

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

**Before the Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
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**Introduction**

Madame Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is James Lighthizer, and I am the president of the American Battlefield Trust. I come before you today to respectfully request that the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies fund the Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program, administered by the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program, at its authorized amount of \$10 million.

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 300,000 members and supporters, the American Battlefield Trust has protected more than 50,000 acres of critically important battlefield land in 24 states.

The Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program is an authorized competitive matching grants program that requires a 1 to 1 federal/non-federal match, although on most occasions the federal dollars are leveraged much more than 1 to 1. The program promotes cooperative partnerships between state and local governments and the private sector to protect high priority battlegrounds outside existing National Park Service boundaries.

**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 others to host staff rides on battlefields we own and have protected.

## **Origins of the Program**

In 1990, Congress created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC), a blue-ribbon panel composed of lawmakers, historians and preservationists, to examine the status of America's Civil War battlefields. Three years later, the Commission released a report identifying the most important Civil War battlegrounds, prioritizing them according to preservation status and historic significance. In addition, the Commission also recommended that Congress establish a federal matching grant program to encourage private sector investment in battlefield preservation. The Commission's proposal for federal matching grants was the genesis of today's Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program.

In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2015 (P.L. 113-291) reauthorized the battlefield acquisition grants program and expanded its eligibility to include Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields, in addition to Civil War battlefields. Similar to Civil War battlefields, funding for Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefield preservation is targeted toward sites reviewed and prioritized in a 2007 study by the National Park Service.

Since the program was first funded in FY1999, grants have been used to protect more than 32,000 acres of hallowed ground in 20 states. Among the battlefields that have been preserved using this program are: Antietam, Maryland; Bentonville, North Carolina; Brandywine, Pennsylvania; Champion Hill, Mississippi; Chancellorsville, Virginia; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Hanging Rock, South Carolina; Harpers Ferry, West Virginia; Kettle Creek, Georgia; Mill Springs, Kentucky; Prairie Grove, Arkansas; Princeton, New Jersey; Sackets Harbor, New York; Wilson's Creek, Missouri; and Wood Lake, Minnesota. It is important to note that grants are awarded for acquisition of lands from willing sellers only; there is not — and never has been — any eminent domain authority.

## **Urgent Need for Funding**

The American Battlefield Trust wishes to thank the Subcommittee for its previous support of this valuable program. We recognize that these are difficult economic times and appreciate the constraints on this Subcommittee.

However, we must point out that the clock is ticking on the remaining battlefields of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. The American Battlefield Trust estimates that, in the next decade, most unprotected battlefield land will be either developed or preserved. Further, with the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution only a few years away, there is no better time to preserve these historic shrines and prepare for the influx of visitors expected at that time. The program has enjoyed full funding for the past four fiscal years, and the Trust and its partners strive diligently to put these funds to use in a timely manner. There is no shortage of land that can be saved.

## **Conclusion**

The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War were defining moments in our country's history. America's battlefields are important 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, and those who serve our nation honorably in the armed forces. The Battlefield Land Acquisition Grant Program has been an irreplaceable tool for preserving these hallowed grounds.

Madame Chairman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce, I sincerely hope you and your subcommittee will consider our request to provide funding of the American Battlefield Protection Program's Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants Program at its authorized level of \$10 million. We look forward to working closely with you as we continue our important work to preserve America's sacred battlefield lands. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.