

Making Connections

Linking Outdoor Recreation, Open Space & History

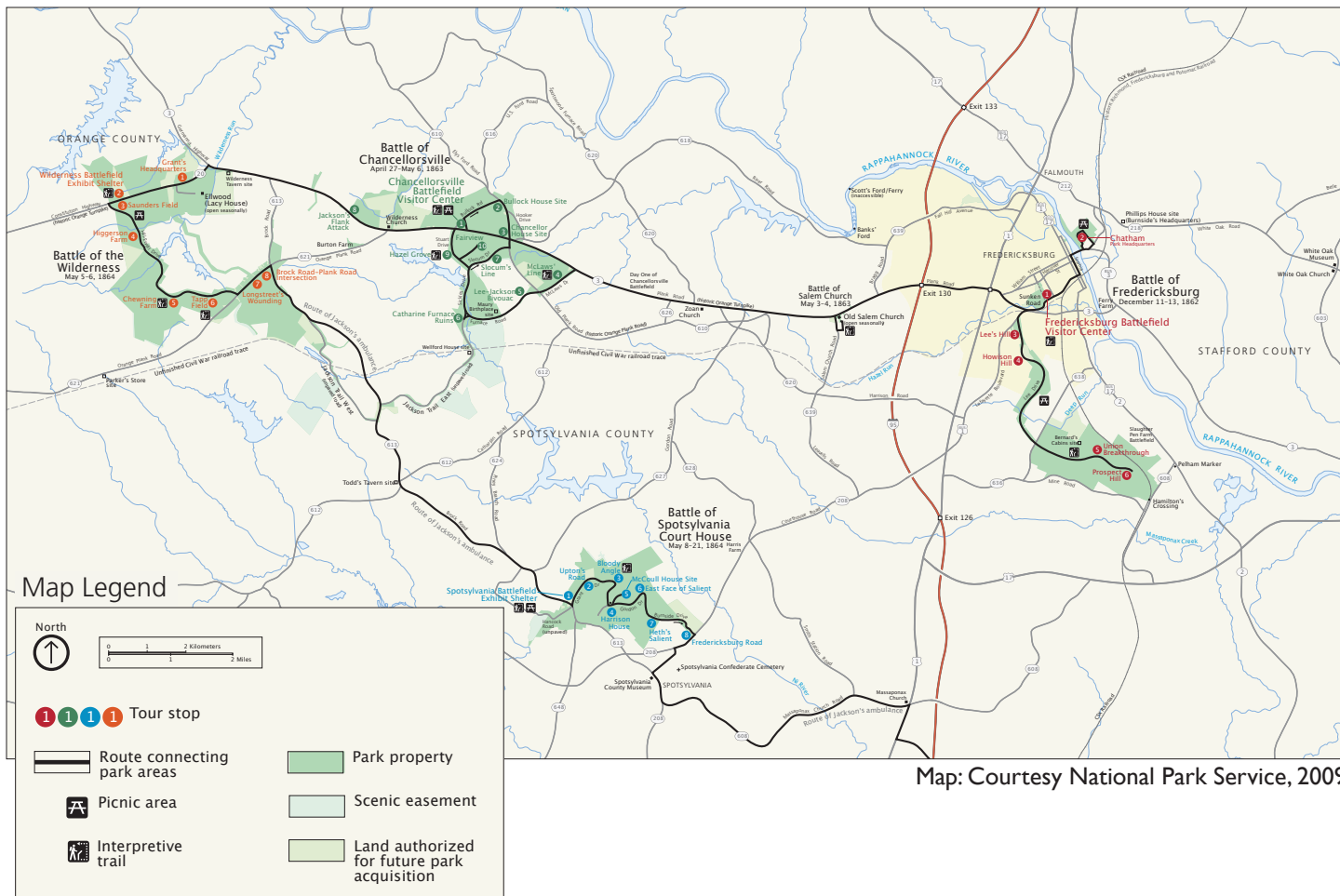
at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park and Nearby Communities



National Parks Conservation Association®

Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park...at a glance



Park Facts

- Established February 14, 1927 as Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park. (This name is commonly shortened to Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.)
- Encompasses 8,374 acres, including four separate, nationally significant Civil War battlefields—Fredericksburg (1862), Chancellorsville (1863), The Wilderness (1864), and Spotsylvania Court House (1864)—and four historic buildings.
- Hosted more than 900,000 recreation visits in 2009.
- Visitor spending in the area around the park supported 450 jobs and more than \$9 million in labor income in 2008.¹
- In 2008, the National Park Service employed 53 staff members, whose wages supported an additional 26 local jobs.²
- Portions of the park are in the city of Fredericksburg and four counties: Caroline, Orange, Spotsylvania, and Stafford.



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Since 1919, the non-profit, non-partisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

History Under Pressure

Lee Drive stretches five miles through what was once a plantation woodlot, past historic Civil War trenches, to Prospect Hill. From here, General Stonewall Jackson commanded his Confederate soldiers as they fended off General Ambrose Burnside's Federal army in the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg.

Maintained as a park road, Lee Drive now hosts a variety of travelers beyond the typically slow-driving visitor soaking up the history of the terrain. Mornings and evenings bring dog-walkers, joggers, and bicyclists to the narrow, shoulderless road, along with commuters cutting through to shave minutes from their drive.

Russ Smith, superintendent of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, says Lee Drive is emblematic of conflicts brewing as the region around the park develops from rural farm country to suburban enclaves for telecommuters, retirees, and commuters to Washington, Richmond, and Charlottesville.

"As this area gets built up, more people look to the park as a place to walk, ride bikes, and get out in nature," Smith says. "Some of that is fine, but we have to be watchful so history doesn't get overrun by recreation. We're all learning how to live with development here. We'll probably be managing some level of conflict among different park users—and different expectations about how to manage our roads and trails—for a long time."

Development Closes In

When Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park was created in 1927, the battlefields and surrounding countryside were mostly a patchwork of farm fields and forest. For half a century, this landscape protected the battlefields' historic character and gave visitors a sense of stepping back in time.

Today, a rapidly growing population and an expanding footprint of residential and commercial development are degrading that historic character. A controversial Walmart Superstore proposed next to The Wilderness battlefield in Orange County would accelerate further development. The park's ability to provide an authentic,



Photo: National Park Service

A car swerves to avoid a bicyclist on Lee Drive, a narrow park road that travels beside Civil War trenches and past interpretive pullouts. Heavy use by park visitors, commuters, runners, bicyclists, and skaters leads to frequent conflicts and safety issues—and points out the need for additional options in the region to meet growing outdoor recreation demands.

Signs of the Times

- In 1994, one in five visitors to the Fredericksburg battlefield also visited the battlefield at Chancellorsville. In 2009, park staff estimates that only one in fifty made the drive. Increasing traffic and commercial development along Route 3 have made the eight-mile trip less attractive to visitors.³
- In the next 20 years, traffic on Route 3 between Chancellorsville and The Wilderness battlefields is projected to increase by at least 65 percent. Orange Plank road, as it passes The Wilderness battlefield, may see 42 percent more vehicles, while in Fredericksburg, traffic on Lafayette Boulevard may more than double.⁴
- By 2020, demand for tent campsites, stream access, and hiking and horse trails is projected to far outstrip supply in much of the region around Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.⁵
- In the more rural parts of the region, the long-standing practice of allowing hunting, fishing access, and other recreation on private lands is going by the wayside, replaced by "No Trespassing" signs and fences.⁶
- More than 70 percent of Spotsylvania county trail users surveyed said they traveled outside the county to access trails because facilities in the county are lacking.⁷



Photos: National Park Service

Salem Church, part of Chancellorsville Battlefield, around 1980 (top) and in the late 1990s (bottom). Development has so degraded the site's historic character that the Park Service no longer provides interpretive services there.

history-soaked experience is strained by the traffic, noise, and visual clutter resulting from suburban development. At the same time, local and state investments in parks and trails have not kept up with growing demand for outdoor recreation areas, putting more pressure on the national park.

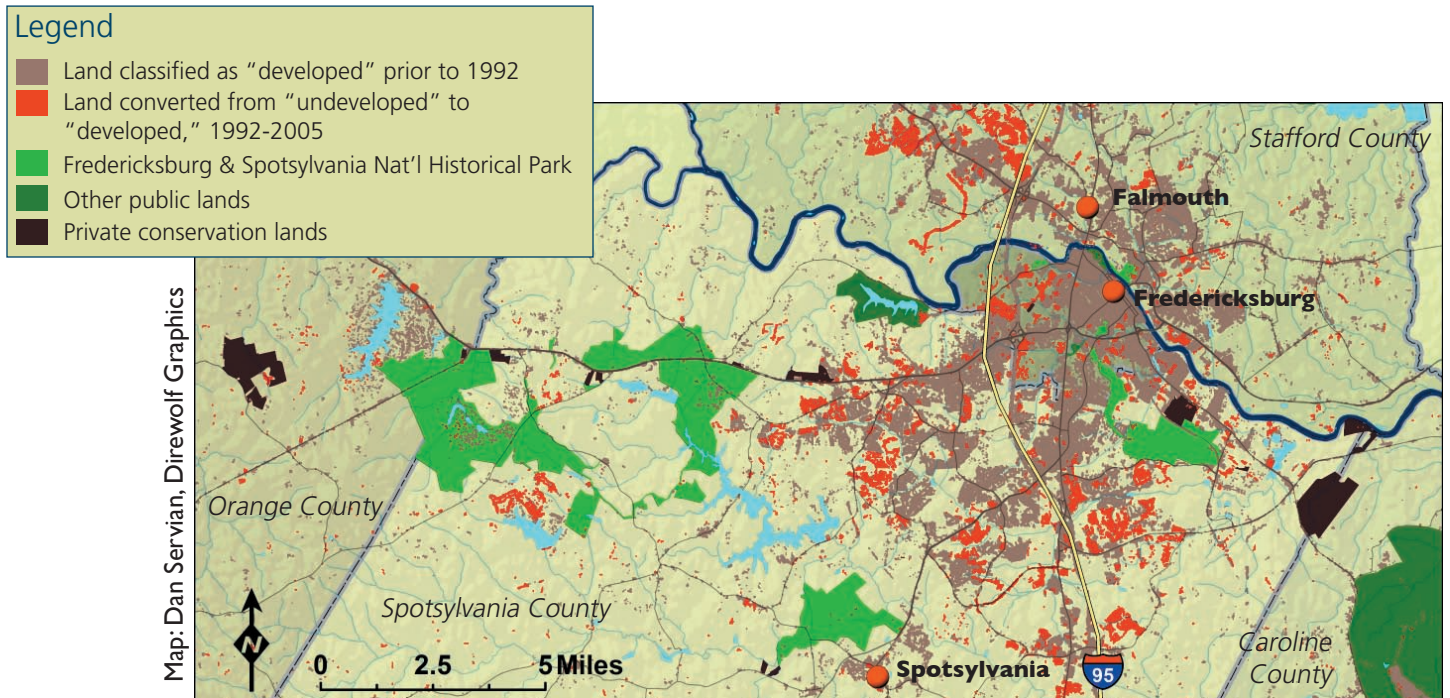
Looking at the Whole Landscape

The national park exists within a larger context of private and public lands that spans the city of Fredericksburg and four counties: Caroline, Orange, Spotsylvania, and Stafford. Spotsylvania and Stafford rank among the fastest-growing counties in the state; and population growth in all five localities has outpaced both Virginia's and the nation's growth for 35 years.

In many localities, growth that has occurred in the last decades pales in comparison to that which is planned for the future. For example, Orange County has the majority of the Route 3 corridor and lands adjacent to the national park slated for future development.⁸

Protecting the park's historical resources and the quality of the experience visitors now enjoy requires looking at the larger surrounding landscape, and creating a context in which the national park can uphold its mission of historic preservation, commemoration, and education. Fortunately, protecting important public resources in the face of rapid development is already on the minds of many local residents and leaders.

Development in the Region Around the Park: 1992-2005



Map: Dan Servian, Direwolf Graphics

This region is one of the fastest-growing in Virginia. One of every six acres used for residential, commercial, or public buildings in the city and four counties surrounding Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park was developed between 1992 and 2005. Over half of this recent development is within four miles of the park.⁹

Battlefields in Context

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's *Virginia Outdoors Plan* identifies preserving open space and natural resources as "a challenge to all localities" in this part of the state. Collaboration and a comprehensive, regional view, the plan notes, are essential to maintaining the quality of life that residents enjoy.¹⁰

Staff at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park are learning that the character of the surrounding landscape, and visitors' experiences traveling to the site have much to do with the park's appeal. Historic preservation, conserving open space and natural areas, and providing recreation opportunities belong in the same conversations about the future of this region.

Open space networks can include lands that serve different purposes including habitat and watershed protection, visual space, different types of recreation, historic preservation, and education. The goal, says John Tippet, executive director of Friends of the Rappahannock, "is to create a landscape of protected areas and recreational facilities that allows different components to serve different purposes."

In the absence of other natural areas with recreational access and facilities, public lands like the national park and the City of Fredericksburg's watershed lands along the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers will likely be expected to meet more demands than they can or should accommodate.

From his vantage point as park superintendent, Russ Smith notes, "As development continues, we really don't want to be the last open space around."

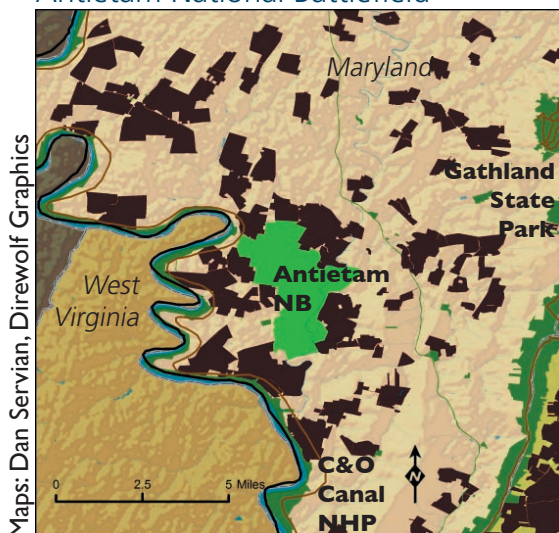
What Makes a Great Battlefield Experience?

- 1 Ease of movement to, from, and around the battlefield
- 2 Feeling safe and secure
- 3 The visual character of the battlefield
- 4 Quality of park facilities and environment
- 5 Quality of interpretation¹¹

88% of Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park visitors agree that the view as they walk the battlefield is very important to their experience.¹²

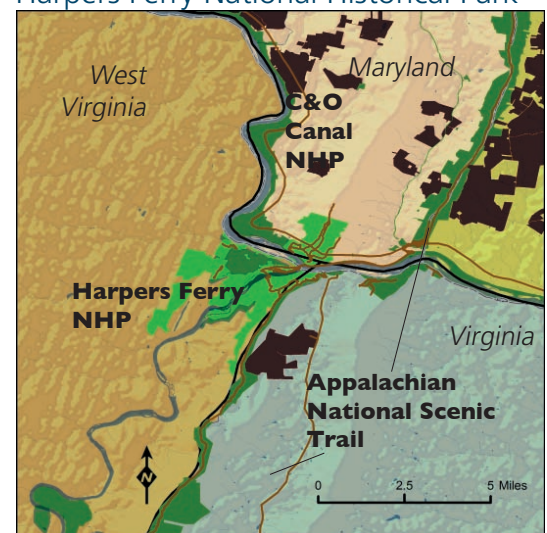
Protecting Historic Character Provides Many Benefits

Antietam National Battlefield



- National parks
- Other public lands
- Private conservation lands

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park



Antietam (MD) and Harpers Ferry (MD, VA, and WV) are battlefield parks in a larger context that includes local and state parks and other federal lands that provide compatible recreation opportunities and open space. Around Antietam, almost 9,000 acres of private land under easement preserves most of the park's historic rural views, and keeps the area's agricultural heritage vital.¹³ Harpers Ferry sits at the convergence of three major trails including the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, and the Potomac River. This connected network of public lands, trails, and other recreation access helps take pressure off Harpers Ferry. A large, private campground adjacent to the park provides walking access for campers.¹⁴

Developing Natural Area Recreation

It's easy for visitors to experience "history overload" here. In the park and outside it, outdoor recreation is a great direction for this area to develop. People will come to our area for a whole experience, not just "another" history monument and cemetery.

Kathy Beard, Tourism Director
Caroline County



Virginia's Most Popular Outdoor Activities

72%* Walking for pleasure

56%* Visiting historic sites

*Percent of Virginia households surveyed that participate in each activity¹⁵

Local business owner, Bob Hagan, notes that the area is long on organized recreation facilities such as ball fields and playgrounds. "But we are short on places for passive recreation—picnicking, strolling in the woods, reading a book in a shady spot—and active pursuits like jogging, bicycling, riding, and walking the dog."

John Tippett learned that lesson working with Fredericksburg on its plan for managing the city's lands along the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers: "There aren't many accessible natural recreation areas around here, and there is huge demand. The city has heard from just about every kind of recreational user, and has had to decide which uses to encourage, and where. We recommend that trail access and heavy use will be concentrated near Fredericksburg, with less access upstream near the confluence, to protect the remote river experience and paddle-in camping there. That is a rare resource on the East Coast."

Natural Recreation Needs

The city's emerging plan recognizes that these riverside lands cannot provide the entire range of recreation in demand among area residents and visitors. A review of recreational facilities and protected open space, and interviews with area leaders and residents suggest four main natural area recreation needs:

- Trails** to accommodate a variety of uses and connect communities with each other and with historic areas
- Large natural areas** to provide quiet recreational experiences and provide connections with nature
- River & stream access** for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, tubing, and fishing
- Tent camping** areas and sites

Using Recreational Development to Meet Other Goals

Chris Folger, chair of the Spotsylvania Greenways Initiative, believes building trails to link people with nature, recreation opportunities, historic sites, and other communities will build support for historic preservation and protecting open space.

Stafford County is coordinating with Fredericksburg to establish parts of the county's planned "Heritage Loop" trails system, connecting historic sites in Stafford County and linking to Fredericksburg's riverfront trails. The trails are designed to serve residents and boost tourism. The Virginia Central rail corridor offers the prospect of linking the communities of Fredericksburg and Orange with a trail that passes through and near Civil War battlefields and other historic sites.

New local and state parks, recreation areas, and conservation lands in close proximity to the national park could leverage the existing public investment in protecting historic battlefields, resulting in more opportunities for residents and visitors alike. New, family-friendly vacation options such as camping, stream access, and nature trails could turn visitors who now spend a few hours at the battlefield into overnight, multi-night, and return visitors, with resulting economic benefits.

Community Benefits

Leveraging the area's natural resources into the kind of "seamless network" of parks, trails, and open space proposed in the *Virginia Outdoors Plan* could benefit the region's communities in ways that transcend the significant advantages that individual parks or trails offer.

Expanding Tourist Appeal

Tourism in the localities surrounding Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park is largely focused on historic sites, battlefields, and museums. More than one-third of Fredericksburg visitors come primarily because of Civil War history, and 14 percent visit a battlefield during their stay.¹⁶

Outdoor recreation offers communities opportunities to diversify visitor offerings and capture a larger portion of the traveler market. Nationwide, outdoor recreation is on par with visiting historical sites and museums as an activity for travelers. This suggests battlefield neighbors might benefit from expanding their tourism offerings to attract more outdoor recreation travelers.

A 2004 report estimated that the 34-mile Virginia Creeper Trail, which connects the southwestern Virginia towns of Abingdon and Whitetop Station, supported 27 local jobs and \$610,000 of labor income. Trail users spent about \$2.5 million annually on their visits.¹⁷

In the early days of the Creeper Trail, most visitors learned about the trail when they traveled to the area for other reasons. Within eight years after the trail opened, it had become a primary attraction. Now, the majority of trail users report they came to the area primarily to bike or walk on the trail, adding on visits to local towns and cultural events.¹⁸

Capturing More Traveler Dollars

Park superintendent Russ Smith believes it would be "great to have some sort of resort or park near the battlefields that offered camping and rustic cabins, and maybe other recreational opportunities. That's one way to leverage the park, keep visitors in the area longer, and maybe appeal to families with an interest in both history and recreation."

Five percent of Fredericksburg area visitors report camping during their stay.¹⁹ At some Civil War battlefields, camping is a more accessible alternative. For example, at Harpers Ferry, a large private campground offers direct walking access into the park. At Gettysburg, where six private campgrounds serve park visitors, 14 percent of overnight visitors camp.²⁰

Visitors to Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park tend to be highly educated and affluent. According to a report based on visitor surveys at 20 battlefield parks, Civil War travelers are high-value visitors: "Civil War tourists are terrific guests. They are energetic, involved, and willing to stay in the area longer than other travelers."²¹ Seven out of ten Fredericksburg area visitors surveyed planned a return visit in the next year.²² Offering these tourists recreational opportunities linked to their primary interest in history may deepen their interest in repeat visits.

Tourist Activities in Fredericksburg Area vs. the U.S.*

Fredericksburg Area

16% Visit historic sites

14% Visit a battlefield

5% Outdoor recreation

United States

15% Visit historic sites and museums

17% Outdoor (camping, hiking, biking, etc.)

* Percent of travelers surveyed who participate in each activity²³

Photo: Friends of the Rappahannock



One-third of Fredericksburg visitors surveyed are interested in river ecology excursions,²⁴ which could offer hands-on experiences for adults and children.

Local Economic Benefits from State Parks³⁰

Building a new state park in Virginia generates:

335 Local jobs

\$9.4 million Personal income

\$22.5 million Local sales

Operating a typical Virginia state park supports:

85 Local jobs

\$1.6 million Personal income

\$4.6 million Visitor spending

National parks are great investments, yielding at least \$4 of value for every \$1 appropriated to the National Park Service budget.³¹

Boosting Property Values

Trails, parks, and open space help make places more appealing for residents and attractive to potential new residents. In its 2010 rankings of “best places to retire,” *Money* magazine highlighted parks, trails, and natural areas as contributing features for over half of the listed sites.

Parks also boost property values. According to a 2001 study of home sales in Portland, Oregon, natural areas boosted nearby property prices more than any other kind of park. Home prices within 1,500 feet of a natural area averaged \$10,648 higher, compared to \$1,214 for urban parks and \$8,849 for golf courses.²⁵

A 2005 review of dozens of studies found that open space parks that accommodate only uses such as walking, horseback riding, and bicycling boost nearby property values more than parks with facilities for organized and competitive recreation. The natural area parks are superior in enhancing the tax base, and thus can be a good investment for local governments.²⁶

Creating Jobs Close to Home

Recreational development can create jobs and income that don't require a commute to Richmond or Washington. In 2008, visitors to Virginia's state parks generated more than \$168 million in economic value. At Lake Anna State Park in Spotsylvania County, 24,000 overnight visits and 226,500 day visits produced an economic impact of nearly \$5.5 million.²⁷

By taking recreation and development pressure off the national park and other public lands, expanding protected open space and recreational opportunities will safeguard the park's ability to attract and serve its visitors. Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park hosts 900,000 visits annually. Three-quarters of park visitors are locals.

In 2008, non-local park visitors spent \$24 million, supporting the equivalent of 387 full-time jobs in the surrounding four counties, and \$9 million in labor income. Park visitors pay \$314,000 a year in state taxes, and add \$229,000 to local government coffers.²⁸ In 2009, the park made adjustments to track visitation more accurately. The higher numbers of visits recorded since then may mean that estimates of economic impact from 2008 and before are significantly understated.

Educating and Connecting

Trails, parks, and open space can invite both adults and children to reconnect with nature, be physically active, enjoy family time, and explore the area's history. Once an abandoned Army airstrip, Crissy Field is now a gem in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco, California. During restoration, more than 3,000 adult and student volunteers worked 30,000 hours to re-create native dunes and marshes.²⁹ Now, Crissy Field hosts more than one million visits per year, involves local students in outdoor investigation and leadership development, and offers family-friendly programs. All of this is in addition to the less-structured time that thousands of visitors spend daily enjoying the waterfront, trails, and fields.

Recommendations

Across the country, nature-based outdoor recreation is exploding in popularity. With a rapidly growing population, expanding suburban footprint, and growing demand for natural areas for recreation, the localities around Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park face both an urgent challenge and an enormous opportunity to leverage existing investments in protected lands in ways that will make this area a fantastic place to live—and to visit—for generations to come.

As the 150th anniversary of the Civil War approaches, communities across the larger region between Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and Monticello in Virginia are making plans to accommodate a dramatic increase in visitation. Gettysburg National Military Park projects its visitation will more than double in 2013.³² The nonprofit Journey Through Hallowed Ground is training 4,000 “Certified Tourism Ambassadors” throughout this region to help guide visitors as they travel from battlefield to battlefield.

With the 150th anniversaries of the battles memorialized by Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park approaching in 2012-2014, it is an apt time to consider these battlefields in a larger context. What can this area do to provide an infrastructure that will benefit locals and visitors alike for years to come?

1. Each county and Fredericksburg should address the growing demand for recreation uses, wildlife habitat protection, historic preservation, and river and stream access in planning efforts. For example, Fredericksburg’s draft historic preservation plan emphasizes visitors’ “sense of arrival” and ease of access and movement at the battlefield. Spotsylvania County’s First Impressions Commission is similarly concerned with the landscapes that greet area visitors. Their working principles could be broadened to guide coordinated recreational and open space development near battlefields throughout the region.
2. Encourage private investment in businesses to provide recreational uses compatible with the national park and other historic assets in the area, such as natural campgrounds, rustic cabins, and ecology-focused river excursions.
3. Support, expand, and build on collaborative efforts such as the Spotsylvania Greenways Initiative and the Stafford County Heritage Loop trail collaboration with Fredericksburg. Pay attention to details such as parking, signage, and appropriate use of the national park and other historic areas in planning.
4. Build connections and coordination across jurisdictional lines using shared resources like the battlefields and the Virginia Central rail corridor to focus on common goals. For example, the nonprofit Independence Visitor Center Corporation works cooperatively with numerous partners, using Independence National Historical Park as a hook for marketing historical, recreational, and other attractions throughout Philadelphia and a multi-county region.
5. Look for opportunities to develop local, regional, or state parks to provide low-impact outdoor recreation, open space, and protected natural areas. To the extent possible, locate these parks near battlefields to create easy access to both historic and recreation opportunities.

Growth in Nature-Based Outdoor Activities³³

The Outdoor Foundation states, “Americans returned to nature in 2008.” From 2007 to 2008, participation in these outdoor activities grew dramatically:

22%*	Snowshoeing
19%	Backpacking
9%	Hiking
7%	Backyard and car camping
7%	Recreational kayaking
7%	Bird watching and wildlife viewing

* Percent increase in participation from 2007 to 2008.

By 2020, demand for tent campsites, stream access, and hiking and horse trails is projected to far outstrip supply in much of the region around Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park.³⁴

Our work is all about creating connections. All kinds of people support trails. I hope we can leverage that goodwill into greater support for protecting natural and culturally significant areas across the region.

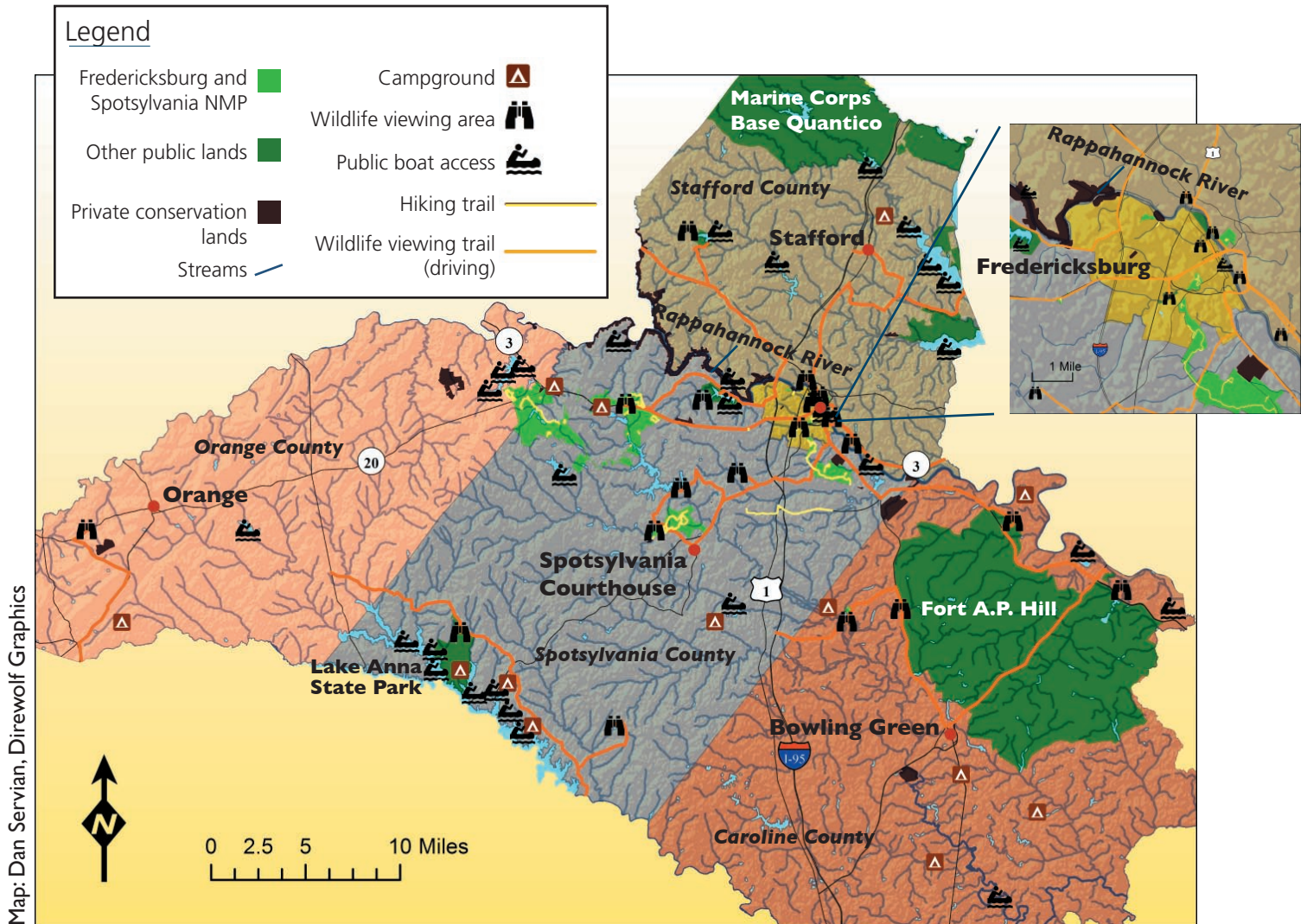
Chris Folger, Chair
Spotsylvania Greenways
Initiative

6. Inform landowners, realtors, estate planning attorneys, and other professionals about conservation easements and their benefits to landowners—such as tax credits and reduced tax bills—and their public benefits such as preserving the area’s rural and historic character, protecting wildlife habitat, and protecting air and water quality. When funded, “purchase of development rights” programs add another land conservation tool.
7. Coordinate tourism marketing among localities to promote recreation and history as connected experiences. For example, the Journey Through Hallowed Ground organized its first annual bike tour in October 2010 to promote the region’s history, beauty, and recreational opportunities.
8. Establish a small matching grants fund to support local business investments in renovating facades of existing structures consistent with the region’s historic character. Localities and the state can develop and administer this fund together. Eligibility could be linked to location within a historic or overlay district.
9. Assemble a diverse group to assess the overall visitor experience in this region and compare it to similar areas. Study how other areas integrate and market historical, recreational, and cultural resources across multiple jurisdictions and apply the best ideas to this region.

Endnotes

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Outdoor Recreational Opportunities and Protected Lands



While some efforts are underway to expand low-impact recreational facilities and access, the communities around Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park have a tremendous opportunity to leverage the national park by thoughtfully providing for compatible recreation facilities such as campgrounds, river access, and hiking and biking trails. At other Civil War-related national parks in the region, a mosaic of local and state parks and protected areas, along with private campgrounds and outfitters, provide visitors and local residents alike with miles of hiking trails, access to local streams and rivers, family camping, and other outdoor recreation-oriented amenities, while also protecting the park's historic character. This region has great potential to do the same.

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On the front cover, clockwise from top

- Cannon at The Wilderness Battlefield (Photo: Civil War Preservation Trust)
- Family canoeing (Photo: istockphoto.com/Blue Cutler)
- Friends camping (Photo: Getty Images/Image Source)

On the back cover

- Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg (Photo: Martin Titus)

GIS data, p. 3

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GIS data, this page

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; The Nature Conservancy (Lands protected by The Nature Conservancy displayed as polygons at scales larger than 1:3000000 and as points at smaller scales. Copyright © 2010 The Nature Conservancy.)



"The jury is in on this. It is not wishful thinking, it is a fact that trails, greenways, and other open space connections benefit communities. They make communities better places to live, attract tourists, promote mental and physical health, boost property values, encourage new local businesses, and provide backbones of beautiful spaces that connect people with each other and nature. They can be part of a rich landscape of culture, history, and activity."

*Rory Robinson
National Heritage Trails Program
National Park Service*

"To insure a meaningful experience for our residents and visitors, we have to maintain the appropriate natural setting for our historic and natural attractions. People aren't looking to simply check off the places on their list, they want to experience those places.

"Connecting the area's individual historic and natural attractions with natural corridors literally surrounds the visitor with a unique reality that multiplies appreciation, and makes 'being here' truly special.

"We cannot sit back and expect our existing attractions to survive the projected growth in population and tourism. Unless we provide additional public natural areas for recreation, our battlefields, historic homes, and parks will simply become too crowded to be enjoyable."

*Scott Howson
Fredericksburg, VA, City Council (1996-2004)
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