



Foundation Document Overview

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park

Texas



Contact Information

For more information about the *Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park Foundation Document*, contact: www.nps.gov/paal or 956-541-2785 or write to:
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Purpose



The purpose of Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park is to preserve the sites of the opening battles of the U.S.–Mexican War, using historical information and perspectives of both nations to tell the story of the battles; the war; the related political, diplomatic, military, and social causes; and the lasting consequences.



Significance

Significance statements express why Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park's 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.

- Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park commemorates and preserves the sites of the first and only major battles of the U.S.–Mexican War fought north of the Rio Grande.
- Palo Alto Battlefield allows visitors to experience one of the few U.S.–Mexican War battle sites on a landscape that is largely unchanged since 1846.
- The battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma opened a war that resulted in Mexico ceding half of its land, thus extending U.S. territory to the Pacific Ocean.
- Numerous individuals who participated in the battles on the Rio Grande, including future presidents Mariano Arista, Rómulo Díaz de la Vega, Ulysses S. Grant, and Zachary Taylor, went on to shape their respective nations as military and political leaders.
- Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park remains a symbol of a war that shaped two nations and provides an emotional and physical focal point for understanding and reflecting on this conflict, its causes, and its consequences.



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 Sites:** This fundamental resource includes key sites currently managed by the National Park Service, including Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, as well as sites outside the park boundary associated with the 1846 opening campaign of the U.S.–Mexican War, including Fort Brown, Carricitos, Point Isabel, and Camp Belknap.
- **Historic Landscape of Palo Alto:** The Palo Alto battlefield within the park boundary retains a high level of integrity that provides an opportunity to experience the site much as it looked during the time of the battle in 1846.
- **Resaca de la Palma Landscape:** A green space in an urban setting, the Resaca de la Palma landscape presents a unique opportunity for the park to expand its range of programming and outreach to the community of Brownsville.
- **Scholarly Research:** Continued scholarly research and data collection about the U.S.–Mexican War utilizing the archeological record, primary documentation, and museum collections allow this fundamental resource to contribute to our understanding of historic events associated with these sites.
- **Opportunities to Connect History to Place:** The park provides visitors with a place to reflect on and better understand the historic events of the U.S.–Mexican War and its lasting impacts on the relationship between these two nations.



Interpretive Themes

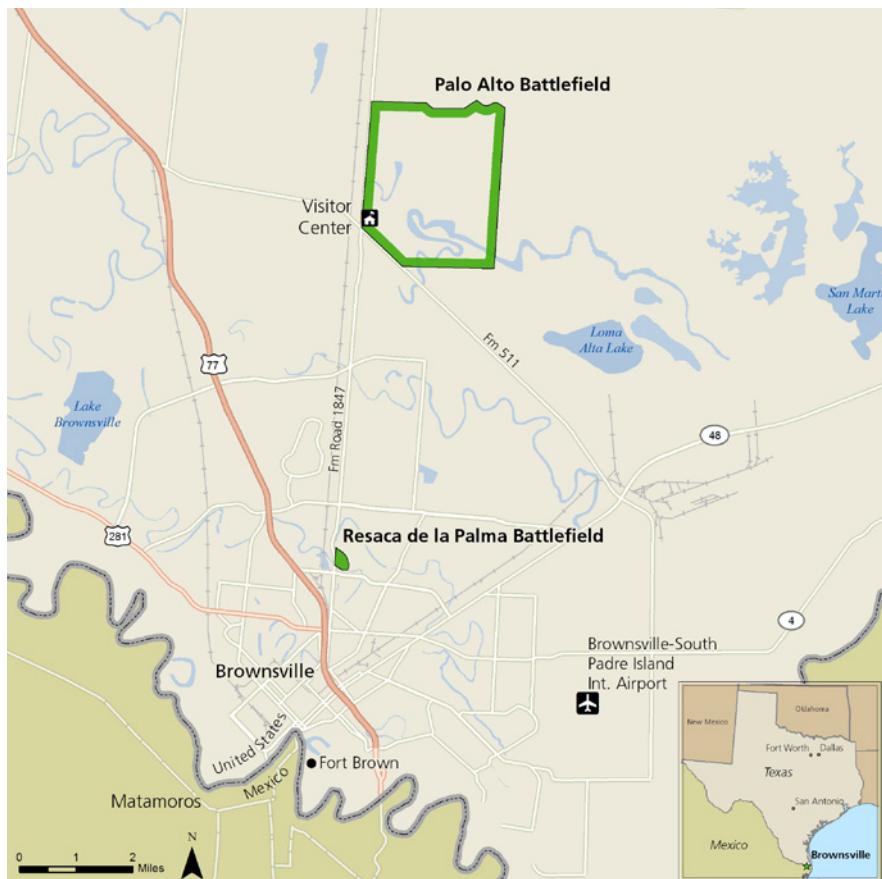
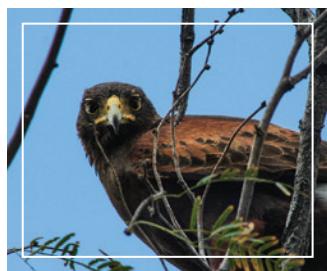
Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and 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.

- The territorial war that began at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma had roots in the earliest days of European colonization. The distinct paths that the United States and Mexico followed from colonies to republics led the two nations into a conflict for control of a vast expanse of North America.
- The war that began with clashes at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma influenced the United States and Mexico in profoundly different ways and those effects continue to create equally distinct perceptions of the conflict.
- The battles on the Rio Grande set the tone for the entire U.S.–Mexican War and opened the way for General Zachary Taylor’s continued campaign into northern Mexico and General Winfield Scott’s advance on Mexico City.
- The battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma demonstrated both existing and new military tactics and technologies of western mid-19th century warfare.
- The battles of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and the U.S.–Mexican War were caused by a diversity of motivations, opinions, political perspectives, and decisions in both the United States and Mexico. Today, citizens from both countries have various opinions and reactions to the battles and the war itself.
- Landscape features that influenced the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma remain a significant part of the park scenery and experience today. This natural landscape, which provides critical habitat for wildlife, offers visitors opportunities to experience the historic battle scene as well as the many unique plant and animal species of the region.

Other Important Resources and Values

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park may contain 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.

- Species Habitat: Habitat protection for native plant and animal species is an important resource management goal for the park.
- Partnerships: Partnerships in both the United States and Mexico are part of the park's enabling legislation and are an important resource for the park.



Description

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park consists of two units, the Palo Alto Battlefield and the Resaca de la Palma Battlefield. Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site was authorized by Congress in 1978, and the Resaca de la Palma Battlefield was added to the park as a discontinuous unit in 2008. The 1992 Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site Act allows the Secretary of the Interior to

... enter into cooperative agreements with the United States of Mexico, in accordance with existing international agreements and with other owners of Mexican-American War properties within the United States of America for the purposes of conducting joint research and interpretive planning for the historic site and related Mexican-American War sites.

The Palo Alto Battlefield encompasses the approximately 3,400-acre historic U.S.–Mexican War battle site 10 miles north of downtown Brownsville, Texas, in Cameron County, near the heart of a growing metropolitan area on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. Palo Alto Battlefield is the site of the first

major battle of the war between the United States and Mexico. With the exception of some impact from agricultural and ranching activity, the battlefield looks much as it did at the time of the battle more than 150 years ago.

The Resaca de la Palma Battlefield comprises 34.4 acres and is 3.5 miles north of downtown Brownsville, Texas. This unit represents only a small portion of the actual battlefield, as the remainder has been lost to urban development. The site is bounded on the west by Paredes Line Road and to the north, east, and south by Resaca de la Palma, a former channel of the Rio Grande. Resaca de la Palma is the site of the second major battle of the war between Mexico and the United States and is one of only two protected battlefields of the war on what is now U.S. soil. The Resaca de la Palma Battlefield has been affected by dredging, vegetation removal, and prior uses including a residential dwelling and recreational polo field, the remains of which can be found among dense areas of grasses and overstory tree canopy.