

Agency Official 106 Effect Report

*Creation of New Parking Pull-off and Wayside Exhibit at Saunders Field
on the Wilderness Battlefield*

**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...and to mark and preserve for historical purposes the breastworks, earthworks, gun emplacements, walls, or other defenses or shelters used by the armies on the said battles...and together also with additional land as the Secretary of War may deem necessary for monuments, markers, tablets, roads, highways, paths, approaches, and to carry out the general purposes of this Act.” 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 to the public and to students of said battles...” By Executive Order 6166 in 1933 the park was transferred to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the National Park Service.

Need

Saunders Field is the first stop on the designated tour route for the Wilderness Battlefield. The field is bisected by State Route 20, a busy two-lane road. Interpretively, the stop is served by a small parking lot and exhibit shelter on the north side of the field. On the south side of the road, a small paved vehicle pull-off serves a brief stop at the remnants of Confederate trenches and earthworks. This current pull-off is along the edge of Hill-Ewell Drive, the battlefield tour road. At the pull-off, there is a 1927 monument to the battle, a state historical marker and a ca.1970's compass pedestal. A rubberized mulch trail leads from the monuments and markers to the earthworks, where a wood foot-bridge carries visitors over the trenches and out into the field.

The foot-bridge, which was built about twenty years ago, is fairly large and somewhat of a visual intrusion on the landscape. Additionally, it is not handicap accessible. The park is looking to develop another stop in this area that will be accessible and will allow for the removal of the foot-bridge.

Description

The park proposes to install a new paved parking pull-off approximately two hundred yards farther down Hill-Ewell Drive from the current location. This will require the construction of a 140-foot long paved area, 12 feet wide, along the shoulder of Hill-Ewell Drive. Excavation to a depth of 8 inches will be required to establish a gravel base upon which to pave the pull-off area. A small number, perhaps six, of trees will be removed as the new pull-off will encroach upon their roots systems. These trees will be cut and their stumps ground.

A new 5 foot wide rubberized mulch trail will run for 140 feet, from the new parking pull-off and across the edge of the field to just behind the Confederate earthworks, where a panoramic view of the field is obtained. At this location, two interpretive wayside exhibit signs will be installed. The path of the trail will require excavation to a depth of 3 inches to establish a compact base.

At the old pull-off, the wooden foot bridge will be removed, as will the rubberized mulch trail that leads to it. This will remove a visual intrusion from the earthworks and the field. The paved parking pull-off will remain, to serve the monument, compass pedestal and state historic marker.

Property Description

A. Major Physical Components

1. Saunders Field – The area of the proposed project lies along the western edge of Hill-Ewell Drive on the Wilderness Battlefield. The project area is bordered to the west by a 60-80 years-old oak-hickory forest, and to the east by the ca.1930's park tour road (Hill-Ewell Drive) and a large open field of native grasses.

B. Historical Significance

1. Saunders Field – Saunders Field is a large open field bisected by the northeast to southwest running State Route 20 (Orange Turnpike). On May 5, 1864, the opening clash of the two-day Battle of the Wilderness took place in this open field. This was the first engagement of the war between Confederate General Robert E. Lee and Union General Ulysses S. Grant. Union forces marching from the east ran into Confederate opposition in this field. Repeated charges across the field failed to dislodge the Confederate defenders, who had built earthworks and entrenchments along the western edge of the field, and for two days the armies engaged in a deadly battle in the field and the surrounding woods. On May 7, 1864, the Union forces disengaged and headed south to Spotsylvania Court House.

C. Archeological Resources

1. Saunders Field – No archaeological investigations have occurred in Saunders Field and no known resources have been identified, other than the visible remnants of Confederate earthworks and trenches. An immediate post-war cemetery was established in this field, which contained the remains of between 108 and 350 Union soldiers. These remains were later disinterred and moved in to the Fredericksburg National Cemetery. The exact location of this temporary cemetery is unknown.

D. Historic Architectural Resources

1. Ewell's Works – The proposed trail will provide access to these earthworks without encouraging pedestrian traffic over them, such as now offered at the existing stop. The proposed trail will stop at a point just inside the earthworks and will not intrude upon the trenches. These earthworks were surveyed and are in the park's List of Classified Structures (IDLCS #07935).

2. Hill-Ewell Drive – The proposed parking pull-off will be adjacent to Hill-Ewell Drive, which was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930's as the only park tour road on the Wilderness Battlefield. The proposed park pull-off will be paved, but will only impact 140 feet of the tour road, which measures 22,672 feet in overall length. This road was surveyed and is listed in the park's List of Classified Structures (IDLCS #082114).

Description of Alternatives

Alternative A – No Action

This option would continue to provide access to the area via a foot-bridge over the earthworks, which is not handicap accessible and which does encourage foot traffic over the earthworks. This option would also keep the existing foot-bridge in place, which is a visual intrusion on the landscape and on the earthworks.

Alternative B – Rehabilitate Existing Stop

Under this option, the tour stop would remain where it is currently located. The park would remove the foot-bridge, but continue to advertise and encourage use of this location as the primary interpretive stop for that portion of Saunders Field south of State Route 20. Under this option, visitors would not be able to get a clear view of the field without traversing the earthworks, which will likely increase erosion on the resources and due to the incline of the road shoulder and associated path, it would remain inaccessible to handicap visitors.

Alternative C – Move the Designated Tour Stop Farther Down the Road, Create a New Parking Pull-Off and Trail to Access the Earthworks (Preferred Alternative)

This option would involve the creation of a 140 foot by 12 foot paved parking pull-off approximately two hundred yards farther to the south along Hill-Ewell Drive. A 140 foot by 5 foot rubberized mulch trail will lead to the Confederate earthworks, where two interpretive wayside exhibits will be established. The foot-bridge at the existing stop will be removed and the rubberized mulch trail that accesses the bridge and earthworks will also be removed. Under this option, a better vantage point for interpretation of Saunders Field will be created, a trail that will be handicap accessible will be developed, and the visual intrusion of the foot-bridge at the existing location will be removed.

Mitigation Measures

Archaeological testing has been conducted for the proposed parking pull-off, trail and sign locations. No significant resources were discovered.

Assessment

It is the opinion of the park that the preferred alternative will have some impact on the historic landscape. However, that impact will be minimal and will have no “adverse effect” on the historic resources. The improved access and interpretive possibilities will help to protect the earthworks by keeping foot traffic off the resource and the removal of the foot-bridge will help to improve the setting. Materials used in the construction of the parking pull-off and trail will not disturb any archaeological resources, nor adversely effect the architectural resources (earthworks and park tour road), and will not adversely effect the cultural landscape.

Park Consultation

The proposal has 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, historical architecture and historical landscape architecture.

The proposal will go through a 30-day public comment and review period. During that time, the proposal will be posted on the PEPC website. The park will contact, and solicited comments from, representatives from interested organizations such as Mary Washington College’s Department of Historic Preservation, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Round Table, the Friends of Wilderness Battlefield, and the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust.

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