

Creating the Fort Circle Parks Trail

“The defense sites contain green space that represents one of the earliest urban planning efforts for public recreation in the United States.”

Final Management Plan: Fort Circle Parks (2004)



The Civil War Defenses of Washington, D.C.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Washington turned into the training ground, arsenal, supply depot, and nerve center for the Union cause. Newly formed regiments encamped in every quarter, and streets reverberated under the wheels of cannon. Cattle for meat grazed on the Mall; sacks of flour, stacked against siege, surrounded the U.S. Treasury. To protect the city and vital supply routes from enemy hands, Union armies built a ring of earthen fortifications on the city's edge. Today, a sprawling metropolis has absorbed most sites, but the names remain.

Linking People and Places

Legislation and subsequent plans to connect the Civil War fortifications around Washington have appeared in various forms, beginning in 1902 with the McMillan Commission Report which proposed a “Fort Drive.” A plan for the Fort Circle Parks, completed by the NPS in 2004, states that:

The Fort Circle Parks trail system should be completed as a continuous trail, linking the historic Civil War Fort sites within the District. Existing street rights-of-way shall be used where delicate cultural and natural features will not support a trail

alignment unimpaired. The existing hiking trail through Glover-Archbold Park should be upgraded and link the Fort Circle trail system with the C&O Canal trail, if practicable.

Today, a seven-mile forested segment of the Fort Circle Parks Trail exists southeast of the Anacostia River within National Capital Parks-East. With support from individuals, organizations and government agencies, a continuous trail connecting many of the Civil War defenses has the potential to provide significant recreational and educational opportunities.

Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail

The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail is a partnership to develop and maintain a network of trails for non-motorized travel between the Chesapeake Bay and Allegheny Highlands. Nearby, existing segments of the network include the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Towpath; Potomac Heritage Trail and Mount Vernon

Trail within George Washington Memorial Parkway; and the Prince Georges County On-Road Bicycling Route. Coordinated by District of Columbia agencies, the alignment for a Fort Circle Parks Trail could be recognized as a segment of the evolving National Scenic Trail network.

More Information

- American Hiking Society**
30th Anniversary Fort Circle Parks Trail Project
www.americanhiking.org
- National Park Service:**
 - Final Management Plan: Fort Circle Parks (2004)**
www.planning.nps.gov/plans.cfm
 - National Capital Parks-East** (including Forts Dupont, Mahan, Stanton and Foote)
www.nps.gov/nace
 - Rock Creek Park** (including Forts Stephens & Totten, Battleground National Cemetery and Battery Kemble)
www.nps.gov/rocr
 - Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park**
www.nps.gov/choh
 - National Capital Region Office of Communications**
www.nps.gov/ncro
202-619-7222
 - Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail Office**
www.nps.gov/pohe
- National Capital Planning Commission**
www.ncpc.gov

- City of Alexandria Fort Ward Museum**
Tuesday–Saturday 9–5; Sunday 12–5
www.FortWard.org
703-838-4848
- District of Columbia:**
 - Department of Parks and Recreation**
www.dpr.dc.gov/
 - Department of Transportation**
Pedestrian Program & Bicycle Program coordinators
www.ddot.dc.gov
 - Office of Planning**
www.planning.dc.gov
- Washington Parks and People**
www.washingtonparksandpeople.org
- Potomac Heritage Trail Association**
www.potomactrail.org
- Committee of 100 on the Federal City**
www.committeeof100.net/pdf/pub/C100FortCirclePlan.pdf
- Civil War Preservation Trust**
www.civilwar.org/news/topten2006/2006report.pdf