

CIVIL WAR PRESERVATION TRUST

America's Largest Nonprofit Battlefield Preservation Organization

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**Testimony of David A. Myers
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**Before the Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
United States House of Representatives**

*Congressional Field Hearing
Pea Ridge National Military Park, Arkansas
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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is David Myers, and I am an Associate for Government Relations at the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT). CWPT is a 75,000-member nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving America's remaining Civil War battlefields. We have protected more than 22,000 acres of hallowed ground in 19 states, most of it outside National Park Service (NPS) boundaries.

I come before you today to state our views on landscape restoration programs at America's Civil War battlefields, particularly those protected at least in part by the NPS. As several speakers on this morning's agenda have or will indicate, park landscape restoration is a complicated and occasionally controversial undertaking. However, for the millions of Americans who visit these battlegrounds every year (including thousands of members of our Armed Forces), the rewards of landscape restoration certainly outweigh any bureaucratic hassles such endeavors generate, as long as appropriate standards and review are employed.

Terrain Is Key to Battlefield Story

More than 140 years have passed since the guns fell silent at Appomattox in April 1865. In the succeeding decades, nature ran its course; fields that were once ripe with corn have become forests, farm lanes that once served as the supply lines of armies have become overgrown and lost, and thickets, woodlots, and hedgerows that once dotted the landscape have disappeared entirely. Consequently, the battlefields that tourists explore today often barely resemble the shot-torn fields of the Civil War.

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Testimony of the Civil War Preservation Trust

Page 2 of 5

December 19, 2005

This is regrettable, because of the unique role that terrain and landscape features play in the maintenance and interpretation of military parks. Unlike many “natural parks,” landscape features – both natural features and those created by man – were often the primary reason armies clashed there. The combination of circumstances and terrain that leads to battle has been best stated by renowned English historian George Macaulay Trevelyan, who wrote about one of his own nation’s battlegrounds: “Chance selected this field out of so many, that low wall, this gentle slope of grass, a windmill, a farm or straggling hedge, to turn the tide of war and decide the fate of nations and of creeds. Look on this scene, restored to its rustic sleep that was so rudely interrupted on that one day in all the ages...”

Because park landscape features play such a prominent part in military historic sites, the maintenance and restoration of these features are essential to interpretation of the sites. Even recognized military historians can have difficulty explaining the ebb and flow of battle when trees or other natural features are allowed to obscure the battlefield’s topography. In the case of casual park visitors, the misconceptions that result from alternations in the historic landscape can be profound, especially since most casual visitors expect historic sites to accurately reflect the period in history they represent.

Park Enabling Legislation

The veterans who led the effort to create America’s first military parks understood the need to maintain park landscapes as they appeared at the time of the Civil War. During the siege of Atlanta in 1864, a sergeant in the 17th New York Infantry wrote to his hometown paper: “If these works could be preserved by law, for the benefit of our curious posterity, they would last many generations. Each battlefield would thus have its own monuments to celebrate the events that transpired there; each rifle pit and battery speaking more to the heart of the spectator than would whole volumes of history.”

This attitude toward maintaining the historic landscape features is reflected in the enabling legislation enacted between 1890 and 1940, when most of the present battlefield parks were created. For example, at Vicksburg National Military Park (NMP), the enabling legislation commits park officials “to restoring the field to its condition at the time of the battle.” At Chickamauga and Chattanooga NMP, the park is directed to “preserve and suitably mark the scene” of battle. The enabling legislation for Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP states that the War Department could enter into agreements with landowners, provided that “they will only cut trees or underbrush or disturb or remove the soil, under such regulations as the Secretary of War may prescribe....”

The enabling legislation at other Civil War battlefield parks is roughly analogous to these examples. In all cases, these indications of Congressional intent provide the nation’s military parks with the legal justification to pursue historic landscape restoration and maintenance.

Testimony of the Civil War Preservation Trust

Page 3 of 5

December 19, 2005

Military Reasons for Landscape Restoration

Although the primary reason for the creation of battlefield parks was preservation for public uses, another motive was each battlefield's value as a military education tool. As Sun Tzu wrote more than two millennia ago: "Those who do not know the conditions of mountains and forests, hazardous defiles, marshes and swamps, cannot conduct the march of an army."

Even today, more than 100 years after the first military parks were created, "staff rides," as they are referred to by the military, are used for professional development at all levels, from individual units to war colleges. For example, the U.S. Military Academy at West Point provides staff rides to Army units upon request, and has done so at Antietam, Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Perryville, and Shiloh in recent years. Chickamauga and Chattanooga NMP estimate that it conducts 50 staff rides a year.

The key to these staff rides is to take military personnel out to battlefield to examine terrain features and gain a better understanding of the why Civil War commanders made the decisions they did. The military uses a formula referred to as "KOCO," which is an acronym for the need to study "Key terrain, Observation and fields of fire, Cover and concealment, and Avenues of approach." Needless to say, it is difficult to use the KOCO formula when a battlefield landscape no longer resembles its 1860s appearance.

Gettysburg Landscape Restoration Initiatives

It is probably no coincidence that America's most famous battlefield is at the forefront of the historic scene restoration movement. In 1999, NPS approved a general management plan for Gettysburg NMP that includes an ambitious landscape restoration plan. The 15-year plan includes restoration of the historic woodland, removal of non-wartime structures (such as the cyclorama center and the Home Sweet Home Hotel), and the rebuilding of fences and farm lanes.

When completed, NPS will have removed 576 acres of existing woodland that were not present in July 1863. During the same period, the park will add 115 acres of trees that were present during the battle (trees that provided cover and concealment for the opposing armies). In addition, Gettysburg NMP plans to rehabilitate 160 acres of orchards and 278 acres of forest to reflect their historic sizes and configurations.

Further, Gettysburg NMP plans to repair, rehabilitate or reconstruct 9.8 miles of historic lanes and roads that provided mobility and avenues of approach for both armies. In addition to removing and restoring trees, Gettysburg will restore 39.1 miles of field boundaries, using fencing, vegetation patterns and hedgerows. According to one park ranger, quoted in a recent issue of *American Heritage* magazine, "It really is a new battlefield. The terrain hasn't changed. The hills and ridges are still there. But now we can see how they relate to each other and how close they are."

Testimony of the Civil War Preservation Trust

Page 4 of 5

December 19, 2005

According to John Latschar, Superintendent of Gettysburg NMP, every park landscape restoration project is undertaken with great care. There is a thorough review and mapping process, including research based on archival materials, historic photographs and sketches, maps, and 20th century aerial photographs.

Other NPS Landscape Restoration Initiatives

Other NPS battlefield parks are also performing historic landscape programs. Landscape restoration projects have been conducted at Antietam in Maryland, at Chancellorsville and the Wilderness Battlefields in Virginia, and at Chickamauga and Chattanooga in Georgia and Tennessee. Two of the most recent landscape restoration projects were undertaken at Vicksburg in Mississippi and right here at Pea Ridge.

Compared to those at Gettysburg, these landscape initiatives have been somewhat smaller in scope – although all had a positive impact on interpretation of their respective battlefields. At Vicksburg, three acres of timber near the Louisiana Redan were recently cut, thanks to a private donation from John Nau, III, Chairman of the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation. Here at Pea Ridge, approximately five acres of timber have been thinned to reflect an average wartime density of 20 to 40 trees per acre.

Despite the educational and interpretive value of landscape restoration projects, cutting timber and restoring woodland sometimes generates opposition from interests that are more concerned with preserving the natural landscape than they are with protection of the park's historic setting. This is unfortunate, because restoring historic terrain to its wartime appearance often benefits the environment as well. For instance, landscape restoration at Gettysburg includes the recreation of up to 100 acres of wetlands, fencing cattle from streams to improve water quality, and increasing the habitat for grassland species, ground nesting birds and native plants.

CWPT Landscape Restoration Efforts

As part of its battlefield preservation mission, the Civil War Preservation Trust also conducts some landscape restoration work on properties it has acquired for preservation, although not at anywhere near the level of the work NPS undertakes. Most of the landscape restoration work contracted by CWPT involves timber restoration or removal, although in some cases we have also rehabilitated wartime roads and reconstructed period fences.

CWPT is currently involved in landscape restoration projects at Chancellorsville, Port Republic and Reams Station – all located in Virginia. In the case of Reams Station, we have removed trees and underbrush, utilized controlled burns, and created buffer zones in order to restore the wartime landscape. At Chancellorsville, we have engaged volunteers to plant a variety of trees native to region on 14 acres of core battlefield land.

In all cases where CWPT attempts to restore historic terrain features, we use archival materials and engage recognized historians – many of whom are NPS personnel volunteering their time and expertise for our efforts.

Testimony of the Civil War Preservation Trust

Page 5 of 5

December 19, 2005

CWPT is not alone among nonprofit groups working to restore historic landscape features. Friends of the National Parks at Gettysburg are one-third of the way through a campaign to rebuild nine miles of wartime farm fences. Volunteers have already put 6,330 hours into the fence rebuilding project.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude my testimony, I want to thank you for bringing this issue to the attention of Congress and the public through this field hearing. Today's hearing will help advance cause of park landscape restoration first called for by Congress more than a century ago.

Although we have come here today to talk about American battlefields, it is worthwhile to conclude with a statement by another Englishman, the philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead once wrote, "We think in generalities, but we live in detail. To make the past live, we must perceive it in detail in addition to thinking of it in generalities." The detail of historic scene restoration allows us the past to live for millions of Americans.

Mr. Chairman, we look forward to working with you and the subcommittee on park landscape restoration efforts and other battlefield preservation issues. Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee.

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