

Agency Official 106 Effect Report

*Belmont to Ferry Farm Trail
Chatham Manor
Stafford, Virginia*

**U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park
120 Chatham Lane
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22405**

Description and Purpose of Undertaking

Purpose

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park was authorized by an act of Congress on February 14, 1927 (44 Stat. 1091). The purpose of the park, as stated in the act, is “to commemorate the Civil War battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville, including Salem Church...” The legislation further states that the park shall “open, construct, and repair such roads, highways, paths, and other approaches as may be necessary to make the historical points accessible...” By Executive Order 6166 in 1933 the park was transferred to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the National Park Service.

Additionally, the park’s current General Management Plan (1986) states:

“Two trails will be developed cooperatively with other agencies/organizations - one along the abandoned railroad between the Fredericksburg and Wilderness battlefields and the other along the bluffs and riverside from Chatham to Falmouth...” - pp.80-81

Need

For nearly two decades, Stafford County has planned the development of a trail that would connect the Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont, in Falmouth, with George Washington’s Boyhood Home at Ferry Farm. The proposed trail would cross National Park Service property at Chatham Manor. To date, the northern sections of the trail have been constructed that link Belmont and Falmouth with the Historic Port of Falmouth Park, St. Clair Brooks Park and John Lee Pratt Memorial Park. The trail’s current southern terminus is the property boundary between John Lee Pratt Memorial Park and the National Park Service at Chatham Manor. Stafford County is now proposing to construct the next section of trail that would extend it south from John Lee Pratt Memorial Park across Chatham Manor and to the Chatham/State Route 3 Bridge, which connects Stafford County with the City of Fredericksburg. The proposed route of the trail is to use the bottomland and lower fields of Chatham, which are located between the Rappahannock River and River Road (County Route 607).

Property Description

A. Major Physical Components - The area of the proposed project lies on the Chatham Manor unit of the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. Chatham sits on 85.01 acres in Stafford County, Va. The tract is a mixture of open fields and wood lots, bisected by a few ravines that feed rainwater runoff to the Rappahannock River. The proposed project location for the trail is in the bottomland adjacent to the Rappahannock River. It is bordered to the west by the Rappahannock River, to the south by John Lee Pratt Memorial Park (a recreational park administered by Stafford County), River Road (County Route 607) to the east, and the

Chatham/State Route 3 Bridge to the south. The ground is a mixture of hardwoods and grassy areas.

B. Historical Significance - The area of the proposed project is on the grounds of the historic Chatham Manor, a former plantation and farm that dates to the 18th century. During the Civil War, the Union army occupied Chatham beginning in the spring of 1862. President Abraham Lincoln visited his generals at Chatham during that period. In December 1862, Union generals again made Chatham headquarters and both during and after the Battle of Fredericksburg the house and grounds became a hospital for wounded soldiers. From the front porch of the house, and from its grounds, Union generals observed and directed the Battle of Fredericksburg, as it took place across the river. From the bottomland in front of Chatham, which includes the proposed project area, Union engineers constructed pontoon bridges that carried troops and material across the river into Fredericksburg. These temporary bridges were built in May 1862, December 1862, May 1863 and May 1864.

C. Architectural Significance – The main structures at Chatham were constructed between 1768 and 1771 and served as a domestic site for over 200 years. These structures sit atop the bluff, 80 feet above the river bottom and the proposed project area. In the most recent draft of the park's National Register of Historic Places documentation update, Chatham (NR # FR0138) is considered a contributing structure.

D. Landscape Resources – The site today includes a mixture of overgrown vegetation on the slope of the ridge east of River Road. To the west of River Road, the ground is open a couple hundred yards to the banks of the Rappahannock River. A project that will commence in the fall of 2014 involves the clearing of existing trees in the river bottom area and the clearing of some trees and vegetation on the slope of the ridge.

E. Archaeological Resources - No archaeological resources are known to exist within the project area. Archaeological testing was conducted along the route of the trail through NPS lands and no resources were discovered.

Description of Alternatives

Alternative A – No Action

This option would hinder the fulfillment of the park's legislative mandate to “open, construct, and repair such roads, highways, paths, and other approaches as may be necessary to make the historical points accessible...” It would also hinder the fulfillment of the park's GMP directive to develop a trail “along the bluffs and riverside from Chatham to Falmouth...”

Alternative B – Construct Trail Across Chatham Bottomland (Preferred Alternative)

Under this alternative, the trail would descend the slope from John Lee Pratt Memorial Park, just west of its boundary with the Chatham Manor property, turn southeast and travel approximately 220 linear feet at the base of the slope along the northwest side of the road, crossing a small intermittent stream. The trail would cross River Road and pass southeast along and very close to

the road shoulder for a distance of about 2,000 linear feet on NPS property. This proposed trail route is driven by several considerations:

- The need to accommodate the steep slopes and at the same time meet safety standards for this type of facility. The trail is required to have a gentle slope.
- The desire to use an existing entrance to the floodplain rather than create a new entrance. The trail would cross River Road at an existing gravel entrance used by NPS maintenance equipment.
- The desire to use existing stream and ditch culverts as much as possible to avoid additional impacts to the floodplain wetland.

The trail on the NPS and private properties would be constructed in the Rappahannock River floodplain, and through the bottomland. It would be constructed by excavating the top foot or so of soil, and backfilling with suitable bedding and drainage material such as gravel or crushed rock and surfacing with asphalt pavement. The proposed trail would be 10 feet wide and will have 2-foot graded shoulders on each side. The drainage stone will extend vertically within the first 6 inches of the graded shoulder adjacent to the trail. The asphalt pavement surface will be free of a center line stripe and will be tinted to better blend in with the visual aspect of the area.

Alternative C - Construct Trail Across Chatham Ridge and Connect with Chatham Lane
Under this alternative, the trail would connect Chatham with John Lee Pratt Memorial Park along its shared northern boundary through the upland area atop the Chatham ridge. The trail would utilize a farm road and Chatham's existing entrance road to connect with Chatham Lane. This alternative would require paving of gravel drives within the Chatham Manor unit and would also put pedestrian and vehicle traffic on the same right-of-ways, thus increasing safety risks and altering the surface treatments for Chatham's internal traffic system.

Alternative D - Construct Trail Across Chatham Ridge and Connect with Historic Exit Road
Under this alternative, the trail would connect Chatham with John Lee Pratt Memorial Park along its shared northern boundary. The trail would utilize a farm road and Chatham's existing exit road to connect with River Road and the river bottom. This alternative would require paving of the historic gravel exit road at the Chatham Manor unit and would also put pedestrian and vehicle traffic on the same right-of-ways, thus increasing safety risks and altering the surface treatments for Chatham's internal traffic system.

Park Consultation

In the 1980s, Stafford County and the park first discussed linking the village of Falmouth with Chatham by way of a pedestrian trail. In 1990, the Fredericksburg-Stafford Park Authority invited the NPS to join them in constructing a regional multi-use trail, a portion of which would pass through the grounds of the Chatham Manor unit of the park. The NPS Superintendent immediately approved the concept of a trail. Construction began on the section from Falmouth south to the park boundary. Funding has been secured to construct the next section that would run through the NPS property at Chatham Manor. The county funded the archaeological testing

required for the proposal. This testing followed the route of the proposed trail through NPS property. No significant artifacts or sites were found on NPS property.

The proposal is undergoing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review through an Environmental Assessment (EA).

The proposal is being circulated among the park's Section-106 Team of Advisors for archaeology and historical landscape architecture.

The proposal is going through a 30-day public comment and review period. During that time, the proposal is posted on the Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment website. The park contacted representatives of Mary Washington College's Department of Historic Preservation, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, the Friends of Fredericksburg Area Battlefields, the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, the Civil War Trust, and the Friends of Chatham for comments.

Mitigation

Archaeological testing was conducted along the route of the proposed trail extension. No significant artifacts or resources were found on NPS lands.

The proposed trail will utilize tinted asphalt that will have a muted color. The trail will not have a painted centerline and will not have any upright features, such as safety pylons.

The location of the trail was sited to hug the slope dropping from River Road into the river bottom land, so as to minimize its visibility from the terraces on the Chatham ridge.

Conclusion

At an important historic site, the proposed undertaking would foster fulfillment of the park's Congressional mandate to "open, construct, and repair such roads, highways, paths, and other approaches as may be necessary to make the historical points accessible..." Likewise, the proposed undertaking would fulfill the park's General Management Plan directive to develop a trail "along the bluffs and riverside from Chatham to Falmouth..."

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