

# Holding the High Ground

## Principles and Strategies for Managing and Interpreting Civil War Battlefield Landscapes

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This conference was born of ever-increasing threats to battlefield landscapes, conflicting values and mandates that buffet our management efforts, and a recognition that our interpretive efforts do not convey the full range and context of the stories our sites can tell.

A major precept helped guide these meetings: National Park lands were set aside to be here for as long as there is an America. These sites are supposed to be as meaningful and evocative to Americans 500 years from now as they are today. Nothing else in America—not roads, buildings, cities, or industries—requires such an expansive long-range vision. But integrating the NPS mandate for permanency with a social and economic landscape that changes constantly—and one where the span of vision rarely exceeds ten years—is no small challenge.

Another hard reality guided our deliberations: The easy preservation battles are the big ones. More insidious, destructive, and unmanageable is the cumulative effect of a number of seemingly small but destructive actions--choices all--that chip away at these landscapes and the sense of place.

Despite federal ownership, NPS battlefield areas are not faring well amidst the maelstrom of change that surrounds them. Intrusions from adjacent land uses, expansion of roads, and even thoughtless or misguided decisions by the NPS itself chip away at or obscure the fabric of these sites. If the rate of incremental destruction over the last 30 years is maintained, these places will not survive in any meaningful way even for a few decades, much less centuries (indeed, some sites are already devastated). Gone are the days when the nation can blandly anticipate that a park will always be here in significant form.

Interpreting these battlefields to a rapidly changing society also represents a major challenge. The traditional NPS approach to interpreting battlefields has been a continuation of the legacy of returning veterans--stressing the military tactics and strategy they so loved. Like the returning veterans, we focus our interpretation on the experience of soldiers; we view the resource primarily through military eyes.

In so doing we have forgotten that the population of the veterans in 1910 knew the context of the war far better than do Americans of today. Like the veterans, we sometimes have forgotten that the experience of war went far beyond the ordeal of soldiers in the field. And we have not fully recognized (or rectified) that the veterans' traditional interpretation was the product of an era where "reconciliation" was paramount and where "ownership" of the story resided solidly with America's white population.

Several parks (Monocacy, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania, Richmond) have already begun the process of addressing these important issues in new interpretive plans or by interpreting new stories through "new" sites. Those parks, and more, are blazing a trail others must follow.

The results of this conference are but a first--indeed incomplete--step. Many important issues were not even broached (e.g. incompatible uses of battlefield areas, and the NPS role, if any, in preserving significant lands outside the park boundary). Much work remains to be done. But in Nashville in August 1998, managers of Civil War battlefields set a direction that will guide our efforts to ensure that these places remain a vital and vivid part of the American social and cultural landscape for centuries to come.

The conference tackled four major issues. The deliberations for each are summarized below. They reflect the input of our partners in the various State Historic Preservation Offices and other non-NPS partners (both public and private). Each summary includes a statement of the problem and the challenge posed to managers, a statement of guiding principles, and either applied principles or action items.

*Notes: Several times during the conference, conversations centered on the proper roll of the NPS in preserving now-unprotected battlefield sites beyond NPS jurisdiction. This issue is addressed extensively in the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission's 1993 Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields. While this was not a formal agenda item, discussions on this matter are summarized at the conclusion of this report.*

*The conference planning team would like to thank the battlefield managers, SHPO representatives, and outside "reality checkers," and regional and WASO staff who came together in a nontraditional format to begin the effort to solve problems—and who succeeded.*

The relationship between NEPA, Section 106, the SHPO's, and the National Park Service while implementing these policies:

This document articulates policies that National Park Service superintendents propose to help achieve the NPS mission of preservation and public use within the battlefield parks. Defining this philosophical high ground will help provide guidance to both current and future superintendents seeking to best serve the public interest as they manage Civil War battlefield landscapes.

However, the NPS cannot expect a State Historic Preservation Officer or the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation to arbitrarily impose NPS policies on other agencies. The SHPOs and the Advisory Council, through the NEPA and Section 106 processes, have within their missions the goal of reconciling competing views of what constitutes the best interest of the public at large. While NPS battlefield superintendents are charged with demonstrating the validity and value of the principles described in this document, the NPS is also strongly committed to using Section 106 and NEPA to assure an informed decision-making process. Consultation with SHPO's, the ACHP, and other interested parties in accordance with the stipulations in Section 106 and the Programmatic Agreement, will be a critical and continuing part of transforming the philosophy put forth here into desired outcomes for the "hallowed ground" of the nation's battlefields.

# Issue One: Roads

**The Problem:** The same transportation corridors that moved armies in the 1860s carry ever-more commuters in the 1990s. With development beyond park boundaries intensifying, the pressure to increase the carrying capacity of those historic road corridors is increasing. Solutions for traffic problems caused by development outside the park are often being sought within national park boundaries.

The opportunity for future preservation through long-range transportation planning is closing quickly. Intensifying development around battlefield sites forecloses potential alternatives to widening roads through National Park Service areas.

**The question:** Can an effective, integrated plan involving all levels of government avert consumption of battlefield landscapes and park land by new or expanded roads? What roles should Congress, the NPS, States, Federal Highways, and localities play in developing solutions? Can a broad-based proactive, comprehensive plan avoid “fighting it out” on each local issue, without compromising NPS principles of preservation?

## The Results

### ***Guiding Principle***

Modern roads and traffic shall not adversely affect the integrity of the resource and the quality of the visitor experience.

### ***Applied Principles:***

The National Park Service will not cede land to expand existing road corridors or create new corridors through Civil War Battlefields it holds in trust for the American People.

Wherever possible, the NPS will reclaim and restore historic road corridors critical to understanding battlefield landscapes.

The National Park Service will work with U.S. DOT and the Federal Highway Administration to establish a policy which opposes such highway expansion even where sufficient right of way to expand a corridor through a national park battlefield area exists.

The National Park Service will identify (or ensure others identify) the secondary and cumulative impacts of regional road projects on battlefield resources and, ensure that such impacts are eliminated or mitigated.

### **Actions**

The NPS shall seek an agreement at the departmental level with the U.S. DOT, Federal Highway Administration, Congress and the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation to study, identify, and implement permanent transportation solutions that avoid impact on NPS Battlefield resources. State clusters of parks will seek similar agreements with pertinent state and local agencies

Pilot project: Battlefield parks from Virginia and Maryland (NCR and NER) will initiate a pilot project to work at the state, federal, and local levels to perform a comprehensive, state-wide planning process that identifies alternatives—potential permanent solutions--to the expansion of roads on existing rights of way through NPS battlefield areas. The goal of this effort is to identify those alternatives in local comprehensive plans, regional transportation plans, and state-wide work programs. Results will also be embodied in MOAs between the NPS, the SHPOs, Federal Highways, and MD and VA DOT.

In the absence of such long-range planning, the NPS will advocate for the resources in its charge —recognizing the role of the SHPO and ACHP in reconciling competing views of what best serves the public interest through the NEPA and 106 processes.

Parks must develop comprehensive cultural and natural resources inventories and monitoring programs to support decision making and update parks' National Register nominations. The NPS and SHPOs must educate the public about the contributions of park lands to the quality of life of the community and the nation.

Parks will become a permanent partner in comprehensive planning at both the local and state level. Maintain personal relationships with partners and stakeholders, advocacy groups and elected officials to resolve transportation issues.

Parks will seek to establish a systematic communication network among battlefield park superintendents and other NPS professionals. We will improve training on local governmental structure, practices, and other forces at work affecting transportation issues.

**Seek designation of all NPS Battlefield areas as National Historic Landmarks. This can be done by individual nomination or perhaps by legislation declaring all NPS Battlefield areas NHLs.**

Review for consistency NPS policies that apply to or affect transportation issues.

# Issue 2: Adjacent Land Use

Two truisms help define this issue:

- What goes on outside a national park can devastate the resources and values of the lands inside a national park. Gone are the days when our surrounding communities or the nation can blandly anticipate that a park will always be here in meaningful form. The NPS may own the places, but the community has control over the Sense of Place.
- All land outside the park boundary will eventually be developed in some form--a form that will be determined by local landowners and local governments.

**The problem:** Only a handful of communities surrounding a NPS battlefield area have in place an ordinance that recognizes the presence of a national park area in its midst--an ordinance that provides for some review of development projects on or near the park boundary. Other areas lay unprotected with respect to land use and design. Some localities may not be enabled by legislation to implement specific measures that protect NPS areas. Others choose not to implement such measures. The result is that battlefield areas are suffering regular and significant degradation from adjacent land uses.

**The challenge:** To work with local communities to manage external development in a way that does not diminish the power and integrity of these national treasures. Local communities must understand the vulnerability of battlefield landscapes to adjacent and nearby development, and we must understand the desire of adjacent landowners and local communities for development. They must have at their disposal sufficient land-use and design tools--including incentives--to effectively protect NPS areas. They also must be inspired to use them. What are those tools? How best to convince localities to implement them? What incentives or initiatives can federal and state governments offer to further protect NPS resources?

**The Results:**

***Guiding Principles:***

The NPS will work with local governments and landowners to ensure that adjacent or nearby development does not adversely affect the integrity of the resource and the quality of the NPS battlefield visitor experience.

***Applied Principles:***

Battlefield lands can be protected using strategy that is fair to local landowners and supportive of local economic development objectives.

NPS superintendents support the recommendations embodied in the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission's (CWSAC) *Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields*.

NPS superintendents must know and encourage the employment of land use measures available to local governments and landowners.

***Actions:***

*At the Federal Level.*

Actively pursue legislation implementing the recommendations of the CWSAC *Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields*.

Use existing and improved NPS land protection plans, boundary studies, and the efforts of the American Battlefield Protection Program as appropriate to the local area and resource.

Superintendents should pursue partnerships with SHPOs, local governments and the Corps of Engineers (COE) to ensure NPS input into the review of projects under the Section 106 review process, which is mandatory as part of the COE's 404 Clean Water permit process.

Continually acquire data on natural and cultural resources along park boundaries.

Seek opportunities to locate regional wetland mitigation projects on lands adjacent to NPS battlefield areas.

Provide training for Management and staff on land protection strategies commonly used by local governments, non-profits, and (occasionally) private landowners.

*At the State Level*

NPS should work with local and state partners to generate and support state-level legislation conveying to localities the tools necessary to protect NPS areas in their midst.

Pilot project: Tennessee superintendents will work with state and local lawmakers to generate a state-level legislative package that ensures that

communities surrounding NPS battlefield areas have all reasonable land use tools and incentives at their disposal.

NPS must become active at the front end of Regional planning efforts addressing issues of growth and transportation.

*At the Local Level*

Integrate park GMP process with local comprehensive planning efforts.

Pilot project: FRSP will embark on a GMP update that will integrate NPS management strategies with Spotsylvania County's comprehensive plan. This project will define how the community will integrate the park into its midst, and vice-versa. The end product: a park GMP amendment and a component to the county's updated comprehensive plan that are identical, and that help ensure the survival of the park in one of the nation's fastest growing areas.

Convey the vulnerability of battlefield landscapes, the battlefields' economic potential, and their historical and cultural significance to local politicians, administrators, and elected officials.

Encourage non-profit organizations, advocacy groups and partners to become more involved in local, state and regional planning.

Develop in adjacent or nearby landowners the desire to preserve open space and the knowledge of the tools available that will make preservation both spiritually and financially rewarding.

Formulate data to substantiate land protection decisions as they relate to damage to resources and the visitor experience.

Integrate park GIS data bases with the GIS systems of local governments and planning organizations.

# Issue 3: Interpreting Civil War Battlefields

**The Problem:** We have an inclination to tell the story of the literate, the enfranchised, or the landed--those whose thoughts and actions are generally recorded in the historical record. We do magnificent resource-based interpretation of the use of antebellum manors by armies during the war, but little of the owners, slaves and servants who peopled and operated those sites prior to and during the war. We portray vividly the stories of soldiers who trod battlefields, but little or nothing of the dirt farmers whose lives and homes were devastated by war. We have invested our interpretive and research dollars where it's easiest and most convenient--in those topics illuminated by the written word, or at sites where obvious vestiges remain. The result: interpretation that is biased racially and socio-economically.

We have replaced the reminiscences of returning veterans with the interpretation stressing military tactics and strategy they so loved. In so doing, we have forgotten that the audience of the veterans knew the context of the war. We often do not provide adequate context for the site-related stories we tell.

**The Challenge:** How do we go about expanding the scope of interpretation on Civil War battlefields—giving visitors the opportunity to explore the fundamental contexts and meanings of the resources that comprise Civil War Battlefields? What kind of investments are we willing to make in order to better tell these stories?

**The Results:**

## ***Guiding Principle***

Battlefield interpretation must establish the site's particular place in the in the continuum of war, illuminate the social, economic, and cultural issues that caused or were affected by the war, illustrate the breadth of human experience during the period, and establish the relevance of the war to people today.

## ***Applied Principles***

Primary interpretive themes and stories at battlefields will be rooted in each park's unique enabling legislation and surviving resources. Civil War battlefields generally possess the range of resources necessary to illuminate those larger issues in a unique way, tell a wider range of unique stories (not simply military), and establish the relevance of the war to today's Americans.

Commemoration, inspiration, provocation, and interaction with the resource are fundamental to the NPS mission and the visitor experience at Civil War sites.

The expansion of the scope of interpretation on battlefields will provide an enriched and diverse interpretive experience that will reach a more diversified audience and promote the preservation of a broader range of resources.

Expansion of the sites subject to interpretation and the updating of interpretive media and programs will be based on comprehensive research and will incorporate current scholarship.

Interpretative programs and media will recognize that the aftermath of war—its legacy of personal, social, and economic trauma and the continuing debate over unresolved issues—is a vital component of understanding the war's relevance to subsequent generations.

By using resources and stories at the park level to illuminate larger issues, we will show that those issues were not viewed homogeneously, and that the human experience related to those issues varied greatly. By allowing each park to develop these themes based on existing resources and enabling legislation, we will enrich and diversify the interpretive experience of visitors.

***Actions:***

Seek a set-aside from Repair/Rehab funds to undertake the effort to upgrade and expand interpretation on Civil War Battlefields.

The NPS will use the existing Memorandum of Agreement with the Organization of American Historians and will generate new agreements with scholars, colleges, and universities to help integrate the latest scholarship into new and ongoing interpretive efforts.

Institute training and symposia to allow staff to address issues of causation and result with confidence.

The NPS will re-examine and update park Long Range Interpretive Plans to identify sites and media to be used to tell a broader range of stories.

The NPS will examine the use (or lack thereof) of battlefield sites by minority populations. Why are these sites so lightly used by those populations; why do these sites appear to be irrelevant to them?

The NPS will improve interpretive links between regional sites; engage in systematic, multi-park planning to link stories, common themes, and related resources.

# Issue 4: Managing and Interpreting Layers of Resources

**The Problem:** A diversity of resources--both historical and natural—may beget conflicting values, policies, and law and challenge us as we allocate scarce resources. Our battlefield landscapes have laid upon them a multitude of post-war resources: commemorative expressions, new or expanded civilian sites, and government facilities designed to bring the park's story to visitors and put visitors within the landscape. Many of these post-war resources have assumed significance in their own right. Yet some also intrude upon or consume significant battlefield landscapes and resources. Visitors generally want to reach back and touch history, or at least get as close as they can to experiencing a wartime landscape. But do we sometimes sustain post-war resources at the expense of those landscapes and features that comprised the wartime landscape?

A second issue: The traditional NPS policy and tradition to manage natural resources to support natural processes within an ecosystem sometimes conflicts directly with the charge to restore and preserve historic landscapes on Civil War Battlefields.

**The Challenge:** Is there a difference between National-Register-level significance and National-Park-level significance? Do we maintain our battlefield areas as museums of commemorative and interpretive expression, where each generation's expression of reverence (or lack thereof) and evolving sense of historical reality are accorded the same level of significance as the battlefield landscape itself? If so, what implications does that have for the preservation of battlefield landscapes, and for visitors to battlefield areas in 500 years? How do we set priorities for vectoring limited dollars for preserving resources? How do we reconcile conflicting natural and cultural resource management mandates, policies, or preferences? When such conflicts exist, what priorities will guide us?

**The Results:**

## ***Guiding Principles:***

The management of battlefield landscapes shall recognize the primacy of those historic resources identified in each park's enabling legislation--those resources that are at the heart of the visitor experience and the core of the park's preservation efforts. Cultural resources on Civil War battlefields shall, therefore, be managed according to these priorities (as described in a number of park GPRA plans):

- 1) Those structures, features, landscapes, archeological resources, and viewsheds that comprised the wartime landscape.
- 2) Commemorative expressions by veterans and subsequent generations that reflect Americans' sometimes profound attempts to make sense of and derive meaning from the war.
- 3) Nationally significant post-war accretions on wartime landscapes.
- 4) Facilities (buildings, roads, trails, or media) erected by the government or other entities to interpret, support maintenance of, or provide access to battlefield landscapes.

Battlefield managers remain committed to preserving all significant historic resources when they do not constitute a significant degradation of the primary battlefield landscape. When post-war resources adversely affect the primary battlefield landscape, the NPS will develop solutions in close consultation with the SHPO and ACHP, in accordance with NEPA and 106.

### ***Applied Principles***

Commemoration (including the commemorative expressions of veterans), inspiration, provocation, and interaction with the resource are fundamental to the NPS mission and the visitor experience at Civil War sites. The expressions of veterans and subsequent generations are an important part of the war's legacy, and often help serve as a "bridge" for helping modern visitors derive meaning from the war.

Where post-war accretions or facilities diminish the visitor experience, significantly degrade the primary resource, or inaccurately convey historical data or impression, the NPS shall pursue a goal of restoration of the primary resource. NPS policies on restoration will be stringently applied, and alternatives to restoration will be explored and evaluated in consultation with the SHPOs and ACHP, under the 106 process. (Note: 36CFR800 will be the guide for determining "significant degradation.")

While battlefield managers will be strongly committed to the highest standards of natural resource management, when conflicts in the management goals of natural and cultural resources emerge, natural resources will be managed to support the goals of preservation and interpretation of historic battlefield landscapes and their components, consistent with existing laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies.

### ***Actions:***

Generate supplemental Memoranda of Agreement with SHPOs and the Advisory Council that embodies the principles embodied in this document.

Develop a “commemorative context” for evaluating the National Register eligibility of commemorative expressions.

Seek change in NPS policy regarding new monuments, generally excluding them but recognizing the need to allow some level of expression only by groups not recognized or allowed to participate during the commemorative period.

Pilot project: Virginia parks will work with the VA SHPO to complete a “Management Plan for Depression-Era Resources in Virginia’s National Parks”—a plan that provides context for evaluation, identifies the unique, rare, or the common, and establishes a framework within which those resources will be managed. The goal: surer management of those resources that are preeminently significant, and increased flexibility on the part of superintendents to recognize the primacy of wartime landscape features in decisions regarding layers of resources.

# Management of non-Adjacent Related Lands

This issue was not on the agenda, but arose several times. It is particularly important to parks that own only a small portion of the core battlefield areas—Richmond, Petersburg, Stones River, Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania. When next the superintendents meet, this clearly is one of the items many parks most want to talk about.

No consensus was attempted on this issue, but a few thoughts worth recording were expressed.

Parks that do not include all the core battlefield sites feel a strong need to work for the preservation of lands outside their boundary—lands that may some day be included in a park boundary.

In Virginia, at least, the parks' Land Protection Plan would be a disastrous mechanism by which to trigger NPS involvement in the preservation of those lands. In such a strong lands-rights region, the expression **by the NPS** of a desire to see lands beyond its boundaries preserved could be seen as a “land grab” or an effort to stop development and diminish property values.

Other mechanisms exist whereby related lands can be inventoried and strategies for their protection developed, but these must have the imprimatur of the local community. The ABPP has had some success in developing partnerships at the local level and should be a major player in continuing to do so.

NPS areas should seek to work with other federal agencies (especially the Corps of Engineers) to develop strategies for preserving related lands through those the Section 106 process and agencies' permitting or funding processes.

Pilot Project: Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania will execute a memorandum of agreement with the Virginia SHPO, the Corps of Engineers, Spotsylvania County, and the Advisory Council that will establish a formal process for NPS input into the Section 106 process for federal undertakings that affect related lands in Spotsylvania County.