

**Testimony of O. James Lighthizer  
President, American Battlefield Trust**

**Before the Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands  
United States House of Representatives  
NPFPL Legislative Hearing  
May 22, 2019**

**Introduction**

Madame Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to you today. My name is James Lighthizer and I serve as President of the American Battlefield Trust. I come before you today to respectfully request that the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands support H.R. 307, the Preserving America's Battlefields Act.

The American Battlefield Trust is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving America's remaining Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War battlefields. Thanks to the generosity of our more than 50,000 members and 300,000 supporters, the American Battlefield Trust has protected more than 50,000 acres and of critically important battlefield land in 24 states over the past thirty years. Much of this land could not have been preserved without the support of Congress, and for that we remain incredibly appreciative.

The Preserving America's Battlefields Act is bipartisan legislation that would reauthorize the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program, administered by the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program, at \$20 million annually through FY2028. Since its inception in FY1999, this public-private partnership program has been used to preserve more than 32,000 acres of unprotected hallowed ground outside of existing National Park Service boundaries.

**Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program**

The origins of the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program trace back to a congressional commission, the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission that in 1993 identified the 383 most historically significant Civil War battlefields in America. The Commission recommended the establishment of a federal matching-grant program to preserve the country's most unprotected Civil War battlefields. Due to the program's remarkable success and a similar study released in 2007, it was expanded by Congress to include Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields as part of the FY2015 National Defense Reauthorization Act.

The program, funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, requires a 1-to-1 federal-to-non-federal match, although on most occasions the federal dollars are leveraged much more than 1-to-1. As it can only be used to acquire land outside existing National Park Service boundaries, it therefore does not add to the NPS maintenance backlog. The program is currently authorized at \$10 million through FY2021, has been fully funded in FY2016, FY2017, FY 2018 and FY2019, thanks in large part to its wide bipartisan support in Congress.

**Preservation Successes**

Since its creation nearly two decades ago, the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program has been utilized in 20 states to preserve more than 32,000 acres of hallowed ground from the three wars. Its

matching-grants formula, which encourages private sector and state investment in battlefield preservation, is the key to its success. In fact, it is often referenced as a model for cooperative conservation partnerships between the federal government and the private sector. Battlefield land can only be acquired on the fair market.

Without the program, utilized by nonprofit groups such as the American Battlefield Trust, the Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation, the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, and the Battle of Franklin Trust, entire battlefields could have been lost. Among the battlefields that have benefited from this program are Antietam, Md.; Bentonville, N.C.; Gettysburg, Pa.; Glorieta Pass, N.M.; Mansfield, La.; Petersburg, Va.; Princeton, N.J.; and Vicksburg, Miss.

While we have made tremendous strides in preserving these hallowed grounds, much remains to protect. This year alone, the American Battlefield Trust and its partners have used the program to save critical battlefield sites at South Mountain, Maryland; Champion Hill, Mississippi; Aversboro and Bentonville, North Carolina; and Fisher's Hill and Chancellorsville, Virginia.

## **Opportunities**

With the expansion of the program in 2014, the Trust immediately set to work to identify Revolutionary War and War of 1812 sites to preserve. In that short time, the Trust, working with the American Battlefield Protection Program, has preserved nearly 1,000 acres of battlefields from those two formative wars, land valued at more than \$14.6 million.

In the time since its expansion, the Trust has seen an increase not only in preservation opportunities, but also in the price of key preservation projects. In many instances, we are seeing the cost of unimproved farmland increase as the economy improves; much of the unprotected battlefield land we preserve is unimproved farmland. From FY1999 to F2014, the ABPP awarded fifteen grants valued at more than \$1 million, including at Slaughter Pen Farm in Fredericksburg, at Brandy Station, Virginia, at Resaca in Georgia, and Richmond, Kentucky, to name a few. Since the program expanded, grants of more than \$1 million have been awarded for nine sites, including the Siege of Charleston, Lee's Headquarters at Gettysburg, Battlefield Bluffs at Yorktown, and key acreage at Franklin, Tennessee. The expansion into these earlier wars has committed preservation needs to urban areas, where land is decidedly more expensive, such as Princeton, New Jersey, and Brandywine, Pennsylvania. The Trust and its partners consistently submit applications for the full \$10 million worth of grants available, and the number of grants awarded has increased, from 18 in 2015 to 33 in 2017 and 27 in 2018.

There are several major opportunities on the horizon that could be lost without an increase in the authorized funding level of the program. The following are just a few of these opportunities:

- Several large properties at Mississippi battlefields associated with Grant's Vicksburg Campaign.
- Key parcels at the Spotsylvania Court House and The Wilderness battlefields in the Overland Campaign.
- Land in the southern portion of the Battle of Fredericksburg near the Slaughter Pen Farm.
- Major properties at the Battle of Gettysburg.
- Land at the pivotal Revolutionary War Battles of Princeton, NJ and Brandywine Creek, PA, located near major metropolitan areas.
- Incredibly consequential battlefields in the Revolutionary War's southern campaign – Kettle Creek, Georgia and Waxhaws, Eutaw Springs and Hanging Rock, South Carolina.
- Unprotected yet vitally important acreage at the War of 1812 Sacket's Harbor Battlefield in upstate New York.

Now, increasing the program's authorized level to match its expanded mission will ensure groups like the American Battlefield Trust can continue utilizing this critical conservation tool to protect America's endangered battlefields for years to come.

In addition to reauthorizing the program, this legislation also includes provisions requiring that, of the up to \$20 million authorized, up to \$1 million could be authorized for battlefield landscape restoration and up to \$1 million could be authorized for battlefield interpretation and education. These provisions will enable nonprofit organizations like the Trust to enhance the educational and interpretive opportunities at battlefield sites and encourage visitation to places that help Americans to better understand the sacrifices made to secure the freedoms we enjoy today.

In the next decade, the nation will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the founding of the United States. Americans are expected to visit battlefields and historic sites in record numbers to learn more about events that led to our nation's independence. Enactment of this legislation will ensure that our country's battlefields are prepared to play an important role in the commemoration.

### **Outdoor Classrooms and Military Training Grounds**

America's battlefields are irreplaceable parts of our shared national heritage. When preserved, these battlefields serve as outdoor classrooms to educate current and future generations about the defining moments in our country's history. They are living memorials, not just to the soldiers who fought and died there, but to all who have proudly worn our nation's uniform.

Preserved battlefields are also economic drivers for communities, generating tourism dollars that are extremely important to state and local economies. Battlefield visitors, who typically travel in groups and as part of families, tend to stay longer and spend more than other types of tourists. Additionally, battlefields serve as training grounds for our men and women in uniform in the form of customized battlefield tours known as "staff rides." Preserved battlefields are frequently used by the modern military to place officers and enlisted ranks alike in the shoes of combat commanders, asking them to make difficult choices, in the face of daunting obstacles, over the same terrain. The American Battlefield Trust is proud to work with the Marine Corps University Foundation and other groups to host staff rides on battlefields we own and have preserved.

### **Conclusion**

America's battlefields are key to understanding who we are as a nation, and where we come from. They are open spaces and outdoor classrooms that commemorate the sacrifices of those who fought and died on these fields. The Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program has been an irreplaceable tool for preserving these hallowed grounds. By reauthorizing it at \$20 million through FY2028, you will ensure that this cooperative public-private partnership program will continue to be available for use by nonprofit organizations like the American Battlefield Trust to preserve our nation's history.

Chairman Haaland and Ranking Member Young, I sincerely hope you and your subcommittee will consider reporting this bill out of committee. We look forward to working closely with you as we continue our important work to preserve America's battlefield lands. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.