Background

The Florida Park Service manages the sites of fifteen plantations in the area once known as East Florida, including the U.S. Territorial Period sugar plantation known as Bulow Plantation (BFT). The plantation is now located within the Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park, located in Flagler County, approximately two miles north of the Volusia County line and two miles from the Atlantic Coast. Current interpretations at the park are limited in scope, visitation is considered to be relatively low, and the mill structure and associated buildings pose a variety of management issues. The development of solutions for the Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park will be applicable not only to other plantation sites managed by the Florida Park Service, but any state park in Florida and site managers beyond Florida’s boundaries.

The Problem

The U.S. economy has experienced several years of recession, a rising debt level, and the lowest tax revenues in decades. Though the economy is showing signs of recovery, the likelihood is considered low that it will return to the prosperous levels of the early 2000s. Referred to as the “New Normal Economy,” federal and state governments will need to continue to cut funding for programs. The FPS has lost over $10 million in funding over the past decade. Currently, FPS’ historic preservation and site interpretation budget has dwindled from several million dollars eight years ago to zero dollars in 2011 (Florida Department of Environmental Protection 2011). In addition to resources for maintenance, preservation, and interpretation, the FPS faces the threat of closure of some of its parks to further decrease the FPS operating budget. In 2011, the Florida Legislature considered closing 53 parks due to low visitation and a lack of camping facilities. Sadly, these 53 parks include the National Register sites and national historic landmarks.

Solutions

In order to address the issues that face Florida State Parks, I have developed an integrated group of solutions for the Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park. I will present this plan to the Florida Park Service. They will then be able to facilitate the meetings and methods outlined for Bulow, as well as apply the plan to other state parks in a similar situation. The elements of the plan include the identification of park stakeholders and potential investor circles, multi-mode outreach strategies, and effectively tying the management of the park’s cultural and natural resources together.

Any park within the Florida Park Service must increase visitation numbers in order to avoid potential future closures. Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park currently has a very small volunteer corps and very little community stability. A first step towards increasing visitation is to identify those within the community with a vested interest in the future success of the park. These include government agencies, descendant groups, museum groups, conservation groups, and members of the local community. A goal of identifying stakeholders is the formation of a Citizen Support Organization for the park.

The lack of FPS historic preservation funding creates challenges in effectively managing the Bulow Mill ruins. A quarter-million-dollar preservation project has been identified for Bulow, but little exists to carry it out. Information Management (BIM) models can be used as a basis for management strategies.

Rationale for Approach

ICOMOS and UNESCO both currently advocate for holistic site management and conservation, and strategies (McKercher and Crox 2002). It is essential to create sustainable tourism options (Cameron and Gatewood 2000), and develop management strategies that see state parks as ecosystems with interrelated parts that need to be managed as a whole (Chaplin et al. 2009).

A point cloud of the Hutchmaker Complex in North Dakota created in Google SketchUp, showing more visualization options that are possible for the Bulow Ruins site. Such tools are useful for both outreach and management applications.

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