



Foundation Document Overview

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park

Virginia



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purposes of FREDERICKSBURG AND SPOTSYLVANIA NATIONAL MILITARY PARK are

- to preserve and protect the cultural resources associated with the Civil War battlefields of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House*
- to interpret and commemorate the battlefields and related sites in the larger context of the Civil War and American history, including the causes and consequences of the war and its effect on the American people, especially on the American South*
- to manage natural resources to preserve the setting and environment in order to support visitor understanding and appreciation of the battlefields and related sites*

Significance

Significance statements express why Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Fredericksburg, Virginia, and the surrounding area was the scene of four major Civil War battles: Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House. Within a 17-mile radius of the city, there were more than 100,000 casualties, reflecting the war's tragic cost.
- The assemblage of battlefields, historic landscapes, and related sites at the park commemorate major Civil War events that occurred between December 1862 and May 1864, providing an outstanding opportunity for visitors to learn about the social, political, and military aspects of the war over time. The sites and the associated events represent the transformation of the war into a conflagration that affected soldiers, civilians, and entire communities. They illustrate the progression of the war from great Confederate successes under General Lee and significant Union defeats, to the start of the final campaign that would lead to the surrender of Lee's forces at Appomattox Court House and victory for the Union Army under General Grant.
- The national military park contains nationally significant historic structures present at the time of the battles, including Chatham used by the Union Army as a headquarters and hospital; Ellwood used by the Union Army as a headquarters and by both sides as a hospital; Salem Church, a shelter for civilian refugees from Fredericksburg in 1862 and a focal point of battle in 1863; the Innis House on Fredericksburg Battlefield; and a plantation outbuilding at Guinea Station where the great Confederate Gen. Stonewall Jackson died in 1863, with far-reaching consequences for the Confederacy.
- The Fredericksburg National Cemetery honors more than 15,000 Union soldiers, who died in battle or from disease. The cemetery contains almost 85% unknown burials and is one of the largest Civil War national cemeteries.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Battlefield Landscapes**
- **Battlefield Archeology**
- **Civil War Historic Structures and Landscapes**
- **Earthen Fortifications**
- **Historic Roads, Traces, and Trails**
- **Museum and Research Collections**
- **Commemorative Landscape**
- **Natural Quiet, Light, and the Lack of Modern Visual Intrusions**
- **Park Setting**

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Viewsheds and Adjacent Lands**
- **Passive Recreation**



Interpretive Themes



Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **General Themes** - Overarching park themes focus on the Civil War battles, the free and enslaved communities of the Fredericksburg area, and other political, social, and economic realities of the war.
- **Site Specific Themes** - Each area of the park contains its own unique story and reflects what is significant about the park including:
 - Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House Battlefields
 - Chatham and Ellwood Plantations
 - Stonewall Jackson Shrine
 - Salem Church
 - Fredericksburg National Cemetery

Description

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park commemorates and interprets four major battles of the American Civil War: Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House. It also includes the Fredericksburg National Cemetery established at the war's end and Chatham, an 18th century plantation house, outbuildings and grounds overlooking the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg and understood to be the only house in America visited by both Presidents Washington and Lincoln. The Fredericksburg area became the most fought-over ground of the war, resulting in more than 100,000 casualties and devastation to the local communities.

Battle of Fredericksburg

The Union Army commanded by Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside arrived on Stafford Heights above the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg in mid-November 1862. Pressured by President Lincoln for a victory on the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation, Burnside was unable to cross the river until December 11. By that time, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's forces were firmly posted on the high ground west of the city. On December 13, Burnside ordered two attacks. An assault led by Union Gen. George G. Meade against Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's corps at Prospect Hill achieved temporary success before Confederate reserves drove the Federals back to their original position. The second attack was launched against the heart of Lee's defenses at Marye's Heights west of Fredericksburg. When the day ended, Lee had won his most one-sided victory of the war.

Battle of Chancellorsville

Following the Fredericksburg debacle, President Lincoln replaced Burnside with Gen. Joseph Hooker. On April 27, 1863, the new commander marched most of his army upstream, crossing the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers, and within three days was at the Chancellorsville crossroads. Lee discovered this threat to his position and rushed westward, prompting Hooker to abandon the initiative and establish a defensive line on the right flank. Jackson exploited this weakness on May 2 by leading his corps on a risky 12-mile march around the Union army and destroying Hooker's right in a spectacular surprise attack. The day ended tragically for the Confederates when Jackson was unwittingly shot and mortally wounded by his own troops. For three more days, Lee pressed his advantage and eventually drove the Federals back across the river.

Battle of the Wilderness

Following Lee's bold but failed advance to Gettysburg, Lincoln again called a new leader to Virginia to challenge Lee's army. In Ulysses S. Grant, Lincoln found the general with the skill and determination to engage and sustain combat until the war's end. The first engagement between Lee and Grant took place in the dense thickets and tangled undergrowth of the Wilderness on May 5-6, 1864. Along the Orange Turnpike, the armies grappled to a bloody stalemate over two days. To the south, on the Orange Plank Road, the Federals almost crushed Confederate Gen. A.P. Hill's troops on May 5, only to be thrown back by a dramatic counterattack the next day. Tactically the battle was a draw, but Grant broke the stalemate by marching his army south toward Spotsylvania Court House.

Battle of Spotsylvania Court House

On the night of May 7-8, 1864, both armies raced for the vital intersection at Spotsylvania Court House that controlled the shortest route to Richmond. Lee arrived first, entrenched, and successfully withstood a series of Union attacks. On the morning of May 12, two Federal corps charged from the woods opposite a vulnerable section of the Confederate line known as the "Mule Shoe Salient," overwhelming the Southerners. Confederate reinforcements counterattacked, and for the next 20 hours this sector witnessed the most intense hand-to-hand combat of the war. The site of this desperate fighting came to be called the "Bloody Angle" and earned Lee enough time to build new earthworks, which he held until Grant sidled south once again on May 21.

