

Battlefield Identification and the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission

By 1990, over one third of all American battlefield properties were endangered by, or had already been lost to, land development. In recognition of this loss, in 1991 Congress voted to establish the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC). This Commission was established to identify battlefield properties, evaluate their historic significance and the level of threat to their continued existence, and to offer alternatives to promote their preservation.

The CWSAC determined that approximately 10,500 battle actions occurred during the course of the American Civil War. Of that number, 384 were identified as principal battles and these became the focus of the CWSAC's efforts. Each of these battlefields was evaluated for its significance within the overall context of the War, its physical integrity, and the degree to which that integrity was threatened by land use activities. The CWSAC then used the information to generate recommendations to assist local, state and federal governments as well as nonprofit organizations and private citizens in preserving battlefields within their regions. The CWSAC provided a formal report on its findings and recommendations to Congress in 1993 in a document titled, *Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields*. This report included appendices containing the locations of all battlefields identified by the Commission, organized by state as well as by location within state or federal parks. The CWSAC's recommendations resulted in, among other actions, the establishment within the National Park Service of the American Battlefield Preservation Program (ABPP), and the acquisition of federal grant funding for battlefield identification and preservation.

In 2002 Congress passed the Civil War Battlefield Preservation Act, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to update the 1993 report, providing funding for this effort in FY2005 and FY2007. As directed, the ABPP undertook a re-evaluation of the CWSAC's original findings, visiting each of the battlefields identified in the 1993 report to reassess the integrity and threat level of each property. The first survey completed was of Virginia battlefields, and the results of this new evaluation were released in draft form in 2009, including maps showing the identified boundaries of each battlefield. These boundaries indicate the limits of the core (where actual battle actions took place) and study areas (where battle-related actions such as encampment and transportation are documented). Virginia has now integrated the ABPP's battlefield boundaries into its GIS-based Data Sharing System electronic database.

For more information about the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission's 1993 report and its 2009 update, the American Battlefield Protection Program, and the most up-to-date battlefield boundaries and data, please go to: <http://www.nps.gov/hps/abpp/index.htm>.