

SESQUICENTENNIAL BATTLEFIELD INITIATIVE

Proposed by the Civil War Preservation Trust, September 26, 2007

In March 2007, the Advisory Council to the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission recommended that battlefield preservation be a primary goal of the four-year commemoration.

The Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) has identified more than 50,000 acres of threatened Civil War battlefields in Virginia that should be preserved prior to the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Much of this land is located in the Commonwealth's fastest growing regions, such as Hanover, Henrico, and Spotsylvania counties, as well as the Shenandoah Valley. CWPT estimates that much of this unprotected battlefield land will be bulldozed in the next five years if immediate steps are not taken to protect it.

CWPT is proposing a "Sesquicentennial Battlefield Initiative" to save this sacred land prior to 2015. The mechanism for the Initiative will be \$5 million in annual state funding, from 2009 to 2015, for the existing Virginia Civil War Battlefield Preservation Fund ("Fund"). This Fund, administered by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR), provides matching grants for battlefield land acquisition.

In Fiscal Year 2006–07, the Fund received a \$500,000 appropriation from the state legislature. CWPT was able to put \$300,000 of this amount toward protecting the \$12 million Slaughter Pen Farm in Spotsylvania County and \$200,000 for a portion of the Glendale Battlefield in Henrico County. In Fiscal Year 2007–08, the Fund received \$200,000, which will likely be allocated toward additional acquisitions at Glendale.

Although the \$700,000 appropriated for battlefield preservation in the last two years has contributed toward the protection of two of the Old Dominion's most famous battlegrounds, it is only a beginning. To make substantial progress in time for the Civil War Sesquicentennial commemoration, the Fund requires an annual appropriation of \$5 million a year. Significantly, the fund also requires a 2-to-1 non-state to state funds match. This means that the Commonwealth's \$5 million annual investment will result in \$15 million of battlefield protection per year.

In addition to preserving Virginia's unique Civil War heritage, the Sesquicentennial Battlefield Initiative will contribute to the protection of open space, wildlife habitats, riparian zones, and endangered streams and creeks in the Commonwealth. For example, nearly all the Virginia Civil War battlefields currently protected by CWPT are within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

It is worth noting that the Civil War Sesquicentennial is expected to draw heritage tourists from across the United States and many other countries. According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation, these tourists stay longer and spend nearly twice as much as the average visitor to the state. Protecting major Civil War battlefields prior to the Sesquicentennial will provide these tourists with more sites to see and additional reasons to extend their stay in the Old Dominion.

For all of these reasons, CWPT is asking the Commission to endorse and promote the Sesquicentennial Battlefield Initiative.