INCORPORATING NATURAL HISTORY CONSERVATION INTO THE PROPOSED DELTA NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are a recent designation created by the U.S. Congress to encourage local participation in the conservation of cultural, historic, and natural amenities. The U.S. National Park Service (NPS) partners with local communities and organizations to manage these areas. In northwestern Mississippi, the NPS and the Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University are working together to create a National Heritage Area to preserve and promote themes from the area’s rich cultural history, including the origin and evolution of blues music, the Civil Rights movement, and a rich literary tradition. This paper explores opportunities for incorporating the area’s natural history, including bottomland hardwood forests, migratory bird species, lakes and rivers, and fish and wildlife, into the proposed NHA. The paper addresses significant policy and management concerns, drawing on experiences from other National Heritage Areas that include a natural history component. Ways to integrate natural and cultural history into a management plan are explored, and issues of public participation are examined, accounting for cultural characteristics unique to the Delta region. Possibilities for incorporating participatory education and action research into the management agenda are highlighted.