The National Park Service has awarded Cumberland County $49,500 to study what’s believed to be the only official military action in the county during the American Revolution.

The grant, which is part of the American Battlefield Protection Program, focuses on the Battle of Dallas Landing, a deadly 1781 confrontation along the Maurice River between continental troops and British loyalists. At least seven loyalists are said to have died in the skirmish after they reportedly tried to force their way onto a small ship near what is now known as Port Norris.

More than two centuries later, many questions – including the burial sites of the dead and the specific location of the battle – remain unanswered. And because of rising sea levels and shoreline erosion around the Maurice River, important evidence could disappear in the not so distant future.

That’s what prompted the Cumberland County Cultural & Heritage Commission to apply for the grant.

“It’s literally a race against time and mother nature,” said Matt Pisarski, the Commission’s principal planner. “Our hope is to get a more comprehensive understanding of the battle using tools like ground penetrating radar and metal detectors. Once water levels rise to cover the site the archaeological resources will be lost.”

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It’s time again to submit grant applications

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these funds in New Jersey.
As phase 2 of the 2013 program nears its end, applications and guidelines for the 2014 program are available on the Commission’s website, www.ccculturalheritage.org. Deadline for submitting applications is Oct. 18, to be sent to the Cumberland County Department of Planning & Development.

Grant Writing workshop

A Grant Writing workshop to aid in the preparation of the application, also sponsored by the Commission, will be held on Thursday, Sept. 12, from 6 to 9 p.m. at Gallery 50, 50 E. Commerce St., Bridgeton. The workshop provides applicants the opportunity to meet with Commission staff, review requirements for the proposal, and ask questions and explore ideas for successful projects.

All organizations planning to submit a proposal are encouraged to send a representative to the meeting, preferably the person responsible for organizing the proposal and writing the narrative.

Review process

Once submitted, the application is scrutinized by an independent panel of arts and history professionals. The proposals are evaluated for artistic merit, the manner in which the ideas address the needs of the community, compliance with local, state and federal law, the applicant’s administrative capabilities and prior program and funding history, where available.

The panel will make recommendations to the Commission regarding which proposals should be funded and at what level. The panel may recommend reduced funding because of procedural failings or because the panel feels that the amount requested cannot be justified by the scope of the project, but it will not reduce the amount requested simply to fall under an artificially constructed dollar limit.

The panel’s recommendations are then submitted to the Commission and are accepted as submitted or amended with cause. An appeals process is available for rejected applications, but only if the applicant believes his proposal was misunderstood or misinterpreted. Winners will be informed by letter in mid-December.

Those with questions are asked to contact Matthew E. Pisarski, Commission principal planner, at (856) 453-2175, or mattpi@co.cumberland.nj.us.

Investigation may reveal battle secrets

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“There is a lot of speculation surrounding the event,” he added. It is unclear where the battle exactly took place or if bodies are, in fact, buried beneath the ground.”

“We’re fortunate to have this research opportunity,” said Freeholder Carl Kirstein, liaison to the Cultural & Heritage Commission. “This battle might have been small in the scope of the American Revolution, but it exemplifies the role of maritime activities to Cumberland County and the deep divisions among our local residents to American independence.”

The study will take place on both banks of the Maurice River in the Port Norris area.