

Agency Official 106 Effect Report

*Removal of Non-Contributing Structures and Restoration of Battlefield Landscape at
Chancellorsville - 2016*

**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 (FRSP) 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 “mark and preserve historical points connected with the battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville, including Salem Church ...” By Executive Order 6166 in 1933 the park was transferred from the War Department to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the National Park Service.

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

"nonhistoric structures will be removed from the historic scene as they are acquired."

At the time that the General Management Plan was written, the use of the term “nonhistoric” was also intended to mean non-contributing.

Need

The Verna buildings consist of a two-story concrete house, a two-story concrete garage and a one-story concrete chicken coop. All three buildings were constructed ca1930-1945 and sit north of Wilderness Church on the Chancellorsville Battlefield.

FRSP acquired the Verna property in 2000 with the intention of removing the buildings and restoring the battlefield landscape. Securing funding and proper planning for restoring the landscape has taken much time, but the park now plans to move forward with the removal of the structures.

In 2001, a reconnaissance level survey form was prepared for the Verna property, on behalf of Spotsylvania County and by Traceries, an architectural history and historic preservation firm in Washington, D.C. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources identification number for the property is 088-5128. In 2003, the National Park Service (NPS) completed a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the Verna House and chicken coop. At that time, the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with the park's finding that this structure is non-contributing.

Property Description

A. Major Physical Components - The area of the proposed project lies on the Chancellorsville Battlefield unit of the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. The Verna buildings sit on 64.77 acres in Spotsylvania County, Va. The tract is a mixture of open fields and wood lots, bisected by a stream that feeds rainwater runoff to the Rapidan River. The proposed project location is bordered by NPS lands to the north, east, west and south.

B. Historical Significance - The area of the proposed project is within the Stonewall Jackson Flank Attack zone of the Chancellorsville Battlefield. On May 2, 1863, during the Battle of Chancellorsville, Union forces held this ground until late in the afternoon when a large Confederate attack, led by General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, fell upon the far right of the Union lines, approximately one mile west of the project area. The Confederate attack overwhelmed the Union defenders. Union forces fled east across the project area, followed by their Confederate pursuers.

C. Architectural Significance – The Verna house, garage and chicken coop were constructed between 1930 and 1945 and served as a domestic site for approximately sixty years. The house and garage are built into the side of a knoll, so that the ground floors are actually holding up the knoll, while the second story is entirely above the grade of the sloping ground. The chicken coop sits above the house and garage on the top of the knoll. In 2001, a reconnaissance level survey form was prepared for the Verna property, on behalf of Spotsylvania County, by Traceries, an architectural history and historic preservation firm in Washington, D.C. The Virginia Department of Historic Resources identification number for the property is 088-5128. In 2003, the National Park Service (NPS) completed a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) for the Verna House, garage and chicken coop. At that time, the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with the park's finding that this structure is non-contributing.

D. Landscape Resources – The site today is a mixture of open fields, currently under an agricultural lease, and natural wood lots. The Verna chicken coop sits atop a small knoll or hill, while the two-story Verna house and garage are actually built into the side of the hill. The entire property is part of the Stonewall Jackson Flank Attack zone of the Chancellorsville Battlefield, which is of national significance and is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

E. Archaeological Resources - No archaeological resources are known to exist within the project area. Archaeological testing has not occurred at this location.

Description of Alternatives

Alternative A – No Action

This option would hinder the fulfillment of the park's General Management Plan directive that "nonhistoric structures will be removed from the historic scene as they are acquired."

Alternative B – Removal of Verna Buildings

Under this alternative, the three buildings would be razed and removed, but the site would not be restored. Mechanical equipment would remove all of the concrete and associated building material from the site. While this alternative would fulfill the directive of the General Management Plan, selecting not to restore the landscape would leave a hole in the side of the knoll where the house and garage are now located. The risk of erosion and destabilization of the hill would increase significantly over time and would lead to an adverse change to the battlefield landscape.

Alternative C – Removal of Verna Buildings and Sculpting of the Landscape

Under this alternative, the three buildings would be razed and removed. Mechanical equipment would remove all of the concrete and associated building material from the site. This would leave a hole in the side of the knoll, which would be rectified by the sculpting of the hillside. Earth would be dragged and moved down from the top of the knoll and feathered down to a gradual slope so as to fill the hole left by the removed structures. While this alternative would fulfill the General Management Plan's directive, the moving of dirt and sculpting of the hillside might disturb previously unknown archaeological resources.

Alternative D – Removal of Verna Buildings and Addition of Fill to Restore the Landscape (Preferred Alternative)

Under this alternative, the three buildings will be razed and removed. Mechanical equipment will remove all concrete, with the exception of the eastern wall of the garage and house, being the wall that is against knoll. This wall will remain, but will be lowered to a height of two feet below the grade of the knoll. This would leave a whole in the side of the knoll, which would be rectified by bringing in approximately 700 cubic yards of clean fill that will be deposited where the buildings had been removed. The fill will be contoured to match the hillside and feathered down to a natural slope, thus restoring the landscape. The soil will be seeded with natural grasses and vegetation.

Park Consultation

The proposal is undergoing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review.

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

The proposal is going through a 30-day public comment and review period. During this time, the proposal was posted on the National Park Service's Planning, Environment and Public Comment website. The park has contacted, and solicited comments from, representatives of potentially interested organizations such as the University of Mary Washington's Department of Historic Preservation, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, the Civil War Trust, Spotsylvania County, the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust, and the Pamunkey Indian Tribe.

The proposal will be sent to the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer for a 30-day review and comment period.

Supporting Documentation

- A. Copy of DOE and associated correspondence
- B. Photographs
- C. Restoration Plan

Conclusion

It is the park's belief that this project will have "no adverse effect" upon historic resources.