studies by the Louisiana State University AgCenter showed that salvinia weevils eat the new buds of giant salvinia plants but don't eat other plant species so are considered safe to use as a biocontrol agent. In 2011, Jean Lafitte resource management staff and volunteers distributed salvinia weevils into selected waterways at the Barataria Preserve in Marrero, and their efforts are paying off visibly: small brown patches are now visible in the green carpet of giant salvinia on preserve waterways.



Above: Restoring Louisiana wetlands is the goal of tree-planting projects at the Barataria Preserve. Below: The round leaves of giant salvinia, an invasive non-native plant, carpet the waterways of the preserve. (Photos: NPS)

**RESTORING** More than 700 tiny new cypress trees now grow along the Barataria Preserve's western boundary of Bayou Segnette Waterway, where canal banks provide prime habitat for invasive species like Chinese tallow trees. In December 2011, more than 50 volunteers grabbed their shovels and teamed up with park staff to plant the trees. The new cypress trees will not only restore native species to the canal banks, but also ultimately will keep out Chinese tallow trees since the invaders cannot thrive under a cypress canopy.

The volunteers protected the trees' trunks with biodegradable plastic sheaths to keep animals from destroying the young cypresses. They also tagged and measured each tree so that the park can monitor growth and survival rates. Two days of hard work by volunteers may leave a centuries-long mark on the preserve landscape. The project was a partnership between the park and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana with support from Shell, Entergy Corporation, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana, and Restore America's Estuaries. The partnership has planted over 5,000 cypress trees in the park over the past three years.

**EDUCATING** Most people would assume that visitor and resource protection rangers preserve special places by writing tickets for rule violations, but the law enforcement rangers really prefer to educate. Rangers walk trails, patrol waterways, and talk to visitors to explain the whys behind the rules, emphasizing visitor safety and resource protection. When visitors understand the reasons for the rules, lives are saved and special places are preserved for future generations to enjoy.

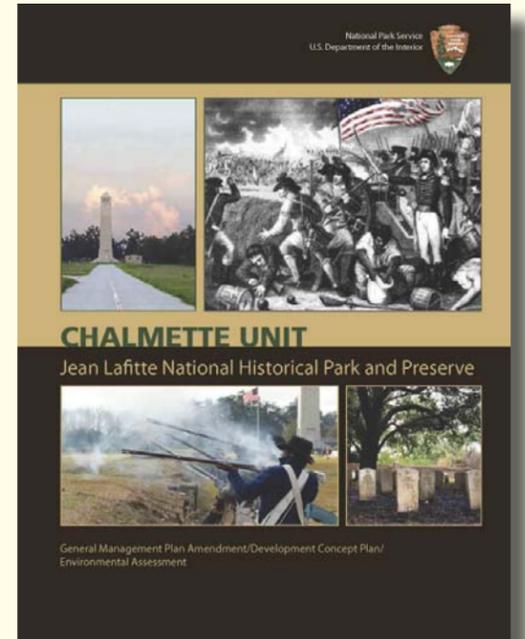


**SAVING** Preserving America's special places also means preserving pieces of American history. When Hurricane Katrina submerged Chalmette Battlefield in 2005, cannon tubes on display along the battlefield rampart and cannon tubes and cannonballs in storage spent days underwater. The battlefield's 16 cannon tubes are both reproduction and actual War of 1812-era tubes, each weighing between 800 and 8,000 pounds.

Two years of careful study by a specialist produced a restoration plan, and a crane operator with cannon-moving experience transported the cannons to a warehouse where work began in July 2011. The iron and bronze tubes were stripped, cleaned, primed, and painted; bronze tubes also got a coating of hot wax. More American history saved!

**SHARING** Preserving special places doesn't mean keeping people out of them. At the Barataria Preserve in Marrero, boardwalks and a public canoe launch were rebuilt in 2011 to ensure better public access. At Chalmette Battlefield, new wheelchair-accessible walkways were built so more people can explore more of the battlefield.

**PLANNING** Years of work (interrupted by Hurricane Katrina) and the contributions of local residents, organizations, and park staff resulted in the production of a revised management plan for Chalmette Battlefield, officially adopted as of September 2011. The General Management Plan Amendment, Development Concept Plan, and Environmental Assessment establishes a 20-year strategy to preserve the historic site and improve visitor services. Plans include improving visitor safety by rerouting roads and pedestrian walkways, adding a visitor information station near the river entrance where daily excursion boats dock, and adding staging areas for special events.



Above left: The waters of 2005's Hurricane Katrina took a major toll on Chalmette Battlefield's cannons. Above right: The final version of the battlefield's General Management Plan Amendment was delayed by Katrina but is now ready to guide decision-making for the next 20 years. Below: A park maintenance worker rips out old boards to make way for a new Barataria Preserve canoe launch. (Photos: NPS)



# Jean Lafitte Enhancing Organizational Excellence

The National Park Service constantly strives to serve the public better and more efficiently. Much of this work is done behind the scenes by volunteers or by park staff in administration and facility maintenance.

**FINANCES** Jean Lafitte's administrative staff are the unsung heroes who pay the bills, program and track budgets, keep the computer systems running, provide supplies, and manage payrolls for both Jean Lafitte and New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park. In 2011, the two parks had a combined operational budget of nearly \$7 million, and Jean Lafitte's staff made sure that funds were managed to provide taxpayers with the best return on their dollars. Internal controls in all aspects of finance and human resources provided improved service for 65 employees, hundreds of thousands of visitors, and millions of American taxpayers.

**VOLUNTEERS** Park volunteers bring an astonishing array of skills and energy to park projects and everyday operations. In 2011, nearly 1,500 volunteers provided 17,000 hours of work---the equivalent of eight fulltime employees! Jean Lafitte's volunteers played music, staffed visitor center desks, presented living history programs, designed brochures, taught Cajun dancing to visitors, demonstrated crafts, helped with summer camps, and maintained trails.



Above: Volunteer musicians keep toes tapping at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center's weekly music jams. Right: Replacing underground heating and air conditioning pipes for the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center and the Liberty Theater was a necessary but now invisible improvement. (Photos: NPS)

**SAFETY AND SERVICE** One of the most precious resources of the National Park Service is its employees. In 2011, visitor and resource protection (law enforcement) rangers provided staff training in safe boat operations, crime prevention, and first aid and CPR. Rangers also developed and implemented safety plans for major events and natural disasters.

Staff from both Jean Lafitte and New Orleans National Historical Park participated in customer service training. The training emphasized service for all park customers, whether internal (other staff) or external like visitors, organizations, and taxpayers.

**FACILITIES** Infrastructure---buildings, roads, plumbing and electrical systems---is often taken for granted until it fails. Major 2011 projects at Jean Lafitte included new air conditioning chillers at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center in Thibodaux and the Barataria Preserve Environmental Education Center in Marrero.

At the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center in Eunice, underground pipes that provide heating and air conditioning for the center and for the Liberty Theater and Theater Annex next door were replaced. The theater is the home of the popular weekly music program *Rendez-vous des Cajuns*, presented by Jean Lafitte and the City of Eunice.



Other improvements were more obvious. A new storefront display for the French Quarter Visitor Center in New Orleans was a joint effort between visitors and interpretation and education rangers. The old storefront, in place since the center opened in 2002, gave visitors little understanding of what the park's six sites offer. By listening to the public, rangers helped design engaging artifacts, "only in Louisiana" words, and a digital picture display to provide passersby with a sample of what the park has in store for them.

The new Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery Visitor Center, dedicated in January 2011, delivered new understanding of the Battle of New Orleans. The old center was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The new center is nearly twice the size of the old one and features two films, hands-on displays, and interactive computer exhibits. It's greener too: solar tubes provide lighting and solar panels help power the building. New wayside exhibits on the battlefield grounds tell the site's story from the 1815 battle to the present day.

Facility maintenance staff does the behind-the-scenes work that often isn't noticed but is always critical to success. Along with



The new Chalmette Battlefield and National Cemetery Visitor Center incorporates state-of-the-art elements like solar panels to catch the sun's rays. (Photo: NPS)

cleaning and maintaining park buildings and grounds, facility maintenance staff provided logistical support for major events in 2011. At the Battle of New Orleans anniversary, staff set up historical tents, made tent posts on the spot, distributed 256 cubic feet of firewood and 57 bales of straw, cleaned and stocked restrooms and other public areas, and made sure that 4,100 visitors and over 100 living history reenactors were well-equipped. Facility maintenance also adopted a new green procurement program, implemented air quality monitoring, and developed a data system to track labor hours that's become a model for other national parks.

## To build a better park, Jean Lafitte works with organizations like...

- City and parish governments and the State of Louisiana to produce events and encourage tourism. For example, St. Bernard Parish helps produce the park's biggest annual event, the annual Battle of New Orleans commemoration, by providing parking, public shuttle buses, traffic control, and event promotion. The City of Eunice works with Jean Lafitte to maintain the historic Liberty Theater and produce its signature show *Rendez-vous des Cajuns*.
- Eastern National to run the park's bookstores and to fund special projects and events.
- Museums, universities, and historic sites like The Historic New Orleans Collection, the Louisiana State Museum system, and Louisiana State University to present programs, produce educational materials, and do research.
- The Atchafalaya National Heritage Area to create programs promoting the historical, cultural, and natural landscape of Louisiana's Atchafalaya River basin.
- Universities, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority of Louisiana, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Project, and many others to monitor and restore wetlands and to educate the public about their importance.
- Public and private elementary, middle, and high schools to create educational materials and provide programs for students at park sites and at schools.

# Jean Lafitte

## Looking Ahead To 2012

### ON THE TO-DO LIST

- Work with Lafayette's Hispanic community to create Acadian Cultural Center exhibits celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month in the fall.
- Commemorate the beginning of the War of 1812 bicentennial with NOLA Navy Week in April, when tall ships and modern Navy vessels will sail into New Orleans.
- Begin ranger-guided boat tours on Bayou Lafourche and team up with Thibodaux area Girl Scouts for special programs at the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center.
- Do major painting projects at the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center, the Acadian Cultural Center, and the French Quarter Visitor Center/Park Headquarters.
- Replace exhibit lighting systems at all Acadian centers and at the French Quarter Visitor Center.
- Encourage community input and involvement through a series of public meetings that will lay the groundwork for the 2015 bicentennial of the Battle of New Orleans.
- Rebuild Ring Levee Trail and replace Marsh Overlook Trail bridges at the Barataria Preserve.
- Install water level loggers at the Barataria Preserve to collect data on water levels, the key to wetlands health.
- Provide staff training in NPS Operational Leadership (safety leadership) and in NPS Incident Command, the structure used for major events and disaster response.
- Set up an eBird Trail Tracker kiosk at the Barataria Preserve to allow bird sighting input and instant access via computer or smartphone.
- Convert park financial and asset information systems to the new NPS-wide Federal Business Management System.
- Replace the flagpole and tour road culverts and paint the historic Malus-Beauregard House at Chalmette Battlefield.

### FUNDING APPLIED FOR

- Create a mobile web tour and tour booklet to take visitors "Beyond the Battlefield" and explore the New Orleans campaign of 1814-1815 in partnership with The Historic New Orleans Collection and St. Bernard Parish.
- Hire an intern to spend summer 2012 developing the salvinia weevil biocontrol program at the Barataria Preserve as both an invasive species management program and a tool to inform the public about invasive species.
- Work with the Regional Planning Commission, West Jefferson Medical Center, and Tulane University's School of Public Health to develop programs and promotions aimed at getting local residents and medical personnel involved in healthy activities on Barataria Preserve trails.
- Expand Chalmette Battlefield's Recognizing Our Roots youth living history program beyond New Orleans so more high school students can participate in the study and portrayal of the many cultural groups that fought at the Battle of New Orleans.
- Produce a CD of classic Cajun music interpreted by new generations of musicians at the Prairie Acadian Cultural Center.

