The American Battlefield Protection Program

Working Together to Preserve America's Historic Battlefields
The National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) leads a federal partnership initiative to help communities identify, assess, and protect our nation's historic battlefields. This program works to preserve significant battle sites associated with wars fought on American soil.

The American Battlefield Protection Program provides guidance, support, and seed money for battlefield preservation, planning, interpretation, and education. The ABPP works with private land owners, interested community groups, and local, regional, and state officials so they can become leaders in preserving America's historic battle sites.

The ABPP was born of crisis. In 1988, proposed development of a regional shopping mall threatened 540 acres of significant Civil War battlefield land that lay beyond the boundaries of the Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia. Supporters of preservation and proponents of development quickly drew new battle lines. In the end, national public outcry in favor of preserving the battlefield convinced the U.S. Congress to buy the land, but at a cost to American taxpayers of nearly $120 million.

The experience at Manassas taught us that such last-minute preservation efforts are often expensive and divisive ways to preserve this nation's important battlefields. To ensure that such costly resolutions did not occur again, Manuel Lujan, Jr., then Secretary of the Interior, and Congress created the American Battlefield Protection Program in 1990.

Preserving battlefields honors those who fought and died for their ideals, their homes, and their families. It also ensures that both the tragedies of war and our nation's hard-won advances are never forgotten.
ALK THE GROUND at Lexington and Concord, Gettysburg, and Little Big Horn. Experience the powerful lessons these places convey about the past, present, and future of the United States. A battlefield’s landscape speaks beyond written accounts and motion picture and television recreations. The remarkable story of armed conflict in America cannot be compellingly told or wholly understood without these sites.

The need to protect these sites of heroism and sacrifice has never been more acute. Today, residential, commercial, and industrial development threaten significant battle sites in dozens of states.

Among the most vulnerable battlefields identified in 1993 by the Congressionally-appointed Civil War Sites Advisory Commission are: Malvern Hill, Virginia; Port Hudson, Louisiana; Fort Donelson, Tennessee; Bentonville, North Carolina; and Glorieta Pass, New Mexico. Hundreds of other Civil War battlefields are now at risk and soon may be lost forever. Equally endangered are dozens of battlefields associated with the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, and the Indian Wars.

THE ABPP WORKS WITH INDIVIDUALS, organizations, and local and state governments to find innovative ways of preserving the nation’s battlefields. Planning and stewardship are two key objectives. The ABPP encourages public and private partners to identify and evaluate battlefields as early as possible so that information about them can be incorporated into land-use, economic development, and tourism plans. This helps avert costly crises that can divide communities and lead to the destruction of important historic sites.

The ABPP also fosters local stewardship of historic battlefields by working with landowners, developers, battlefield friends groups, government officials, and others to create opportunities for preservation. The program encourages its partners to promote battlefields and associated historic sites as valuable community assets. When carefully managed, these places can become recreational open space, outdoor classrooms, and tourism and revenue generators.

No single government agency, organization, or person can preserve this nation’s battlefields alone. Together we can. The American Battlefield Protection Program is committed to working with its many partners to save these remarkable places of American history.
Once a year as part of its Partnership Funding Program, the ABPP invites funding proposals for battlefield preservation projects. Since 1990, the ABPP and its partners have helped protect and enhance more than 60 battlefields by co-sponsoring more than 130 projects in 16 states and the District of Columbia. Individual project funding has ranged from $1,000 to more than $115,000; the average amount is $22,000. Most partners contribute matching funds or in-kind services to these projects.

The ABPP supports partnership projects that:
- Identify and document battlefields and associated historic sites;
- Assess the condition of battlefields and potential threats to their continued survival;
- Develop battlefield preservation plans;
- Provide for public education and interpretation of battlefields and associated historic sites;
- Incorporate battlefield preservation into local, county, regional, and state planning;
- Promote battlefields and associated historic sites as heritage tourism attractions and local and regional economic development opportunities; or
- Improve the technical or management capabilities of local, regional, state, and national organizations and governments that help protect battlefields.

The ABPP does not fund land acquisition or capital improvement projects.

At present, the ABPP is focusing on strategies to preserve priority Civil War battlefields identified by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission. The ABPP also selectively funds projects that protect sites associated with the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, and other armed conflicts.

**Examples of Partnership Projects**

**Chickamauga, Georgia**
In 1994 and 1995, the ABPP, the Chickamauga and Chatanooga National Military Park, the Georgia Office of Historic Preservation, and several regional planning authorities orchestrated a comprehensive survey of Civil War resources outside the boundaries of the park. This broad-based planning effort stressed private property owner and public participation.

**Fredericksburg, Virginia**
As part of a land-use planning initiative, the ABPP used computer mapping technologies called Geographic Information Systems to map for the first time all of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park's historic features, including nearly 40 miles of defensive earthworks. In 1994, the ABPP supported Spotsylvania County's effort to incorporate a battlefield preservation element into the county's comprehensive plan.

**Honey Springs, Oklahoma**
The Oklahoma Historical Society used two ABPP Partnership Funding awards to conduct an archaeological investigation of the Honey Springs Battlefield. Information from the two projects helped accurately identify and interpret historic sites associated with the battle.

**Mexican-American War Study, Texas**
From 1993 to 1995, the ABPP assisted the Texas Historical Commission, the Southwest Regional Office of the National Park Service, and the Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site identify battlefield sites associated with the Mexican-American War in the Rio Grande Valley.

**Rich Mountain, West Virginia**
Beginning in 1994, the ABPP helped the Rich Mountain Battlefield Foundation, Inc., develop a tourism route linking Civil War battle sites between Parkersburg, West Virginia, and St. Augustine, Virginia. The project's goal is to increase public awareness of battlefields associated with the 1861 West Virginia Campaign.

**Stones River, Tennessee**
In 1992, the ABPP funded Rutherford County's efforts to develop a corridor protection plan and an interpretive plan for Thompson Lane, a major approach to Stones River National Battlefield. In 1993, the county received additional support to interpret lands outside the park's boundaries.
In 1992, citizens in south-central Kentucky forged a partnership with the American Battlefield Protection Program that is reaping rewards for the region. The Mill Springs Battlefield Association, with assistance from the ABPP, the Kentucky Heritage Council, and the Appalachian Regional Commission, protected more than 600 acres of historic land associated with the Battle of Mill Springs from encroaching resort development. Here in 1862, Union General George H. Thomas' army broke through the Confederate defensive line shielding Tennessee, thereby opening an invasion route into the heart of the Confederacy early in the Civil War.

The protected Mill Springs Battlefield affords visitors an educational site, precious open space, outdoor recreation opportunities, and the enjoyment that comes with these amenities. With support from local citizens, the Mill Springs Preservation Association continues to raise funds to build a battlefield museum and protect adjacent historic land. The Association also is helping preserve the battlefield's 1862 appearance by negotiating leases and agricultural easements for large tracts of farmland and wooded areas with private property owners. This success story underscores ABPP's mission of encouraging and enhancing local battlefield stewardship before threats to the integrity of battlefields arise.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

1. **EDISCOVER THE HISTORY**
   of battles that took place in your community, state, or region through books, battlefield tours, and special events.

2. **FAMILIARIZE**
   yourself with battlefield preservation issues and techniques.

3. **TEACH YOUNG PEOPLE**
   the value of preserving battlefields as a tangible way to understand the history of the United States and its people. Encourage schools to do the same.

4. **VISIT BATTLEFIELDS**
   and associated historic sites throughout the country that commemorate the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Indian Wars, and other American military conflicts.

5. **ENCOURAGE YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**
   to support legislation that protects historic battlefields.

6. **ATTEND LOCAL PLANNING MEETINGS**
   to ensure that decision makers acknowledge and protect battlefields as historic places, open spaces, and tourist sites.

7. **JOIN A LOCAL BATTLEFIELD FRIENDS GROUP**.
   If one does not exist in your community, establish one.

8. **JOIN AND SUPPORT NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION**
   organizations and historical associations.

9. **VOLUNTEER**
   at a battlefield park or site.

10. **SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL OR STATE BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION COMMISSION**.
    If one does not exist, petition your elected officials to establish one.

11. **ENDORSE BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION**
    initiatives through newspaper editorials and at community meetings.
Battlefield preservation enables current and future generations to understand better the connection between military conflicts and important social and political changes in American history. Saving the site of every battle that occurred in the United States may be impossible and impractical, but we should strive to protect the most important battlegrounds for ourselves and our descendants. At these places our ancestors fought and died for the American ideals we now enjoy — liberty, democracy, and human rights.