

Remarks of Fran P. Mainella (As Prepared)
National Park Service Director
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Thank you, Dick (Moe), for that introduction. I am grateful to you, and, of course, Chairman Jonathan Kemper; National Trust President Dick Moe; and Portland's Mayor, Tom Potter, for hosting this important event today. It is once again a special privilege to address an audience filled with so many knowledgeable, thoughtful, and dedicated people, especially at a time when historic preservation is facing unprecedented challenges. The National Park Service is proud once again to co-sponsor the National Trust's Annual Preservation Conference.

Before going further, let me add my own heartfelt sympathy for the victims of the storms that have so recently swept through the South. Above all, the personal tragedies of our fellow citizens require our support and our understanding. I spent much my life in Florida and have seen the power of these storms first hand – but nothing that matches the scale of damage that has just struck some of our most treasured historic places. I know everyone here joins me in a sincere hope that the effort to rebuild communities and historic places – an effort on which we have already begun working -- will begin with the rebuilding of human lives.

From southeastern Louisiana to Mobile Bay, Hurricane Katrina damaged some of the historic legacy of more than 300 years of American history. The Gulf Coast has long been recognized for its unique blend of French Creole, Anglo-American, and African American cultures, and the Creole influences that predominated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries played a central role in creating some of the most distinctive architecture in North America.

While it likely will be months before the full extent of the damage is known, it is clear that the storm took a heavy toll on the heritage and historic fabric of the Gulf Coast. There is a little bit of good news, however – the most historic parts of New Orleans, especially the famed French Quarter and nearby Garden District, escaped largely unscathed.

We are working on restoring much of the impacted areas, including many sites on the National Register. In neighborhoods such as the Esplanade Ridge Historic District, which encompasses nearly 1,500 examples of Creole-style domestic architecture, there was extensive flooding. The Creole cottages, shotgun houses, and raised villa-style residences found in Esplanade Ridge and throughout the city are mainly wood-frame structures built on piers, which are especially susceptible to water infiltration.

Flooding also damaged sites such as Congo Square, also a site of great interest to the NPS and the preservation community. Congo Square was historically the main gathering

place for free and enslaved blacks. Even before the Civil War, African-Americans gathered here to keep alive their African heritage through dance, music, handcrafts, and to socialize. Restoring this site is one of our priorities. Dillard University, a historically black institution with elegant Classical Revival-style buildings, in the past has received NPS preservation grant funding. This site also was struck by wind damage and flooding.

The museum collections of Jean Lafitte and New Orleans Jazz national parks, were held in a building that, thankfully, was spared. We have moved their museum collections temporarily to Natchez, Mississippi, because essential climate control will not be possible for some weeks – until utility services are restored. On the ground, Chalmette Battlefield, site of the still-famous “Battle of New Orleans,” was pretty badly damaged also. But we are confident much of the landscape will recover, given time. Artillery pieces have been removed from the battlefield and sent to Springfield Armory National Historic Site in Massachusetts for whatever maintenance or repair proves needed. The Chalmette National Cemetery suffered some damage from uprooted trees, that exposed some cultural artifacts, including human remains. We have, of course, placed those in appropriate storage until they can be suitably returned.

Over in Mississippi, we still don’t have a full assessment of the losses at Fort Massachusetts and other offshore elements of Gulf Islands National Seashore, where damage was dramatic. The seashore’s museum at Davis Bayou was heavily damaged, so we have moved most of the collection to our Southeast Archeological Center for recovery or Timucuan Preserve in Jacksonville for storage. Sadly, of course, the Florida end of Gulf Islands is still recovering from last year’s devastating hurricanes, so the same facilities are already housing collections from those events. We can rebuild where we have good records of what was there. We have good photographs and plans and other drawings at many of the places that we care about. We will be able to pass on this record of lives and achievements to posterity, even after a destructive event like Hurricane Katrina.

The Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record have documentation on more than 800 sites in the gulf coast areas impacted by Katrina. Following Hurricane Katrina, the cultural resources programs of the National Park Service have responded with guidance on recovery and stabilization of sites, structures, and objects in the impacted areas. We have provided extensive site documentation, technical information, and training; developed new tools specifically to meet the needs of the states; and provided limited on-site assistance.

As one example, working with the Historic Natchez Foundation and Southeastern Library Network, the National Park Service offered a free public workshop on recovering water-damaged collections in Natchez, Mississippi, on September 15. We thought it was important to offer this service promptly, and close enough to the worst-hit areas that it could have an immediate, practical result. More than 60 people attended. Hurricane Rita was less powerful than Katrina and less harmful to park resources, however, again, some National Register properties have been affected -- especially in the region surrounding Port Arthur, Texas, and Lake Charles, Louisiana. The NPS parks

suffered downed trees, lost utility services, and minor building damage to public-use facilities in Big Thicket National Preserve, Cane River Creole National Historical Park and even Vicksburg National Military Park. Big Thicket is expecting to be without power for at least a month and is still assessing damage, but is also providing support services for nearby communities, especially the isolated Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation.

We have long talked of the value of strong partnerships. It is these types of crises that test the strength of these partnerships. And they are holding strong! We are very proud of what we have been able to do in the wake of Katrina and Rita, but we've learned valuable lessons of what we and others can do differently – and better! We remain concerned that singular resources be saved, wherever it makes sense in the aftermath of an event like this. Part of our job is to teach those who must be focused on short-term solutions to massive problems, so that they recognize that preservation makes sense!

A week ago (September 22) we testified in support of re-authorizing the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Historic Preservation Fund. Let me just take a minute here to say we want both back, and stronger than ever! We are working closely with the ACHP on a number of important initiatives, including the Preserve America program and compliance tools. We value that partnership! I was just with our good friend John Nau in Vicksburg, where he personally illustrated his commitment to historic preservation by writing a check for more than \$17,000 to preserve portions of the battlefield there. Also, don't forget that the Preserve America Presidential Awards Nominations are due November 1st! And the first round of the Preserve America grant process opens up in just a few days – October 1st. (\$5 million worth this year!) Information can be obtained on our web page: www.nps.gov, in the cultural resources section, or you can log on to www.preserveamerica.gov.

Also on a positive note, over the years, the Historic Preservation Fund has been a highly flexible authority for developing targeted grant programs that address the broad purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act. They include the grants to Indian Tribes to support Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and project grants to preserve America's native cultures; grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to preserve significant campus buildings; the Save America's Treasures Grant Program for threatened nationally significant properties; and more recently, the Preserve America grant program for heritage tourism, including education, and economic revitalization. These grant programs not only preserve historic resources, they attract new economic investment. We have asked Congress to renew the fund for another 10 years.

We also take great pride in our recognition programs. Our highest recognition standard remains the National Historic Landmark. Earlier this month, the National Park System Advisory Board recommended National Historic Landmark designation for 13 properties. I am pleased to announce, for the first time publicly today, that Secretary Norton has already acted to approve the first of that group – the Kam Wah Chung Company building in John Day, Oregon! The building is important for its association with Chinese immigrants in the development of the American West, when the Chinese came to the

West to work in mining, on the railroads, in the lumber industry, in the construction of wagon roads, and in agricultural jobs. It is one of the finest representatives of the Chinese role in the post-Civil War expansion period of the American West and the sole remainder of the town's once-thriving Chinese community.

On a personal level, my good friend John Reynolds, who recently chaired the Flight 93 Advisory Committee and will soon go to work for the National Park Foundation, might never have been here without the Kam Wah Chung. John's grandfather, James Dowett, grew up in the John Day Valley. In the late 19th century, while playing with his brother Jack, Jim's finger was impaled on a rusty nail they were using as a makeshift arrow tip. Blood poisoning set in. The family took their child to every doctor in the area, who all failed. But then they turned to Ing Hay, otherwise known as "Doc" Hay, the Chinese herbalist at the Kam Wah Chung apothecary, who created a poultice that cured the infection. Young Jim Dowett lost a fingertip, but not an arm – or his life. Jim Dowett grew up, married, had children who also had children – and one of those became our friend and colleague, John Reynolds. I am pleased now to present the Landmark certificate in honor of the legacy, symbolism, and preserved integrity of the Kam Wah Chung apothecary.

Through the work of our partners in the States, we can cite significant achievements over the past year: The National Park Service approved 1,537 new listings, which include 46,619 properties, in the National Register of Historic Places. The Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program resulted in the rehabilitation of more than 1,200 historic properties listed in the National Register, creating some 15,000 new housing units and generating \$3.8 billion in leveraged private investment.

In FY 2005, the Save America's Treasures grant program awarded a total of 145 matching grants in 43 states and the District of Columbia totaling \$29.5 million. Our partners in the program are the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

We – the National Trust, the Advisory Council, and the Park Service – can provide guidance, inspiration, and even some financial stimulus. But the day-to-day work of identifying needs, conceiving solutions, and rallying essential support for special projects, structures, and events is a task we share with those who care, the deeply dedicated grassroots workers in cities and towns across America.

We're fortunate to have so many partners already active in historic preservation. This room is filled with those who share the passion and possibilities of preservation. Now, more than ever, we must convert the passion to action... and the possibilities to realities. Thank you for inviting me today!