



**AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST** ★ ★ ★
PRESERVE. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.

**Testimony of
David N. Duncan, President
American Battlefield Trust**

Before the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands

**EXPLORE America250: Celebrating One Year of the Expanding
Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act**

January 21, 2026

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Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to the subcommittee. My name is David Duncan, and I am a president of the American Battlefield Trust. 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 500,000 members and supporters nationwide, the Trust has protected more than 60,000 acres of critically important battlefield land in 25 states. We could not have performed our mission without the support of Congress and the cooperation of the National Park Service and, specifically, the American Battlefield Protection Program.

The EXPLORE Act, which included the American Battlefield Protection Program Enhancement Act, took an already successful federal program, and made it more efficient, ensuring the preservation, restoration and interpretation of our nation's most hallowed grounds as an enduring legacy of America's semiquincentennial observance.

American Battlefield Protection Program

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.

The American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) has been THE key tool of the past quarter century to ensure these hallowed grounds are preserved for generations to come. The program traces its origins to 1990, when Congress created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC), which produced a report outlining 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. In 2007, a similar report was submitted to Congress by the National Park Service (NPS), identifying the key battlefields of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. To date, ABPP's Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants have been used to preserve more than 36,000 acres of previously unprotected battlefield land in 20 states from these three formative conflicts.

Enhancing a Successful Program

ABPP is a program that *works*. It is responsible for one of the most effective public private preservation partnerships in the country. The Trust and our partners from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to Yorktown, Virginia; Shepherdstown, West Virginia to Nashville, Tennessee; from Fort Ticonderoga, New York to Glorieta Pass, New Mexico; from Princeton, New Jersey to Vicksburg, Mississippi have put this program to work to preserve battlefields from the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. The EXPLORE Act made an already effective program even stronger. As we commemorate our nation's 250th anniversary, the legislation was

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critical in allowing us to do everything we can to save the places where America was forged, including strengthening the tools available to ensure our country's history is preserved, and its stories told.

The EXPLORE Act made four minor but important updates to the program. Even though the bill was enacted only a year ago and considerable time was lost during the government shutdown, we have started to see positive impacts of some of its provisions.

The first modification enables non-profits and Native American tribes to apply directly for the land acquisition grants. Previously, the only eligible applicants for these grants were state and local public entities; nonprofits like the Trust had to find a government pass through to submit the applications, which often added months to the application process, jeopardizing land transactions with willing sellers who typically wish to sell their properties quickly.

For example, prior to the enactment of the EXPLORE Act last year, the Trust sent transaction information to our government pass-through for the acquisition of a tract in Stones River, Tennessee. From the time we provided that information, it took seventy-three days for the application to be submitted by the pass-through. In another case in Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, it took forty-nine days for the pass-through to submit the application. In contrast, the Trust recently submitted an application on the same day we compiled the necessary transaction information for a tract in Resaca, Georgia while another application only took six days to submit for a property in Cumberland Church, Virginia.

The permanent protection of America's hallowed ground for future generations is primary purpose of the American Battlefield Trust. In allowing non-profit organizations to apply for Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants, state and local governments have been relieved of the considerable burdens of applying for the grants and managing the grant process for projects that they are not a party to. That is especially important in states and localities that do not have the staff or expertise in federal grantmaking. The legislation allows them to dedicate their limited staff and resources to other priorities.

The second revision made created a mechanism for NPS to modify existing core and study battlefield area boundaries to include new or updated information about the actions that took place at these sites. Periodical updates to the reports, issued in 1993 and 2007, ensure that new, authoritative research about the historic extent of battlefields, obtained through advances in technology or archaeology since the reports were first published, can be incorporated by the NPS so that these lands can be eligible for acquisition, interpretation and restoration grants administered by ABPP.

The final two elements of this bill ensure that these funds will be used exclusively for the preservation and restoration of high-priority battlefield land. Previously, the ABPP statute allowed land grants to be used for all sites listed in the 2007 *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States*. This report includes not only battlefields, but non-battlefield associated sites related to these conflicts – structures, ships and other landmarks in many cases are not on battlefield land. This modification amended the statute to limit Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants to battlefield land, as Congress intended when the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields were added to the program in 2014, as it was for Civil War battlefields.

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Finally, the bill modified the relatively new Battlefield Restoration Grant program, authorized by Congress in 2019, to allow them to be utilized for all protected battlefields listed in the two aforementioned reports. Previously, the statute limited these grants, which are designed to restore battlefield lands to their wartime appearance by removing non-historic structures and reclaiming other features such as road traces and tree lines, to land saved with ABPP Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants, excluded many previously preserved sites across the country. The change allows for sites previously protected – Picacho Peak in Arizona, Brandywine Battlefield in Pennsylvania, and Sailors Creek, Virginia, to name a few – to utilize these funds, ensuring that more battlefield parks can take advantage of this valuable program to improve the interpretive experience and enable visitors to connect with American history through the power of place.

Conclusion

These small but important modifications to the American Battlefield Protection Program in the EXPLORE Act ensure its readiness to preserve America's historic treasures as we commemorate our nation's 250th birthday. The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War were defining moments in our country's history. The battlefields of these conflicts are open spaces and outdoor classrooms that commemorate the sacrifices of those who fought and died on these hallowed fields. The American Battlefield Protection Program's grant programs remain irreplaceable tools with widespread support from Congress for the past quarter century. The EXPLORE Act strengthened the program for years to come.

Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse, we look forward to working closely with you to continue the important work of preserving America's battlefield lands. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.