

# REBECCA BLANKENBAKER

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## PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Rebecca Blankenbaker is the Executive Director of the Cane River National Heritage Area and has over ten years of experience working with community leaders, heritage attractions, and local stakeholders to create authentic and sustainable heritage tourism products in Louisiana's Natchitoches and Cane River regions.

Rebecca leads heritage tourism initiatives in the region that create economic development opportunities and builds innovative private-public partnerships with the National Park Service and the Cane River Creole National Historical Park, the US Army Corps of Engineers at the Grand Ecore Visitor Center, the Louisiana Offices of State Parks, Cultural Development, and Tourism. Rebecca serves on the Board of Directors of the Louisiana Travel Association and the El Camino Real de Los Tejas National Historic Trail Association, and is the Chairwoman of the Louisiana No Man's Land Coalition, a regional alliance that works across parish lines to promote and develop western Louisiana's travel industry.

## EDUCATION

Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA

**Master of Arts in Heritage Resource Management, May 2011**

Thesis Project: "Beyond the Oak Alleé: Developing Interpretive Panels for Magnolia Plantation, Cane River Creole National Historical Park"

Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA

**Bachelor of Arts in History, December 2008**

Area of Concentration: American History

Senior Research: "History of the Orphan Train Movement in Louisiana"

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### **Executive Director**

**August 2018 – Present**

*Cane River National Heritage Area, Inc. Natchitoches, LA*

Leads and implements the strategic plans and policies established by the Cane River National Heritage Area, Inc. (CRNHA, Inc.) Board of Directors. Directs the operation of the organization and ensures that all operational goals are met.

### **Director of Public Outreach & Communications**

**September 2013 – August 2018**

*Cane River National Heritage Area, Inc. Natchitoches, LA*

Responsible for the development and implementation of the marketing and public relations, resource development, and outreach strategies for Cane River National Heritage Area, Inc. (CRNHA, Inc.) projects related to community development, education and interpretation, capacity building, heritage tourism, historic preservation, landscape conservation, and research.

### **Project Coordinator**

**April 2012 – September 2013**

### **Project Assistant**

**August 2010 – April 2012**

*Cane River National Heritage Area, Inc. Natchitoches, LA*

Responsible for implementing and managing a wide range of projects in community coordination, education and interpretation, infrastructure development, heritage tourism, historic preservation, landscape conservation, and research.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Center for a Better Louisiana – *Leadership Louisiana*, 2020  
 Louisiana Travel Association - *Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy*, 2018  
 National Park Service – *National Heritage Area Program Management and Reporting Training*, 2017  
 National Park Service – *National Heritage Area Strategic Planning and Sustainability Training*, 2017  
 LA Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism – *Placemaking and Sustainable Economic Development*, 2016  
 LA Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism – *LA Scenic Byway Management & Product Development*, 2015  
 National Park Service – *National Heritage Area Development and Fundraising Workshop*, 2013

## AWARDS

<b>John Alexander Award</b> Louisiana Council for The Social Studies	<b>October 2019</b>
<b>Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser True Ambassador of Tourism Award</b> Louisiana No Man's Land	<b>August 2019</b>
<b>Rising Star of the Year</b> , Louisiana Travel Association, Louey Award	<b>January 2018</b>
<b>Caroline Dormon Outstanding Thesis Award</b> , Northwestern State University of Louisiana Master of Arts in Heritage Resource Program	<b>May 2011</b>

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS AND BOARD SERVICE

<b>El Camino Real de Los Tejas National Historic Trail Association</b> Member – East Texas/Caddo District Representative Governance Committee	<b>2017 - Present</b>
<b>Alliance for National Heritage Areas</b> Member	<b>2018 – Present</b>
<b>Southeast Tourism Society</b> Member	<b>2018 – Present</b>
<b>Louisiana Travel Association</b> Strategic Planning Steering Committee 2019-Present LTA Young Professional Steering Committee 2017 Board Member 2017-2018, 2020-2022 Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy Member 2017-2018 Professional Member since 2012	<b>2012 - Present</b>
<b>Louisiana's No Man's Land</b> Chairwoman 2020-2022	<b>2017 - Present</b>

Co-Chair, Marketing Committee, and History & Education Committee

**Natchitoches Historic District Development Commission** 2013 - Present  
Marketing Committee Co-Chair 2017 – Present  
Executive Committee Vice-Chair 2020 - Present

**Natchitoches Area Chamber of Commerce** 2018 - Present  
Board of Directors 2021-2023  
Leadership Natchitoches Committee  
Natchitoches Young Professional 2018-Present

**Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches** 2015 - Present  
Member – Ex-Officio Advisor

**St. Augustine Historical Society** 2017 – Present  
Member – Ex-Officio Advisor

**Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation** 2013 - Present  
Member

## PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Louisiana River Parishes, Travel Conference December 2020  
*“Case Study: Building Heritage Tourism in Natchitoches and the Cane River Region”*

Louisiana Travel Association, Lt. Governor’s Annual Travel Summit August 2018  
*“Tourism and Public Lands”*

Louisiana Travel Association, Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy 2016 - Present  
*“Authentic Product Development in the Cane River National Heritage Area”*

National Travel & Tourism Week, Natchitoches Parish CVB & Louisiana Office of Tourism  
*“Successful Heritage Tourism Partnerships in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana”* May 2018

National Park Service, 2017 Southeast Region Meeting, National Heritage Areas January 2017  
*“Centennial Case Study: Cane River National Heritage Area”*

Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation, 2017 Annual Meeting – Keynote Address May 2017  
*“Shared Legacies in Louisiana’s National Heritage Areas”*