



Dr. Timothy Parsons, Director
Division of Historical Resources
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

22 June 2016

Dear Dr. Parsons,

I am writing you so that the Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program (LAMP) and the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum can add our voices to the many others in opposition to the approval of a 1A-31 permit currently under review for the salvage of sites believed to potentially be related to the lost French Fleet of 1565. This permit is being sought by the company Global Marine Exploration, Inc. (GME), who wishes to conduct salvage activities and retain ownership of up to 80% of all artifacts found, which would presumably be sold.

I do not need to tell you that when a shipwreck in state waters is excavated by archaeologists, 100% of the artifacts remain the property of the State of Florida. That way the artifacts are kept together where they can be seen by the public in a museum, and are available to scholars for scientific study even years or decades later. Giving away publicly owned artifacts to be dispersed for the private gain of a company and its shareholders at the expense of the people of Florida is clearly a bad deal. There is also the questionable methods used by commercial salvors which, unlike the techniques used by archaeologists, do not maximize the historical knowledge gained from a site but instead are destructive to archaeological contexts and result in an irreplaceable loss of knowledge. Allowing a commercial salvage company to work on a site such as this, if the wrecks in question are indeed members of Jean Ribault's 1565 ships, would be a terrible mistake. The lost French ships are intrinsically tied to Florida's origin story, and their archaeological remains would prove one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in not only our state but our nation. Every Florida schoolchild knows the story of the French at Fort Caroline and the Spanish at St. Augustine. This story took place generations before Jamestown and Plymouth Rock. The remains of these ships, which carried all of the supplies deemed necessary by the French for a successful colony in the Florida wilderness, are of utmost historical and archaeological significance. Allowing a salvage company to work these wrecks would severely compromise the information that could be gained if they were instead scientifically excavated by qualified archaeologists. The loss of this unique information from a 1565 Ribault wreck, information that cannot be found in any history book, would be a catastrophic blow to historians, archaeologists, and the people of Florida.

This permitting issue is even more complicated when it is considered that Ribault's fleet was owned by the French crown. If these ships do prove to be the lost French Fleet of 1565, then they would remain



sovereign property of the French government and would be protected from non-archaeological salvage by the Sunken Military Craft Act. In this case the French government would have to authorize any activities on these sites, likely through negotiations with the U.S. State Department, and it is highly doubtful that they would condone the destructive practices typical of commercial salvors. In January 2014 at an international conference I talked to archaeologists with the French government and they assured me that they are very interested in the potential research value in these shipwrecks, if they were ever to be found.

In closing, we encourage you to deny this salvage/recovery permit. Regardless of whether the artifacts uncovered by the previous efforts of GME prove to be from the lost French Fleet or another 16th-century shipwreck, they are too rare and too historically significant to entrust to the activities of anyone other than a team of qualified scientists whose end goal is public education. The State of Florida would be better served by leaving these remains in place undisturbed, or else by supporting a scientific, archaeological investigation, in partnership with the government of France if appropriate, whereby all recovered artifacts would remain intact in a single collection accessible by scholars and the general public alike.

Please do not issue this permit.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chuck Meide", is written over a horizontal line.

Chuck Meide
Director, Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program (LAMP)